

The **STANDARD BEARER**

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

This was in many ways, we believe, a very significant Synod. It was this simply because it dealt exclusively with matters pertaining to the life and calling of the Church of Jesus Christ as instituted in the world. . . . Only matters concerning or directly related to the preaching of the gospel, the administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of Christian discipline were treated. Thus the Synod was busy exclusively with the Christ-assigned task and calling of the Church. For this we are grateful and our prayer is that God may keep our Churches faithful to that task.

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MEDITATION

The Secret Of The Believer's Life

Rev. C. Hanko

"I have set the Lord always before me; Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved."

Psalm 16:8

There is a secret. . . .

There is a secret, hidden reason why saints throughout the ages have been able to sing songs even in the night, to rejoice through their tears, and to count it all joy when they meet the severest trials and temptations.

You read that contentment on their faces when they lie on beds of anguish. You see it in their eyes when they mourn the loss of a dear one; yes, also while they themselves are passing through the final, darkest phase of the valley of shadows.

Lowly mothers, withered and bent with age, have sat with folded hands and trembling lips as they

worshipfully poured out their thanks to God for the simple meal set before them. In times of severest persecutions, saints have had the courage to walk to stake or scaffold with peace in their hearts, putting their persecutors to shame.

You and I, who so often falter in the face of temptations, who grow weary and distressed under so few burdens of life's cares, must needs ask: What is the secret of the believer's life? What is it that makes it possible for him to face the worst of trials in quiet contentment, assured that all is well?

The sixteenth Psalm tells us about that secret.

What immediately impresses us when we read it, is

the fact that it is a joyful Psalm that rings with praise to God.

True, in the background we discover that the composer experiences great anxieties brought on by his enemies. The Psalm opens with the bitter cry: "Preserve me, O Almighty, in Thee do I put my trust." Toward the close of the Psalm he sees his soul in Sheol, the threat of corruption eating away his flesh. His enemy is determined to plague him until all his hope should perish forever. Yet in his darkest hour he experiences an inner peace and joy that makes it possible for him to rejoice through his tears. "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places, yea, I have a goodly heritage." "The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup: Thou maintainest my lot." "For Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell: neither wilt Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption." "Thou hast shown me the paths of life: in Thy presence in fulness of joy: at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

I read this. I marvel at this expression of faith. I know that all that the Psalmist says is so true. In Jehovah are pleasures forevermore. I have the whole Bible to confirm this for me. But I, I have my cup often overflowing with sorrows, even to the point that I complain: "My enemy grown strong with pride would take my life away." Darkness floods my soul, so that I ask: How can the Psalmist express such perfect contentment even in the face of death?

I remind myself that this Psalm is strongly messianic. Our Lord was taught to sing this Psalm, even as the Spirit of prophecy had prepared it especially for Him. Christ sang this Psalm over and over again as He walked among us with that heavy shadow of the cross pressing upon Him. I hear Him singing it especially during the forty days of temptation while the wind howled through the crags of rock in a waste and weary land. I recognize the plaintive cry as darkness hides His prostrate form in the dust of Gethsemane: "O my Almighty, preserve me, I have no one else in whom I can trust." We follow Him in our thoughts as He stands before the raging foe that plots and schemes to kill Him. At the cross we hide our faces as we hear Him sing: Thou wilt not leave my soul in the grave: Thou wilt not suffer the enemy to triumph over me! Jesus saw His complete victory in heavenly perfection during that fleeting second when He cried: "It is finished." He could do this because He certainly understood the secret of true peace and contentment that makes it possible to rejoice in the Lord always.

But I? Surely when the Psalmist wrote this he was drawing from his own experience. Although he wrote under the guidance of the Spirit of prophecy, he nevertheless gave expression to his own dark night and the joy that he realized through it. This was written and preserved in the Scriptures for our sakes,

that we may learn to repeat it after him. He was a man of like passions as we are; he was taught of God to know the secret of conquering faith. We can know it also by the same God.

The secret of faith, what is it?

In one word: Jehovah!

"I have set Jehovah before me." I have set Him in front of me with the determination to keep my eye fixed upon Him, never to lose Him from my thoughts or from my sight!

Jehovah is GOD. Let us say so in holy wonder, for He is the only true and living One. All idols are the product of man's foolish imagination, but our God is in the heavens. He is the infinite fullness of His own dazzling holiness, and yet He is so very near to us, that we exist under His watchful eye as in the very palm of His hand. He knows all things. He even knows the end from the beginning, because He has determined that end before there was a beginning. God knows the only possible way in which He may attain His glory through every single creature that He makes. He knows how to manifest His love and mercy in His chosen people in such a way, that all eternity will praise Him for it. He loves His people as His prized possession, bestowing on them all His grace, mercy, lovingkindness and everlasting compassion. On the dark background of reprobation, sin, death, and hell, He shows the glorious brightness of His grace, choosing, redeeming and sanctifying a people unto Himself which He takes into His own bosom to enjoy covenant fellowship with Him forever.

Jehovah is our Creator. The heavens declare His glory, the firmament showeth His handiwork; day unto day it tells something new about Him, while night after night it reveals the secrets of His heart. His Name is near, so very near, in the rumbling of the thunder and in the raging of the storm, but also in the sighings of the wind, the rustle of desert sands, the humble buttercup, and the busy ant that races across our path on the sidewalk. We need but look about us and tune our ears to listen in order to hear from a thousand voices the song of creation, telling their Maker's praise.

Jehovah is our Father. Our adoption papers are made out from all eternity, even when the world and its history was planned. These adoption papers have a seal on them, the bloody seal of Calvary, showing that the highest price that could ever be demanded has been paid to redeem us unto God. How do I know that these adoption papers bear my name? I have received the sign of baptism, which is daily sealed in my heart by the Spirit of Christ, assuring me that I am a son, teaching me to stammer: "Abba, Father." Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons

of God. Now we are sons, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: But we know that when it does appear, we shall be just like Father, for we shall see Him exactly as He is.

Our Father is none other than our Covenant God. He establishes His covenant with us by restoring in us the image of our elder Brother, Christ Jesus. He made us friend-servants, to love Him, to know Him in love and to serve Him in love. Ours is the privilege as well as the duty, the capability as well as the desire to serve Him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, to crucify our old nature, and to walk in a new and holy life before Him. He is the Master Craftsman Who has skillfully formed us with our own personal gifts and talents to perform that certain task, which we only, and no one else, can perform. It is the task for which we are chosen of God, for which we were born and placed in this world, for which we are equipped by the Holy Spirit, even as God has assigned that task to us from eternity. Only when that work is done can we lay down our weary heads to sleep the sleep of death.

Our Covenant God is our Protector. As a shepherd jealously guards his sheep, as a mother shields her child with her own life, as a father has compassion upon his children, so our Heavenly Father cares for us. He cares. We are His chief concern, as written in the palms of His hands. In Him we can place our implicit trust, both as to body and soul, both in life and in death.

This Covenant God draws us to Himself in intimate communion of life as our Sovereign Friend. Enoch experienced that when he walked with God. Noah knew what that meant when he found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Abraham tasted the blessedness of being God's friend. Moses communed with God face to face, more than any other. David could say: "I am Thy servant, Lord; my trust is in Thy Name." We echo this in prayerful worship: "In sweet communion, Lord, with Thee I constantly abide. My hand Thou holdest in Thy own to keep me near Thy side."

I have placed the Lord right in front of me, before my very eyes, to keep Him there always. In every circumstance of joy or sorrow, both in the pleasant hours of the day and in the weary, fearful hours of the night, I keep the Lord before me. This is the secret of my life.

Is this not a proud boast?

I keep the Lord always before me. This was certainly true of Christ. It, no doubt, was also true of David; but am I, a man of low degree, to be compared to a great saint like David?

How often the opposite is true in my life. My sinful inclination draws me to idols as metal is drawn to a magnet. I may look with scorn on the pagan who

bows before a block of wood or a lifeless piece of stone, who worships a snake or a calf. Yet I find myself putting my trust in my own strength, my proud self. I feel no great need to pray for daily bread these days, because the table is always well supplied, and there is even bread to spare in the bread box. We live in an affluent time when it is said that no one need be poor. If one does have need, there is always some government agency that will come to the rescue. Mammon is a god that I can see, can touch, can hold. All this appeals to me, for the simple reason that I am evil, born in sin.

I catch myself playing the practical deist. No, theoretically I condemn deism, which holds that God created all things in such a way that they can function and operate by themselves. God is, in that instance like a machinist, who watches the machine run, sees to it that all the parts remain well-oiled, and only interferes when something goes wrong with the mechanism. Often from a practical point of view I make the same error. In case of illness, one's first thought seems to be to call a doctor, making sure that he is well-qualified. Only as an afterthought do we resort to prayer. I ride along the highway in my car; I'm a bit in a hurry, because I am late. To my complete disgust, those red lights are all against me. I tend to ball my fist in anger, only then to be reminded that God had deliberately turned that light red in front of me. He wants to remind me that He is Lord of my life, not I. I had better slow down and remember my utter dependence on Him.

How often God is not first in my thoughts. How often I turn my back to Him, as if I would keep Him out of my affairs, to go my own willful, sinful way without Him.

Yet God is always there — right at my side!

Even when I was not aware of it, He already was there.

I did not seek Him; He sought me. I did not approach Him; He approached me. He spoke; I heard His voice as He spoke from the Scriptures. What I heard was by no means pleasant. God did not talk to me about a love for all men, also for me. God did not tell me that He ignored the fact that I was a sinner, beckoning me just to come. Quite the opposite. Proud speck of dust that I am, vaunting myself to be something in the face of the Most High; God showed me what a rebellious wretched sinner I am in His sight. God humbled me, put me to shame, pressed upon my guilty soul the burden of my sin. I stood condemned, head hanging low. I saw myself as a filthy, misshapen leper, deserving only to be cast away forever. Yet when I cried to Him, He heard me and drew me unto Himself, taking me into His everlasting arms and assuring me over and over again: Forgiven! Forgiven! through the precious blood of Jesus Christ, God's dear Son.

Jehovah is still always at my side. This is not a mere mystical experience, as if there are times when I go to Him, sit by Him and hear Him talk to me by some mystical message in my heart. Jehovah's presence is very real. He dwells in my heart by His Spirit. He speaks to me through His Word, particularly through the preaching of the Word in the communion of saints. I can approach Him through prayer, any time, any where. I need no appointment. I need no receptionist to invite me into His chambers. I need no instrument through which to talk. I can pray, and in praying experience communion with Him Who inhabits the High and Lofty Place. He is so very far above me, yet so very near. He even makes me God-conscious, so that I see His handiwork in all His creation; I see His handwriting, His seal of genuineness on every creature. I know that God is near; His wondrous works tell me so.

What an abiding comfort!

"With Jehovah at my side I shall not be moved!"

When my back is turned to Him, I walk in stygian darkness. Then I fear a thousand fears. Satan is always on the alert, seeking out every weak spot in my armor. The world still has a strong appeal to my flesh. My worst enemy is my own sinful *self*. Left alone I should certainly perish. All my will power, all my determination, all my ingenuity to resist the onslaughts of sin avail me nothing.

But Jehovah is my Rock. He took me from the miry clay, and set my feet firmly on that immovable Rock; none other than Christ Jesus, my Savior, my Lord.

Jehovah is for me a Refuge, a High Tower, even as a Rock in a weary land, a shelter in the time of storm.

Jehovah fights my battles for me by making me alert and strong against every foe. For underneath are always the everlasting arms, the arms of the mighty God of David.

I sense the lowliness and meekness of David when He sang: "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the House of the Lord forever."

Or to take up Paul's victory cry: Nothing, absolutely nothing, can separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus my Lord.

I have the Lord before me!

He was there first.

He makes His presence known.

He has promised He would never leave me nor forsake me.

For this God is our God forever and ever.

EDITORIALS

Thoughts On Our Golden Anniversary (4)

Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

One of the important aspects of our heritage as Protestant Reformed Churches is the church political aspect of that heritage. As we commemorate our Golden Anniversary as a denomination, and as at that occasion we are reminded of our heritage, our thoughts undoubtedly turn primarily to our doctrinal and confessional heritage, the heritage of the truth. And if at all, then only secondarily do we probably think of the heritage which is ours from a church political point of view. And this order is quite natural and proper. Nevertheless, we must not forget that we have such a church political heritage. And while we may perhaps characterize that aspect of our heritage as secondary, we certainly must not characterize it as being of little value and of minor importance. That would be a grave mistake. When we commemorate the heritage which the Lord our God has given us to have and to hold for these fifty years

of our existence, we must commemorate this aspect of our heritage also. And when we resolve anew, by God's grace, to hold fast to that heritage in the future, we must resolve also to hold fast to the principles and the form of church government which we have.

In general, I am referring to what is known as the presbyterian-synodical form of church government, set forth in the Church Order of Dordrecht. And I am referring specifically to the principle of what is known as the autonomy of the local consistory and congregation.

What is meant by this principle?

It is the principle, first of all, that the authority and the power of the offices of minister, elder, and deacon reside strictly in the local congregation. And, therefore, the authority and the power to preach, to

administer the sacraments, to discipline, and to exercise the office of mercy belong strictly to the local consistory and congregation. In the second place, according to this system, a number of like-minded congregations have banded together in a church federation for the purpose of expressing their unity and for the purpose of mutual advice, counsel, assistance, and cooperation — without, however, in any way conceding or delegating the afore-mentioned powers — and agreeing to be governed, both locally and in their federative functions, according to the 86 articles of the Church Order of Dordrecht. And thus, in addition to our local assemblies, each of which has the power and authority within its own congregation to preach, to administer the sacraments, and to discipline, we have also broader assemblies. We have regional assemblies, our classes, with well-defined jurisdiction, but no jurisdiction *within* the local congregation. And we have our national, or broadest, assembly, our synod — again with certain well-defined powers, but absolutely no jurisdiction *within* the local congregation.

Negatively, our church political heritage implies that no classis and no synod can in any sense exercise the powers of the offices which Christ has appointed in His church. A classis cannot engage in preaching of the Word. A synod cannot administer and celebrate the sacraments. And historically, of course, this principle came into sharp focus in connection with the origin of our churches in 1924. And it came into focus not in connection with the question of preaching or the question of the sacraments, but the question of *discipline*. Can a classis or a synod suspend and depose from office ministers, elders, and deacons? In 1924-1926 the Christian Reformed Church answered, *yes* to that question. We have always insisted and do still insist that the answer to that question is *No*.

Such, briefly, is the church political aspect of the heritage which we celebrate at this Fiftieth Anniversary. It is to be distinguished, on the one hand, from rank independentism, which completely ignores any ties of church federation. And it is to be distinguished, on the other hand, from collegialism, which, in effect, considers every consistory and congregation as but a branch of one large church. And let me remind you that this principle is expressed in our very denominational name. We are not, as a denomination, the Protestant Reformed Church in America, but we are the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. Our denomination is not one church, but it is one federation, or communion, of autonomous churches. Moreover, although independentism and collegialism may in a sense be said to lie at opposite poles, yet when either one of them comes to manifestation in a Reformed communion of

churches, it very often results in the same evil, namely: hierarchy, or lording it. When the churches in common, either of classis or synod assume to themselves power within a local congregation, this is hierarchy. It results in what Article 84 of our Church Order calls “lording it” over a local consistory and local office bearers. But when one consistory and congregation go their independent way, ignoring the rules according to which all have agreed to live within the church federation, this also can result and does result frequently in that one congregation lording it over those with whom it had agreed to live together and to act together within the church federation. In deepest principle, therefore, there is only a fine line of distinction between independentism and collegialism. And our presbyterian-synodical form of church government requires the churches, in a sense, to tread a very narrow course between independentism and collegialism.

This narrow course we have trodden, be it sometimes with much difficulty, during the fifty years of our existence. And this principle of Reformed church government we have maintained until this day.

To hold fast to this part of our heritage is not a matter of little importance. First of all, this is true because this principle of Reformed church government is a *Scriptural* principle. And just because it is a Scriptural principle, it is our calling as churches to maintain it. But there is more. There is a connection between this aspect of our heritage and the doctrinal aspect of our heritage. Historically it has frequently been the forces of hierarchy which were also the forces which promoted heresy and which succeeded by their hierarchical actions in foisting false doctrine upon the churches. Not only was this the case when our own churches had their origin, but it has been true very often in the course of church history. There is a lesson in this. And the lesson is that we must guard against hierarchy in order to hold on to the heritage of the faith once delivered to the saints.

We may ask the question: is there any danger of losing this part of our heritage? Or, to put it positively: how may we hold fast to this heritage of Reformed church government?

To this we would answer, in the first place, that it is always true that we can only maintain our heritage through constant vigilance and by guarding it zealously. We must never simply take it for granted, nor ever consider it a thing of minor significance. Then we will surely lose it. This does not mean, to be sure, that we must see the bogeyman of hierarchy lurking around every corner. And it certainly does not mean that we must not accord to our broader assemblies their rightful place and powers and duties. Then, too, we will go in the wrong direction, that of rank independentism. Nevertheless, we must be on

the alert. History shows that in Reformed Churches it has been very easy to go in the direction of hierarchicalism. And in this direction we never begin to go. In the second place, sometimes clouds, though they be perhaps only the size of a man's hand, appear on the horizon in this regard. Perhaps thoughtlessly sometimes we can catch ourselves referring to classis or to synod as higher and highest ecclesiastical assemblies. But remember: this is the language of hierarchicalism. Classis and synod are not higher and highest assemblies respectively, but broader and broadest assemblies. Another such cloud, I believe, appears when upon occasion we create a disjunction between the local church and the broader assemblies. There is no separation, you know, between the churches and the classis, or the synod, as though the latter have substance and existence in themselves. We must not forget that synod is not and cannot be an entity in itself. We must not begin to speak of "the synodical level" in distinction from the local level or the classical level. At synod the churches-in-common are represented. And at a classical meeting the churches-in-common of a certain region are represented and act together. And a local consistory must not imagine that when classis acts or when synod acts, that local consistory is not acting. The fact of the matter is that the local consistory is not excluded, but is simply acting in concert with its fellow churches. And the local consistories must not feel left out nor consider themselves excluded in such instances. To do so is already to make concessions in our thinking to the error of hierarchicalism. Against these dangers and against such thinking and such language we must be on the alert. And we must be on the alert, too, to live as much as in us lies by the principles and regulations of our Church Order. We must never consider the latter to be of no importance. We must never act in any of our assemblies as though any part of the Church Order can simply be dispensed with, for whatever reason. If we do, we shall someday wake up to the realization that we have forfeited this part of our heritage.

We may ask the further question: are there any areas in the life of our churches in which improvement can be made from a church political point of view?

To this question I believe the answer is affirmative.

In the first place, I have a suggestion of a rather mechanical nature. That is that our Church Order Manual ought to be brought up to date. The present edition of our Church Order was published in 1961. Since that time many of the constitutions of the various standing committees have been revised; and some of those revisions have been sweeping. If I am not mistaken, there is only one committee constitution which has not been revised in some way. Besides, there have been changes in the Rules of

Order and Rules of Procedure of Synod; and these do not appear in our Church Order. In addition, we became incorporated as a denomination in 1962; and the corporate By-laws, as adopted in 1962 and 1963, do not appear in our Church Order. It is high time, therefore, for the orderly transaction of the work of the churches, that we have a new edition of our Church Order Manual.

In the second place, I would like to suggest that — if I may put it that way — it is time for us to grow up as churches. We are 50 years old. And yet there is one important respect in which our churches have been hesitant to make a change. I refer to the way in which our synodical committees are structured; and especially do I refer to the structure of two very important committees which conduct much of the work of the churches-in-common, namely, our Mission Committee and our Theological School Committee. Both of these committees conduct business in behalf of all the churches. And yet both of these committees are limited in their membership to the Grand Rapids area. This is not good. It is not good from a practical point of view because it constitutes a severe stricture upon the membership of these committees and because it means that a very large burden of committee work falls upon a comparatively few ministerial committee members. And it is not good from the point of view of principle: for while these labors are the labors of the churches-in-common, the only time when the churches-in-common actually participate in this work is the time of our annual Synod, when reports are heard and when policies are set. It would be far healthier if there were active participation and input in these important committees from the denomination at large. I am aware, of course, of the objections that have commonly been made. These objections have been that a change in this regard would be impractical because of the amount of travel and the expense involved. I would point out that these are objections of a practical nature, not objections of principle. Nor do I believe that they are insurmountable objections. Some years ago considerable study of this matter was made, and concrete proposals were brought to Synod; but the proposals and suggestions were rather unceremoniously dumped by Synod without thorough consideration. I believe that it is time that our churches once more give careful attention to this matter. The truth is that as far as our Theological School Committee is concerned there has been retrogression in this respect. There was a time when the affairs of our seminary were taken care of by a Curatorium. And this Curatorium included representatives from all the churches at the time when we still had a General Classis in the early years of our history. But today all the affairs of our school are conducted by a committee from the Grand Rapids area. One or more of

our consistories should make a new study of this matter and should bring an overture to synod concerning it.

In the third place, there is a problem which ought to be cleared up. In our Rules of Synod, Article 5, B, sub-2, we read: "No proposals of importance shall be presented to Synod that have not appeared on the agenda, so that Consistories and Classes may have opportunity for previous deliberation. All matters appearing in the Agenda must be dealt with by Synod before its adjournment." Under our present structure, this regulation constitutes a wax nose. The Agenda is published by the 5th of May. But neither Classis East nor Classis West meets after that date; and therefore there is no opportunity for either of our classes to deliberate on matters in the Agenda of Synod before the Synod meets. Besides, it seems to be a common understanding among us that consistories can send no communications concerning matters in the Agenda directly to Synod. Personally, I do not agree with this. I do not believe, of course, that a consistory can send any matters for the Agenda directly to Synod; these ought to come by way of Classis. But I do believe that a consistory may send a communication to Synod concerning matters already in the Agenda, provided that in such communications a consistory does not present new matters for the Agenda. As matters stand now, for the most part our Agenda of Synod is merely a matter of information; it offers opportunity for previous deliberation only to those who are actually delegated to Synod. This situation ought to be corrected. Perhaps this would mean an earlier date for the Agenda; and perhaps it would mean a change in the date of the meetings of Classis East and Classis West. But as matters stand now, there is a hiatus in our ecclesiastical structure. And I believe that it is a hiatus that is out of keeping with the spirit of Reformed church polity.

In the fourth place, I believe that it would be for the benefit of our churches if Classis West would give serious consideration to meeting more than twice per year. Ever since the time that our churches were divided into two Classes, Classis West has met only twice per year. The reason for this is presumably the reason suggested in Article 41 of our Church Order, where we read that the meetings of Classis "shall be held at least once in three months, unless great distances render this inadvisable." It is true, of course, that Classis West has the problem of "great distances." But it is at least a question whether these great distances render three meetings or four meetings of Classis per year inadvisable. With Classis West meeting only twice per year, the meetings of that Classis frequently become too busy and too crowded. Besides, especially when there are matters of protest and appeal pending, it is not good for the welfare of the churches that these must be delayed for such a long time. In these days of air travel, I believe that Classis West could very easily meet at least three times per year.

Finally, I have this suggestion. I wish that our consistories and our Classes could pay more attention and could come more frequently with positive suggestions and overtures with regard to matters pertaining to the churches-in-common. As matters stand now, there is a certain danger of boardism in our denomination, due to the fact that almost all the business of Synod comes by way of the reports of standing committees. It would be a much more healthy situation if the local consistories and the Classes would have a greater voice in the affairs of our churches. Consistories and Classes could well devote more time to positive suggestions and constructive proposals with respect to the work and the activities of the churches-in-common. This, I believe, would be all to the good.

TAKING HEED TO THE DOCTRINE

"Hyper-Calvinism" and the Call of the Gospel (12)

by Rev. David Engelsma

It has been our purpose so far in this series of articles to show that denial of the well-meant offer of the gospel is not hyper-Calvinism. Hyper-Calvinism we have defined as the heresy that denies that God's external call in the preaching of the gospel goes out to others than the elect and that inevitably results in the restriction and, finally, the loss of lively, promiscuous proclamation of the gospel. We found the essential evil of the well-meant offer to be its doctrine

that God is gracious in the preaching of the gospel of Christ to all hearers, not only to the elect. Expressed as the teaching that God is favorable to all and sincerely desires the salvation of all, this doctrine of universal grace in the gospel is, in principle, the denial of election and reprobation; the denial of total depravity; the denial of limited atonement; and the denial of sovereign, efficacious grace. Opposition to the offer, therefore, neither stems from nor leads to

hyper-Calvinism, but is grounded in the Reformed faith, or Calvinism itself and is necessary for the maintenance of the Reformed faith.

Over against the offer-theology, we have contended that the preaching of the gospel with its call, "Believe on Jesus Christ," — which call is seriously made by God Himself — goes out to both elect and reprobate men, but that God's purpose with the sending of the preaching is exclusively the gathering and saving of the elect. The preaching is God's great draw-net cast out into the waters of mankind to catch the elect, and the elect only, from all nations, tongues, and tribes. In the preaching, God is favorable to the elect hearers only. His attitude of love and grace — His sincere desire to save — is towards them only, and He gives the power of grace to them only. God's grace is particular — it is for the elect alone. As regards others who come under the preaching, God hates them, is justly angry with them, and purposes their judgment and condemnation — through the preaching of the gospel.

Is our doctrine historical Calvinism? Is it the Reformed faith as this faith has developed in history? Or is the offer-theology the representative today of the Reformed faith in history, whereas our denial of the offer is a novelty, a recent speculation pasted onto the Reformed faith, and, therefore, to be dismissed as "hyper-Calvinism," or "ultra-Calvinism," or "high-Calvinism," or "hard-Calvinism," or what have you?

Advocates of the offer have clothed their doctrine in the impressive garb of Reformed antiquity. To change the figure, they have baptized the well-meant gospel-offer as the legitimate off-spring of the Reformed fathers, all the while scorning our denial of the offer as a bastard. In each of her "Three Points of Common Grace," the Christian Reformed Church ostentatiously wrapped herself in the flowing robes of classic Reformed thought by stating: "while it also 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." Of late, certain Baptists have taken it upon themselves to give us instruction in the history of Reformed theology, alleging that Calvin, the Reformers, and the Reformed creeds teach the offer and charging that it is "the opposers of the historic Reformed position" who deny the offer.¹

We intend now to take a look at "the historic Reformed position." We will examine, not a few citations snatched from here and there, but the body of Reformed thought, as expressed in the Reformed creeds, as sharpened in controversy, and as developed in certain of the outstanding Reformed theologians, including Calvin, Turretin, and Abraham Kuyper. Let us see whether the parentage of the well-meant offer

is as honorable as is claimed for it and whether it has a right to parade so regally in the robes of historic Reformed Christianity. Perhaps, after all, the offer is an ill-begotten progeny of Pelagius, Rome, Erasmus, and Arminius in the Reformed family and the Protestant Reformed doctrine of preaching as particular grace, a genuine son of the fathers.

Before we begin, several observations are in order. First, the ultimate authority for the Church's confession and the ultimate criterion for judging doctrines is Holy Scripture — not councils, classes, or synods and not the fathers and their writings. This was Luther's response when his opponent, Erasmus, appealed to the church fathers against Luther's doctrine and pulled from the corpus of their writings certain citations that favored Rome and contradicted the Reformation: "We hold that all spirits should be proved in the sight of the church by the judgment of Scripture." In asserting the sole authority of Scripture, Luther was not conceding that the fathers were in fact altogether against him (on the point in dispute: the bondage of the will) — for he claimed Augustine, the best of all the fathers — but he was recognizing that the saints, even the greatest, were weak, sinful flesh: "All that I say of those saints of yours — ours, rather — is this: that, since they differ among themselves, those should rather have been followed who spoke best (that is, for grace against 'free-will'), leaving aside those who through weakness of the flesh testified of the flesh rather than of the Spirit. So, too, in the case of those who are inconsistent, the places where they speak from the Spirit should have been picked out and held fast, and those where they savour of the flesh let go. This is the right course for the Christian reader. . . . But as it is we abandon our judgment and swallow everything indiscriminately; or else (what is more wretched still) we reject the better and acclaim the worse in one and the same author."² So, the writings of the saints — including Luther himself and Calvin! — must be judged by the clear, consistent, infallible Scripture. The Belgic Confession insists on this sole authority of Scripture, as "the only rule of faith," in Article VII. This holds true for the doctrine of the well-meant offer. The decisive question is not, "Do the Reformed fathers teach it?"; much less, "Are there now and then in the Reformed fathers statements, inconsistent with the overwhelming thrust of their theology, which seem to favor the offer?"; but the decisive question is, "Does Scripture teach it?"

Secondly, there is place in the Reformed Church for *development* of the truth. Because the Reformed faith is the truth of Scripture, the gospel, the living

¹Cf. Erroll Hulse, "The Free Offer," pp. 9ff.

²Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, tr. Packer and Johnston, (London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1957), pp. 109ff.

Word of God, the Church does not only hand it on to the next generation unimpaired — although she may never do less! — but she also grows in her knowledge of the truth, by the enlightenment of the gracious Spirit, so that there is ongoing development of the truth — richer, deeper, fuller knowledge and confession. That which lay implicit is made explicit; that which was hidden is made plain; that which was taught only in rudimentary beginning is carried through to its conclusion; a truth largely ignored is dealt with and given its proper place. Nor is it impossible that foreign elements get mixed into the theological thinking of the Church, which must then be purged, always by the fire of the testing Scriptures and always in accordance with the fundamental principles themselves of Reformed theology. Just think how foreign elements appeared in the apostolic churches: works-righteousness; gnosticism; antinomism. Just think how they were soon found in the Church after the apostles: denial of the Deity of Jesus; the innate goodness of man; the papacy. Just think how they were not absent from the amazing Luther: the physical presence of Jesus' body and blood in the Supper. Think how they soon corrupted Lutheranism: synergism, which is essentially nothing else than free will. Even Calvin, who as an exegete and theologian towers over all others, does not escape. There are, e.g., in Calvin, statements regarding the extent of the atonement that not only suffer from lack of clarity but that are also erroneous, statements that are contradicted, to be sure, not only by the essence of Calvin's own theology, but also by Calvin's explicit statements elsewhere; but statements, nevertheless, that head in the direction of

universal atonement. Commenting on the phrase in Romans 5:18, "the free gift came unto all men to justification of life," Calvin says: "Paul makes grace common to all men, not because it in fact extends to all, but because it is offered to all. Although Christ suffered for the sins of the world, and is offered by the goodness of God without distinction to all men, yet not all receive Him" — exegesis that is patently false, for the apostle does not say that the free gift *attempts* to come to all men, but *comes* to all men, so that all men actually *have* the justification of Christ's cross and *possess* eternal life. Calvin's error here rests upon his failure to see that "all men" in the phrase refers to all those represented by Christ, that is, the elect. The Reformed faith did not spring full-blown from the head of Calvin, but develops.

Reformed preachers and theologians do not deliberately set about to concoct something new and different. To teach and to hear some new thing is the lust of philosophers, heretics, and itching ears in the pews. But the servants of the Word labor with the Scriptures — real toil! They do this, praying earnestly and without ceasing for the Holy Spirit's guidance. They do this, gratefully receiving the theology of the Church in the past, especially as contained in her confessions. The Reformed theologian *enters into* Reformed theology of the past — he knows it, wrestles with it, and makes it his own — and he allows himself to be guided in his work with the Scriptures by this theology. Thus, there is development of the truth, as naturally and inevitably as a seed sprouts, grows, blossoms, and flowers in rich, dark soil.

(to be continued)

STUDIES IN ISAIAH

God's Judgments Humbling Sinners--Isaiah 2:10-22.

Rev. Robt. C. Harbach

1. God will stagger carnally secure sinners (10). Read the text in your King James Bible and compare with the Hebrew offered as we consider verse by verse. "Go in the rock and hide thyself in the dust from the faces (God is triune) of the terror of Jehovah, and from the splendor of His majesty" (Hebrew). With judgment ready to fall there is nothing left but for the nation to dive into the rocks to bury itself in the dust to hide from the many faceted terror of Jehovah. Not a call to repentance, this is a warning of impending judgment; and not sarcasm (Gill), but terrific earnestness. We understand Isaiah not literally, for hiding from God is impossible.

Actually, refuge *from* God is to be found only by taking refuge *in* God. For there is no shelter but in God and in the things above. The things of earth and earth itself shall be shaken, and the concussions of heaven's blasts against earth and all its corruption will dissolve the most iron-hearted resistance to God. "Hide thyself from the terrible looks of Jehovah." The prophet is not speaking so much of the fear which the Lord inspires, but the terror which He displays in judgment. The wicked will be terrorized by the *presence* of the Lord coming in judgment, "in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus

Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the *presence* of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Th. 1:9), or, as here, "from the splendor of His majesty." God in judgment is glorious and terrible. Despisers of God, in many ways, are underground in their habitual evil activities. They are from beneath. They love darkness, not light, just because their actions are evil. When judgment comes they will go deeper underground to hide from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. If the hopelessness of this is not now apparent to sophisticated, bored, blasé, drowsy, couldn't-care-less, indifferent haters of God, it will be in that terrible day of judgment. For then they could wish the grave to hide them. Then they could wish to die like a dog. Then they could wish their vain dream and philosophy of annihilation and extinction of being at death a reality. What a comfort the doctrine of annihilation would be to deniers of God, if there were any more truth to it than any other philosophy! God by the ungodly is to be feared, and will be, according to the measure of His manifested glory. That means that in nameless dread they shall tremble, faint, fall and become as dead men, until they hear the Judge's sentence, "Depart ye cursed, into everlasting fire," and are cast into the outer darkness, where there is the weeping, the wailing and the gnashing of teeth. But before this great and terrible day of the Lord shall come, the political and national Israel of the Jews would be swallowed up into oblivion as to ten of its tribes in the captivities, while remaining Judah and Benjamin would be wiped out of God's kingdom in that destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. (Mt. 21:43). The result of this will be that,

2. God will humble wickedly proud sinners (11-17). "The looks of proud man shall be brought low, and high men shall be bowed down, and Jehovah alone shall be exalted in that day" (v. 11). In the day of Jehovah, man will be abased and God exalted. Pride was the very first sin of man when he assumed to be as God. Pride increases when men "imagine that they are higher than God" and in competition with God. The sin of pride culminates in the Man of Sin "who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God," and who blasphemes the name of God, His tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven (2 Th. 2:4; Rev. 13:6). He shall be thrown down, abased, put to shame and destroyed with the breath of Christ's mouth and the brightness of His coming. "The Lord alone shall be exalted in that day," when He shall have put down all opposing rule and all authority and power (I Cor. 15:24). He will be exalted among the nations (Ps. 46:10) then in that day.

What day is that? "For (there is) a day to Jehovah-tsebhaoth against everything high and great, and

against everything lifted up, and it shall be brought low" (v. 12). The whole earth will be brought to such total ruin that everything man puts confidence in shall be destroyed. Men may mock the idea of a final judgment day, but the Word of God assures us "there is a day of the Lord of hosts." The Lord has this day in reserve, and at the right moment will produce it for His purpose. The Lord has His appointed day, recorded in His decree, which He will bring out of the secret of eternity into the history of time, a day of world-wide judgment, which will be the leveler and equalizer making everything high to sink down low into the dust at the feet of the Judge of all men.

That day of the Lord will also come against everything exalted in nature. "And against all the cedars of Lebanon, the high ones and the lifted up ones, and against all the oaks of Bashan, and against all lofty mountains, and against all the hills lifted up" (vv. 13-14). The cedars are trees of the Lord, of His planting (Ps. 104:16); they praise God (148:9). His voice shatters them (Ps. 29:5). But the beauties and glories of nature, in which men boast apart from their Creator, shall all be laid low in the day of the Lord. So with the representatives of all nature, trees and mountains destroyed, the earth itself is destroyed. Why this judgment on nature? Because the creation was subjected to vanity, to the bondage of corruption, so that the whole creation groans and travails in pain until now, waiting for a physical redemption (Rom. 8:20-23). For all nature itself is destined to a *Palingenesia* (Mt. 19:28), a regeneration, or a time of restitution of all things (Ac. 3:21), when the creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption to the liberty of the glory of the sons of God, which shall take place as Peter describes in 2 Pet. 3:10-13.

Yet not only against nature, but especially against the world of men and their evil works shall judgment come. "And against every high tower, and against every fortified (inaccessible) wall, and against all the ships of Tarshish, and against all the pleasure ships" (vv. 15-16). The Lord will be against every high tower. All of them shall fall (Isa. 30:25). There is no place secure from attack, no place to hide when God is the invading enemy. Nor shall "almighty, invincible" man be able to contend against Him. This goes for every fortified wall. No iron curtain shall remain before Him. No Chinese or Russian wall shall stand against Him. The tower of Babel was and modern Babel-building is a matter of atheistic man laboring to establish an antichristian hierarchy as a refuge and shrine of false confidence in the universal sovereignty of man over the powers of heaven and earth. So, from the pseudo-security of his mighty tower of international education, world currency, cosmopolitan philosophy and united nations armed forces, man yawns sophisticatedly, stretches luxuriously and

looks down on heaven and earth as though he were not steward but owner.

"And against all the ships of Tarshish, and against all the *pleasure ships*." The KJV has "pleasant pictures." But the NBV (New Berkeley Version) is probably closer to the original here with its "pleasure yachts." All shipping, navies and foreign trade, together with the luxuries they provide, including these luxury liners and pleasure ships will end in the ruin of all maritime commerce. So calamities at sea occur. (Read Rev. 8:8-9). A woman boarding the *Titanic* asked a purser whether the ship was safe. His answer was, "Lady, even God can't sink this ship!" But this is God in history: just when evil systems and evil causes are at the zenith of their power, worldly might and glory, the Lord suddenly causes them to wither and crumble. The Spanish Armada, arrogantly called the "Invincible Armada," sailed with all possible speed for the coast of England to crush that Protestant power and its fleet. Invincible it seemed, with its huge ships, the armed personnel of soldiers and sailors and weapons of destruction. But He that sitteth in the heavens laughed. He held them in derision. He brought a thick fog into which the British fled to the safety of their land. Then a storm brew and smashed the Invincible Armada on the rocky coasts of the British Isles. The memorial the English made at the time recalls the overthrow of the Egyptians in the Red Sea in the words, "Thou didst blow with Thy wind, the sea covered them" (Ex. 15:10). The great glory of the earth and of man's greatest successes in cultivating the earth were in ancient Babylon. So that *Babylon* is the name given to the universal kingdom of antichrist, when the world shall be brought to a unified cultural development of military, political, religious, commercial and aesthetic glory. But when it is all crushed, overthrown and destroyed by the coming of Christ and of His kingdom of glory, and in one hour Babylon and its riches come to nothing, men who love the world, every ship's pilot, all who sail the seas, mariners, and all who work the sea for their living, shall weep as they watch it all going up in smoke. Then their ribald sea songs will be silenced. Then they will wail, "Woe! woe! for the great city where all who had ships at sea grew wealthy from her great wealth! For in a single hour she has been laid waste!" (Rev. 18:17-19, NBV).

3. God will put these sinners to everlasting shame (18-22). "And," so in this way, "shall the proud man be bowed down, and high men brought low, and Jehovah alone shall be exalted in that day" (v. 17). Especially on *men* shall God's final judgment come, (though its effects also extend to the whole realm of nature) — on *men*, on men's idols and all their false religions. "And the idols (nothings), the whole (lot of them) shall pass away" (V. 18), their images, worship,

names and memory (Isa. 17:7-8; Zech. 13:2). What nothings their idols are, they shall then see, throwing them away in contempt. Their gods never could help them. Mere nothings will not do so then

Then what will idol worshipers do? "And they go into the caverns of the rocks, and in the caves of dust (the ground) from the face of the terror of Jehovah (from the terrible looks of Jehovah), and from the splendor of His majesty, in His rising up to terrify the earth. In that day the man shall throw away the idols of his silver and idols of his gold, which he made to him to bow down to, to the mole-holes and to the bats" (vv. 19-20). In v. 10, they are *told* to go to the rocks and hide among them. But now it is said they *will*, do so; they *must* enter rocks and caves, their last, but ineffectual resort, in vain attempt to hide from the wrathful eye of Jehovah. But there is no place to hide. Also they *will* throw away their idols to the moles and to the bats. These they had valued the most, for they made them of their silver and gold. Gold was their god. But as they flee in terror from the wrath of the holy God, they realize what nothings idols are. There comes a time when for terror merchant seamen dump their wares, including wheat, into the sea (Jonah 1:5; Acts 27:38); when for terror armies flee to leave behind their camp, their booty and their military material (2 Kings 7:13); when for terror the thief throws away his stolen goods because pursued and liable to search. Here, idolaters, for terror, but also for shame and disgust at their own folly for having anything to do with idols, throw them into the fittest places for blind, sightless images, — to mole-holes and bat caves! In such a case, sin is both loathed and left, yet not repented of; loathed because glutted with it; left, only because no opportunity to commit it, but because, as now, all sin, ultimately, *must* be abandoned. It is plain, then, why their idols are so suddenly and willingly abandoned: "to go into the fissures of the rocks and into the cleft of the cliffs (Heb., high rocks), from the face of the terror of Jehovah, and from the splendor of His majesty, in His rising up to terrify the earth" (v. 21). Fleeing from God, they find their idols in the way. (See comment on v. 10.)

In that day men will have no confidence in anything in which they formerly trusted or on which they had depended, including their own arrogant selves. "Cease you from the man whose breath (is) in his nostril, for in what (is) he to be regarded?" (v. 22). Man is a bad foundation on which to rest. Man is a very perishable article, and so really worth nothing as a ground of confidence. "In what is he to be regarded?" — in himself? Apart from being in Christ, he is nothing. The text speaks of the condition of mankind ("the man, i.e., mankind) apart from God. Mankind, fallen, totally depraved and dead through

trespasses and sins puts its hopes in man. Nebuchadnezzar's image symbolizes man's idolizing of "almighty" man. All idolatry and pantheism ultimate-

ly end in man as the highest manifestation of God (2 Thes. 2:3-4). "The greatest need of man is to reject man and seek" the true and living God.

THE VOICE OF OUR FATHERS

"The Holy Spirit: True And Eternal God"

Prof. Robert D. Decker

We believe and confess also, that the Holy Ghost, from eternity, proceeds from the Father, and Son; and therefore neither is made, created, nor begotten, but only proceedeth from both; who in order is the third person of the Holy Trinity; of one and the same essence, majesty and glory with the Father, and the Son: and therefore, is the true and eternal God, as the Holy Scriptures teach us.

The Belgic Confession, Article XI

This Article marks the conclusion of the Creed's treatment of the doctrine of God (Theology). In this section the Reformed believers confess: "That God is one in Essence, yet nevertheless distinguished in three Persons." (Articles VIII, IX); "That Jesus Christ is true and eternal God." (Article X); and now: "That the Holy Ghost is true and eternal God." (Article XI). While the Article is very brief (also by comparison with the others in this section of the *Confession*), it does capture beautifully the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as this is taught in the Word of God. The Article teaches that the Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity, that He is a Person, that He proceeds from the Father and the Son, and that He is very God. This doctrine of the Holy Spirit as taught in Scripture and summed up in this article of the Creed is very significant not only for the faith of the Church but also for its life. This truth has been the subject of no little dispute in the Church from its earliest history. In fact it was largely over the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (especially His procession from the Father and the Son, *filioque*) that the "Great Schism" between East and West, the Greek and the Latin Church took place in 1054. And this truth has taken on added significance in recent years on account of the influential (unfortunately even among Churches of the Reformed tradition) errors of neo-Pentecostalism. It is important that we examine this truth in the light of the Scriptures so that we may clearly understand "what we believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths" concerning the Holy Spirit.

THE HOLY SPIRIT PROCEEDS FROM THE FATHER AND THE SON

This doctrine the article emphasizes with the words: "We believe and confess also, that the Holy Ghost, from eternity, proceeds from the Father and Son; and therefore neither is made, created, nor

begotten, but only proceedeth from both. . ." The article states that the Holy Spirit *proceeds* from the Father and the Son. This means that the Holy Spirit is neither made nor created by the Father; rather, He proceeds from the Father and the Son. It also means that the Holy Spirit is not begotten as the Son is begotten of the Father. In this respect the Holy Spirit is personally distinct from both the Father and the Son. And this is the personal property of the Holy Spirit. This, namely that He proceeds from the Father and the Son and is neither made, created, nor begotten, distinguishes the Holy Spirit from both the Father and the Son. His name, Holy Spirit, expresses this personal property. The Holy Spirit is literally "breathed forth" from the Father and the Son and in this way proceeds from them both. Thus, what was confessed in Article VIII concerning the personal properties of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, is explained with reference to the third Person.

Further, this article stresses that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son. This does not mean that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both as two Spirits, the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son. As one Holy Spirit He proceeds from the Father to the Son and is breathed forth from the Son to the Father. Thus, in the Spirit, God triune enjoys the perfect fellowship of His Own divine Being.

This doctrine of the Holy Spirit was developed rather early in the history of the New Testament Church in connection with the doctrines of the Trinity and of Christ. There were those (many of the Arians) who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit. He was considered a Person but not true and eternal God. The Holy Spirit was said to be the creation of God and of lower order than the Son. The Council of Nicea (A.D. 325) only declaring: "We believe in the Holy Spirit", said nothing definite concerning the

matter. In 381 the Council of Constantinople contributed a bit more by saying: "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the lord and giver of life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, Who has spoken through the prophets." But, as one readily notices from the above quotation, the Council said nothing of the place of the Holy Spirit within the Trinity, and His relationship to the Father and the Son. This whole point became the subject of very sharp controversy. The controversy really focussed on the question of the word, "*filioque*", "and the Son." The question was, did the Holy Spirit proceed from the Father only, or from both the Father and the Son? The Synod of Toledo (A.D. 589) officially settled the question in favor of the word, "*filioque*," "and the Son." The controversy and resultant unrest continued, however, to plague the Church for centuries and finally issued in the Schism between the Greek (Eastern) and Latin (Western) Churches in 1054. The former denies double procession while the latter teaches this truth.

The Scriptures clearly teach this truth of double procession in many passages. Scripture speaks of the Holy Spirit as "the Spirit of your Father" (Matthew 10:20) and as "the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:19). Jesus promised that He would pray the Father: "and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth. . ." (John 14:16, 17). The Savior in this same chapter told the disciples that the Father would send the comforter "in my name" (verse 26). Thus in the Spirit both the Father and the Son make their abode with us. (John 14:23). Finally, in this connection, Jesus said concerning the Holy Spirit (The Comforter): "... whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me." (John 15:26) These and other passages teach that both Father and Son send the Holy Spirit.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS A PERSON

The Confession speaks of this when it says of the Spirit: "... in order the third Person of the Holy Trinity. . ." That the Holy Spirit is: "in order the third Person of the Holy Trinity", does not mean He is inferior in rank or in glory and majesty to the Father and the Son. That our *Confession* cannot mean that is obvious from the words: "of one and the same essence, majesty and glory with the Father and the Son". The "in order" simply refers to the fact that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.

Of greater danger is the tendency to disregard the personality of the Holy Spirit and to think of Him as an "influence" or "power". Certain heretics especially of the ancient church persisted in referring to

the Holy Spirit as an impersonal power or influence. Those who know the Word of God know better. The term "Spirit" in Scripture is neuter but the Bible always uses the masculine pronoun in reference to the Spirit and never is the Spirit called "it" in Scripture. Our Saviour promised the "Comforter"; not merely comfort to the church. (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7) Besides, personal characteristics are ascribed to the Spirit by Scripture. The Holy Spirit creates (Gen. 1:2); strives with the spirit of man (Gen. 6:3); teaches Christ's disciples what they ought to say (Luke 12:12); brings to their remembrance the Savior's words (John 14:26); convicts the world in respect of sin and righteousness and judgment (John 16:8); commands (Acts 8:29); raises the dead (Rom. 8:11); makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered (Rom. 8:26). None of these gracious activities can be ascribed to mere power. They are personal and assure us that God as the Holy Spirit works with and in the hearts of His people. In the Spirit, God in Christ lives with us and deals with us in a profoundly personal way, and this is our comfort. The Lord never leaves or forsakes His people.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS VERY GOD

"Of one and the same essence, majesty and glory with the Father, and the Son: and therefore, is the true and eternal God. . ." is the way the Creed asserts the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Thus the fulness of the divine being and attributes belong to the Holy Spirit. Just as the Father and the Son are God so the Holy Spirit, co-equal with them, is "true and eternal God."

This, the Bible teaches throughout. Scripture assigns divine names to the Spirit. He is repeatedly called the Spirit of God (I Cor. 3:16), the Spirit of the Lord (II Cor. 3:17), and the Holy Spirit of promise (Eph. 1:13). The Apostle Peter identifies Him as very God (Acts 5:3). As God, many divine perfections are ascribed to the Holy Spirit. He is everywhere present (Psalm 139:7-10); He knows all things and searches even the deep things of God (Isaiah 40:13, 14; I Cor. 2:11); all power belongs unto Him to perform signs and wonders (Rom. 15:19); He is called eternal (Heb. 9:14) and holy (I Thess. 1:6); and creation (Gen. 1:2); the renewal of the face of the earth (Psalm 104:30); regeneration (John 3:5, 6); and the resurrection from the dead (Rom. 8:11) are also ascribed to the Holy Spirit. Therefore the Church does not hesitate to confess that the Holy Spirit is God to be worshipped and glorified together with the Father and the Son.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AS THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST

Scripture makes a distinction which our Creed does not between the Holy Spirit as the third Person of the

Holy Trinity and the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ. We read for example in John 7:39: "This spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified." Strikingly, the original Greek does not have the word "given" so that the text reads: "... the Holy Ghost was not yet. . . ." This cannot mean that the third Person of the Trinity was not yet, for, as we have seen, He is true and eternal God. The reference here is to the third Person of the Trinity as He is given to Christ. The Holy Spirit is given to Christ upon His exaltation to glory, and, as the Spirit of Christ, He is poured out into the church on the Day of Pentecost (Cf. Acts 2 especially verse 33). To this Christ alluded often in His ministry especially as the day of His cross approached (Cf. John 14:16-18; 15:26; 16:7-15). On the mount moments before He ascended the Savior

assured His disciples that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5, 8). Thus Paul writes the Galatians: "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." (4:6).

As the Spirit of Christ the Holy Spirit is the source of the diversity of gifts in the Church (I Cor. 12-14); the One Who seals the elect unto the day of redemption (Eph. 1:12-17 and 5:9) and the One in Whom Christ comes to apply to the hearts of believers all the blessings of salvation (II Thess. 2:13, Titus 3:5, *et al.*)

The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Holy Trinity, very God, and the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus with the Church of all ages the Reformed believer confesses: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, true and eternal God, the God of my salvation."

A Report of the Synod of 1975

Prof. Robert D. Decker

The General Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America met this year in our Hull, Iowa Church. While this is our 50th Anniversary as Protestant Reformed Churches, this was the 36th annual meeting of Synod, since the Churches did not organize into the Classical-Synodical structure until the year 1940. The sessions of Synod began on Wednesday, June 11, at 9:00 A.M. and continued daily through Tuesday, June 17, when at 7:00 P.M. the Synod of 1975 adjourned. The Synodical Prayer Service was held under the auspices of the Hull consistory on Tuesday evening, June 10. The Rev. David J. Engelsma, President of last year's Synod, preached a powerful and inspiring sermon based on Psalm 89:15, 16 entitled: "The Blessedness of the People of God". There was sound direction for both the Synod and our Churches in the exposition of this Word of God. The next morning Rev. Engelsma presided over the opening session of Synod. The credentials indicated the following delegates present: from Classis West; Revs. D. Engelsma, J. Kortering, G. Lubbers, and B. Woudenberg; Elders; R. Brunsting, J. Flikkema, J. Haak, and J. Kalsbeek; from Classis East: Revs. C. Hanko, M. Joostens, G. Van Baren, and R. Van Over Loop; Elders; G. De Vries, D. Kooienga, H. Kuiper, and D. Lotterman. Only one of our three Professors (R. Decker) was able to attend this Synod as advisor. Officers chosen for the '75 Synod were: Rev. J. Kortering, President; Rev. G. Van Baren, vice-President; Rev. R. Van Overloop served capably as first Clerk; and he was assisted by Rev. M.

Joostens, the second Clerk. After the delegates arose to express agreement with the *Public Declaration of Agreement With the Three Forms of Unity*, a Committee on Committees was appointed to apportion the work of the Synod, and Synod was ready to plunge into the rather large Agenda and its supplementary reports. The work as usual was divided into four parts and assigned to four Committees of Pre-advice. Matters pertaining to the mission work of the Churches were assigned to Committee I consisting of Revs. Engelsma and Woudenberg, Elders Kalsbeek and Kuiper with Prof. Decker serving as advisor. The Report of the Theological School Committee and related matters were handled by Committee II consisting of Revs. C. Hanko and J. Kortering and Elders Brunsting and Kooienga. Committee III, which consisted of Revs. Joostens and Lubbers and Elders De Vries and Haak, was given miscellaneous material among which were two overtures, the Foreign Mission Committee Report, and the Report of the Committee for Contact with other Churches. Committee IV, consisting of Revs. Van Baren and Van Overloop and Elders Flikkema and Lotterman, advised the Synod on all financial matters. We shall deal with each of these in turn, but before we do we wish to make some general observations on this Synod.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

It is always striking that our Synods meet without any note being taken of their sessions in either the secular or religious press (with the exception of our

Standard Bearer). Not even the little *Hull (Sioux County) Index* reported on the work of our Synod. This is partly because our denomination is so very small compared with other churches. But we believe this is also because, not only the world, but also the ecclesiastical world is not interested in the affairs of our churches. This does not at all mean that our churches are engaged in trivia. This was in many ways, we believe, a very significant Synod. It was this simply because it dealt exclusively with matters pertaining to the life and calling of the Church of Jesus Christ as instituted in the world. There was nothing on the Agenda concerning the problems of the world which occupy so much of the attention of other churches' Synods and General Assemblies. No pronouncements were made concerning world hunger, amnesty for draft dodgers, or homosexuality. Only matters concerning or *directly* related to the preaching of the gospel, the administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of Christian discipline were treated. Thus the Synod was busy exclusively with the Christ-assigned task and calling of the Church. For this we are grateful and our prayer is that God may keep our Churches faithful to that task. This too is the reason why we have every confidence that what was decided is terribly significant for the cause of our churches not only, but for the cause of God's Church in all the world.

This year's Synod was not hasty in its decisions and deliberations. Under the wise and capable leadership of its President, J. Kortering, Synod took its time in dealing with the matters before it. There was full discussion on all issues before it. And throughout these careful discussions great care and concern were constantly expressed that the Churches remain faithful to Scripture and the Confessions of the Reformed Faith. This is rare on the ecclesiastical scene these days and reason for profound gratitude to our faithful covenant God. There is, in this respect, no cause for proud boasting on our part for it is only "of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed" by the apostacy of our times. Great is God's faithfulness indeed!

Again we were impressed with the predominance of "new faces" at Synod. With three exceptions, the veterans among our clergy and elders were not present. Two of Synod's officers were serving for the first time in their ministerial careers and Rev. Kortering occupied the presidency for the first time in his career. All this indicates that the first generation is gradually passing from the scene and being replaced by the second and third generation. As churches we ought to pause and give thanks for the great things God has done for us through the faithful and often extremely trying labor of our older ministers and elders. Through them solid denominational founda-

tions have been laid, deeply imbedded in the Rock of the Truth of Scripture as expressed in the Three Forms of Unity. Our Churches at this moment are standing exactly where they stood fifty years ago when God called them into existence to maintain and defend, preach and teach the Reformed Faith in all its purity. We ought to pause too, in order to pray that God may keep us where we are in the days to come.

Finally, by way of general observation, it may be noted that the Report of the Yearbook Committee indicates that our Churches increased in membership by some 41 families and 150 souls. While numbers are not significant in themselves and while "the Lord's hand is not shortened to save by many or by few," we believe that this too is reason for thanks to God. This growth for the most part is internal since no new churches have been organized in the interim of last and this year's Synods. This too is indication of God's covenant faithfulness to us. His covenant of friendship is being preserved with us and our children by His grace in Jesus Christ.

MISSION MATTERS

The Synod of 1975 was a "mission-minded" Synod. This perhaps is the distinguishing feature of this year's Synod. It was the first Synod in many years privileged to receive reports from not one but two missionaries and from one of our pastors, Rev. B. Woudenberg, on his work in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. The bulk of Synod's time (the better part of two full days) was spent dealing with missions. This ought to discredit the old notion and criticism that the Protestant Reformed Churches "do not believe in missions".

Synod dealt at length with the Jamaican Mission and its sometimes knotty problems. There were lengthy discussions on all points relating to this mission field. Synod rejected the proposal of the Mission Committee (a proposal which had the support of the Jamaica emissaries; Rev. J. Heys and J.M. Faber) that a calling Church be designated for the sending of a missionary to that island. This rejection came on the grounds that the Mission Committee did not spell out in detail the method of labor for the missionary and Synod felt it would be too costly at this time. The sentiment was also expressed that at least two men should be sent to Jamaica since the burden is far too great to be borne by one missionary. It was decided that Rev. Heys remain in contact with the ministers in Jamaica, that correspondence courses be initiated with the newer ministers there, and that emissaries be sent for a period of two to three months to aid the Jamaicans and report on the spiritual progress of the saints there.

Synod heard an interesting oral report from the missionary working in Houston, Texas, Rev. Robert C. Harbach. Missionary Harbach, obviously enthusiastic about his work, reported that the saints there love Calvinism, are learning to know and appreciate our Psalter, and are making real effort to live sanctified lives. Attendance at the morning worship is about 35-40 and the evening service draws about 25. The missionary is busy instructing the children in catechism, preaching two services on the Lord's Days and leading a mid-week meeting where they have finished a study of the *Belgic Confession* and are at present studying the Epistle of James. The saints there also support and maintain a small Christian School for the children of the covenant. While there are some problems remaining and more work to be done it appears as though a Protestant Reformed congregation may be organized in Houston in the not too distant future. Our brothers and sisters and our missionary need our encouragement and our prayers.

In connection with the work in Houston the calling Church (Hope of Grand Rapids) sent a request via the Mission Committee that Synod appoint a study committee to deal with the question of administering the sacraments (especially Baptism) on the Mission field. Synod acceded to this request and appointed: Revs. D. Engelsma, J. Kortering; Elders J. Haak and J. Kalsbeek; and Prof. R. Decker as a study committee to serve the Churches with advice on this matter. This committee is scheduled to report to the 1976 Synod.

Synod was also privileged to be addressed by Rev. Dale H. Kuiper, Missionary to Skowhegan, Maine. Rev. Kuiper preaches twice per Sunday to three families (9 souls) in addition to his own. There are some visitors from time to time. He also conducts a service in Portland, Maine where a few continue to hear the Word. The missionary also reported that he visits as many families as possible in their homes. Rev. Kuiper also conducts a weekly radio broadcast. There are only a very few who seem to be at all interested in the Reformed faith. Missionary Kuiper commented that Maine is an area where the church has long ago departed from the gospel. This makes the work extremely difficult and the contacts very few. Certainly Rev. and Mrs. Kuiper and their family need our prayers. May God preserve the little remnant in Skowhegan.

Rev. B. Woudenberg, pastor of the Lynden, Washington congregation, addressed the Synod concerning his work in Edmonton, Canada. Pastor Woudenberg meets every other week with a group of soundly-Reformed believers in a Bible Study Class. Synod decided to continue to underwrite the cost of the trips of Rev. Woudenberg and other ministers who may be sent to Edmonton. Let us remember these brothers and sisters and Brother Woudenberg as

they "earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints."

Synod also appointed Rev. Kuiper to write a pamphlet in consultation with Rev. Harbach briefly explaining the stand of our Churches. This pamphlet is to be tailored for use on the Home Missions fields.

Synod, in response to the report of the Foreign Mission Committee, decided to continue the study-sheet program in Indonesia. Rev. C. Hanko and Prof. H. C. Hoeksema, who expect to be in Jakarta this summer, hope to make some personal contact with the people who benefit from this program. The Foreign Mission Committee was instructed to pursue its contacts in Ghana during the coming year. The Committee was also instructed by Synod to make further investigation concerning other possible fields of labor in foreign missions.

SEMINARY MATTERS

The report of the Theological School Committee and the Rector's report both indicated that our Theological School is prospering under God's blessing. Synod was informed that the Professors were laboring faithfully under rather heavy teaching loads. The instruction is soundly Reformed and capably given, the Committee reported. Synod also learned that if the pledges were paid the new Seminary building would be paid for. Our people gave liberally to this cause and we are grateful for this blessing of God. The Seminary is now properly licenced with the State of Michigan and approved by the Immigration and Naturalization Service so that foreign students may receive visas. A special resolution of thanks was adopted by Synod to Jon Huisken for all of the work he performed in this regard. Enrollment continues to increase, Synod learned, with two new students approved for entrance into the Pre-seminary department in the fall of this year. Synod also learned that no problems were encountered in connection with our Seminary's instructing the students from the Free Reformed Church of North America. We are happy to have these students in our school and thankful to be of service to the cause of the Reformed faith in this respect. A request of the faculty via the Rector's Report that Synod consider the possibility of calling a fourth professor was referred back to the faculty as a matter to be brought by them to the Theological School Committee.

MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS

The Committee for Contact with Other Churches reported on the Australasian tour to be made this summer by Prof. Hoeksema and Rev. C. Hanko. Synod approved this report and remembered these brethren often in its prayers. This Committee also reported that contact was being made with brethren

of the Reformed Church in the U.S. (Eureka Classis, German Reformed). Synod also approved of this contact. Hopefully these efforts will bear fruit in a denomination-wide conference between our Churches and their's in the future.

Reports from the Stated Clerk, Catechism Distribution Committee, Board of Trustees, the Fiftieth Anniversary Committee, the Emeritus Committee, and the Synodical Treasurer were read and dealt with appropriately.

Synod approved of the work of the Catechism Book Committee and decided that work should continue on the revision of some of the books currently in use. Rev. Engelsma is working on the *Essentials of Reformed Doctrine* book and Rev. Kuiper is busy preparing a workbook to be used with the *Heidelberg Catechism* book.

OVERTURES

Synod dealt with two overtures this year. It rejected the overture of the Hope, Grand Rapids Consistory regarding Student Aid and decided to continue providing aid to our theological students through the Synodically appointed committee.

A brother from our Redlands, California congregation overtured Synod to: "study, evaluate, and

correct the present Constitution of the Mission Committee" upon several grounds. This matter was placed in the hands of a study committee to report to the Synod of 1976. Synod appointed the brethren: Revs. C. Hanco, M. Joostens, and R. Van Overloop, and elders to serve on this committee.

STATED CLERK

The Rev. D. H. Kuiper, whose second three year term as Stated Clerk of Synod had expired, asked not to be considered for reappointment to this office. He felt, and Synod concurred in this, that it was not practical for him to serve as Stated Clerk while serving as a Home Missionary. Synod passed a resolution of appreciation to Rev. Kuiper for all his work as Stated Clerk. From a nomination of three Synod chose the Rev. Marinus Schipper to serve as its Stated Clerk for a three-year term.

After dealing with financial matters and electing the various members to the Synodical Standing Committees the 1975 Synod adjourned. May God cause that the decisions taken at this Synod be of benefit to our churches, and to the church universal in order that His Name may be praised.

Synod will meet, D.V., the first Wednesday of June, 1976 in our South Holland, Illinois Church.

FROM HOLY WRIT

Exposition of Hebrews 13:4

By Rev. G. Lubbers

THE HONORABLENESS OF MARRIAGE IN THE LORD — continued.

Only those who hold to the faith in Christ Jesus have a reason for holding to the sanctity and honorableness of Marriage. Our faith in God is a faith in the "Creator" of heaven and earth. Those who do not worship the Creator must needs worship the creature. (Rom. 1:25) These change the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of the image of corruptible man, birds, four-footed beasts and creeping things. They do not hold to marriage as an institution of God as it was from the beginning. (Matthew 19:8) It is the Christian who finds his rock-bottom joy in knowing that God in Christ always speaks concerning what was "from the beginning". (Gen. 1:1; John 1:1-3) That lays the foundations bare, the very foundations of God's primordial ordinances in creation and in re-creation.

How honorable marriage is, is proven by the very contrasts which we see in all those who do not see

that Christ has come to sanctify the institution of marriage and to make it a "mystery" of the basic relationship of Himself and the church which He has come to cleanse and make pure in His own blood, and to present her spotless to the Lord in the reconstitution of all things. (Ephesians 5:22-33) The less men live in the faith that "God was manifested in the flesh" (I Timothy 4:1-3) the more they will seek to find the solution to all the problems of sin connected with marriage and our earthly existence in "forbidding marriage". Unless we see that marriage is of the Lord Himself, we shall never see the truth that marriage is honorable in all. Marriage, too, will seem like something which defiles the conscience. It will then be no different from the life of adultery. Fact is, that if the one, to wit, marriage defiles the conscience, and adultery defiles the conscience — then there is but one alternative left. It is to live the life of the ascetic which is then more holy than wedlock. But that is trying to be wiser than God. He has given to sinful man, also his sinful saints, an area where he

can live honorably before God and man. No man thinks it dishonorable for a man to live chastely with the wife of his choosing, be she the wife of his youth or of his advanced years. And children, born in wedlock, have a deep sense of comfort that their parents are united in holy wedlock — till death do them part. And the child which is received into a family, where the parents are married, feels that he is now in a protected sphere where the Lord's blessing rests upon him.

Do not forget that marriage is honorable in "all". For "all" that is included in marriage, all the aspects and relationships of marriage are "in the Lord". Yea, even the bed upon which the children are conceived, is honorable. That bed is so honorable that when another comes to this bed to lie with a man's wife, then and then only is that bed "defiled". Thus Jacob says in Genesis 49:3, 4: "Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then *defilest* thou it: he wentest up to my couch." Oh, the sanctity of the bed of wedlock even if it is but a "concubine wife" as was Bilhah, Rachel's maid. Oh, the deep wound in Jacob's soul for this; we hear it in the brief statement in Genesis 35:22, "and Israel heard it." Even though Reuben was his "firstborn" son, he "heard it". It passed deeply into his soul, a wound and a scar that will not heal. Reuben is forever in dishonor. He desecrated the sanctity of the "bed which was undefiled". No doubt, Bilhah too is a desecrated woman. We do well to remind ourselves here of the words of the Proverbs of Solomon, "Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry; but if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his house. But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul. A wound and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away. For jealousy is the rage of a man: therefore will he not spare in the day of vengeance. He will not regard his ransom: neither will he rest content, though thou givest many gifts." (Proverbs 6:30-35)

WHOREMONGERS AND ADULTERERS JUDGED OF GOD (Hebrews 13:4b)

There is here a rather sharp contrast drawn between those who walk in the honorableness of marriage and those who walk in fornication and adultery. The term in the Greek for "whoremongers" is *pornous*, from which derives the term "pornography", a description of "whores," a glorification of whoredom. The Dutch translates this term as *hoer-eerders*, that is, giving honor to whores. One who gives his honor to such women has lost his honor and falls

under the just judgment of God. In the Greek the term *pornos* is a fornicator, a male prostitute in all the forms of it. It is one who has a Caramite, a boy kept for the purpose of sexual perversion. Here we must refer the reader to the vivid and composite description which Paul gives of those who are given over by means of their sinful lust to all uncleanness in order that they may dishonor their bodies between themselves. (Rom. 1:24) These were they who changed the truth of God into the lie, and who worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever, Amen. Basically, pornography is here analyzed for what it is in its deepest essence, and the Word of God here is very sharp as a two-edged sword, dividing asunder even the marrow and bones, and is a searcher of the intents of our hearts. (Hebrews 4:12) The text also speaks of "adultery"! This is the sin against the holy bond of matrimony by bringing in another party, which adulterers the situation. It really breaks the sacred bond; it is a direct defiling of the bed which is "undefiled" as such. This is the only ground for divorce. It is really the most horrible aspect of the sin against the seventh commandment which warns against and forbids all uncleanness as being accursed of God. (H.C. Question 108) Now whoremongers and adulterers are placed in one class in the text. There is really no essential difference between these two; both dishonor the sanctity and holiness of God as this is expressed in the honorableness of marriage, as instituted by God. Neither has God in all his thoughts. They worship the creature rather than the Creator!

But God is not mocked. God will judge (*krinei*) such. This judgment of God may be to the final condemnation in hell. We read in Rev. 22:15, "For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie." That will be the judgment of God upon whoremongers and adulterers, who are not brought to repentance by grace. Paul says repeatedly concerning whoremongers and adulterers that they shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (I Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:19-21; Col. 3:5, 6; Eph. 5:5) That is the way in which God will judge such sinners. He gives to each one according to his works. But God will also judge such sinners in this life. A life of whoredom entails untold (and told) woe for those who are enslaved in it. Think of the physical sicknesses which are the reward of the whoremonger. Ask the doctors and nurses in our hospitals. It is all the "due reward" for the uncleanness of lusts in which God delivers the wicked. This is God's legal "retribution meted out to apostasy" from the living God for all sexual vice. It is God's judicial infliction of His justice upon sin. Men got caught in the snares of sin, but fell under the awful judgments of God. Thus we see women leaving the natural use to do what is against nature

(Lesbianism) and men with men committing worse than bestial sodomy. (Today this is simply called: homosexuality.) And many an insane asylum is filled with those who would try to flee from the wrath of God upon their bestial sins. When man tries to drown out these fears and terrifying accusations of his conscience, he tries to find relief in drinking, and he becomes a drunkard. He had no sanity and sobriety before this. Then to save his face he calls this drunkenness with the euphemism: alcoholism. He saves neither his face nor his soul before the living God into Whose hands it is terrible to fall. For He is a consuming fire.

Now this is written for our warning, lest we should walk in these sins. It is good that our young people, too, be warned as well as our married fathers and mothers, yes, even those who are past the three-score-year span of their life. It is good to remember that the bed which is "undefiled" be even kept so. God hates all uncleanness both inside and outside of wedlock. This is not some Calvinistic-Puritanic ethics and social strictures, but such is the word of God as written by Paul in I Thess. 4:3-8, "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour, not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth (this), despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given us his Holy

Spirit." Let us then work out also the good work of our marriage with fear and trembling. We must also here perfect sanctification in the fear of God. (II Cor. 7:1)

The Hebrews evidently needed this warning from the writer. They had been told that they were come to Mount Sion, the city of the living God. They were no longer under the terrible darkness, tempest of Sinai before which even Moses exceedingly feared and trembled. Now they hear the law as a rule for their life of thankfulness; however, they hear it read to them by the minister in quiet prose, without this thunder of Sinai. They are under the blood of sprinkling. Now they must also walk as such who are under this blood of the covenant, who have their consciences purified from dead works to serve the living God in spirit and in truth. They must cease from such sins, as did evidently the Samaritan woman who was told of her sin in one short sentence "Go call thy husband." She had no husband. She was walking in adultery. Now she sees her sin and says, "Come see a man that told me all I ever did!" The woman taken in adultery is told, "Go and sin no more". And that is what the Hebrew Christians, too, are told. And we are told this here by the writer. God will judge fornicators, whoremongers, and adulterers. Depart from wickedness. Arise, thou that sleepest, and Christ shall give thee light. Ye were darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.

GUEST ARTICLE

"Should We Use Unleavened Bread in the Lord's Supper?"

Rev. Mark H. Hoeksema

Last summer while vacationing in Minnesota for a couple of days I happened to meet a Lutheran minister. After becoming acquainted somewhat, we fell to discussing matters of religion and theology, especially the differences between the Reformed and Lutheran branches of the Reformation. As could be expected, the subject of the meaning of the Lord's Supper came up, and along with that the question of the symbolism involved. My acquaintance volunteered the information that in some Lutheran churches grape juice is used rather than wine in the observance of the sacrament. When I challenged this practice, he readily conceded its error, but immediately countered with a question of his own: did we

use unleavened bread in our observance of the sacrament? I immediately saw the implications of his query and realized that my answer would make me vulnerable to criticism, but had to answer truthfully that we did not. He, of course, pointed out the inconsistency, which I was forced to admit.

This conversation made me stop and think about the subject, and then investigate it further. My investigation proved fruitless as far as our churches were concerned; to the best of my knowledge our Protestant Reformed writings have not touched the matter; a search of my memory revealed that the subject never came up in the course of my seminary training; and even a colleague was nonplussed when I

put the question to him. All of this served to increase my curiosity about the subject, so I began to study and delve into it, coming up with the facts and conclusions presented in this article. There are several questions which must be answered about this matter in order to arrive at a proper understanding and solution to the problem.

First, what is the significance of unleavened bread in Scripture, particularly in connection with the Old Testament feast of the Passover, which is closely connected with the Lord's Supper?

The meaning or significance of unleavened bread is two-fold. In the first place, from a primarily historical perspective, it symbolized the bread of affliction eaten by the children of Israel when they departed from the bondage of Egypt, and which they had to eat annually in the Passover feast in commemoration of their deliverance. Evidently this unleavened bread was of a somewhat bitter taste, and not the most pleasant or appealing of foods. In this respect it was intended to remind Israel of the bitterness of their bondage and affliction under the Egyptians, so much so that in Deut. 16:3 this bread is called the "bread of affliction." Also, it was intended to remind Israel of the speedy nature of their delivery from bondage, an exodus so swift that they did not even have time to prepare leavened bread. Such is the direct teaching of Deut. 16:3: "Seven days shalt thou eat unleavened bread therewith, even the bread of affliction; for thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt in haste: that thou mayest remember the day when thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt all the days of thy life." In the second place, and most importantly, unleavened bread is in Scripture the symbol of spiritual purity. Leaven was the symbol of corruption and impurity, and by implication the absence of leaven implied freedom from impurity. Just as in the physical sense of the word the yeast placed in bread dough spreads throughout the lump, and in a way introduces impurity into it (though that impurity may be desired), so also in the symbolic sense: leaven represents the pervasive and powerful influence of corruption. Because of this Israel was expressly forbidden not only to use, but even to possess or come into contact with leaven during the entire seven days of the Passover feast, on penalty of being cut off from the congregation, cf. Ex. 12:18-20. That the presence of leaven meant corruption can be seen further from Ex. 23:18 as corroborated by Ex. 34:25: "Thou shalt not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leavened bread." Clearly the implication is that leavened bread would corrupt the sacrifice. This idea is also directly supported by Christ Himself, for He warns His disciples in Matt. 16:6, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees." As verse 12 of the same chapter indicates, He referred to their corrupting

doctrine and influence. Thus we can agree with Fairbairn, who states: "There can be no doubt that it mainly pointed . . . to holiness in heart and conduct, which became the ransomed people of the Lord — the uncorrupt sincerity and truth that should appear in all their behavior."¹

Secondly, did Christ use unleavened bread in the institution of the Lord's Supper as the fulfillment of the Passover? We may answer that without doubt He did. As a Jew who observed the law of God perfectly, He certainly obeyed the command respecting the use of unleavened bread during the entire Passover. There simply could not have been any leavened bread at the last Passover in the upper room. And since the Lord's Supper was instituted at the same time as and in direct connection with that last Passover, it necessarily follows that unleavened bread was also used in the institution of the sacrament of communion.

Third, how important is the symbolism of the sacrament? It goes without saying that the symbolism is a necessary part of the proper sacrament; if the symbolism is removed, the sacrament becomes totally meaningless. Indeed, the symbolism is very important. Not, of course, after the manner of Rome, which makes it an end in itself. But certainly in the sense of the relationship between the sign and the thing signified the symbolism is indispensable. Because the sacrament is intended to convey spiritual truths to God's people through the use of earthly symbols (cf. the Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 79, the Belgic Confession, Article 35), there must be the closest possible unity and harmony between the symbol and the thing symbolized. This will become clearer and will be applied presently.

* * * * *

In the light of these Scriptural facts, what is to be our position and practice? Should we as Protestant Reformed Churches use unleavened bread in our observance of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper? I believe that we should, for three main reasons.

The first reason is that we should stay as close to Scripture as possible. This is always a good principle to follow in all matters of doctrine and practice; the more Scriptural we can be, the more sound we are. And this applies also to our practice regarding the Lord's Supper. If the symbolism of the Supper includes the use of unleavened bread, particularly as instituted by Christ, then this should be our practice also. We must not become "symbolistic," i.e., put too much significance in the outward signs. Neither, however, may we ignore or subordinate a proper and significant Scriptural symbolism when it is there. To put this matter into perspective: we would not think of using milk or even grape juice in place of the wine

¹Patrick Fairbairn, "The Typology of Scripture," Vol. II, p. 388.

in the sacrament. Why don't we be Scripturally consistent and use unleavened bread as well?

The second reason concerns the necessity of preserving the unity between the sign and the thing signified. The bread and wine are obviously the major elements in the sacramental symbolism. With the significance of the wine we are probably familiar. Wine in Scripture is the symbol of joy: Psalm 104:15 says that God gives wine "to make the heart of man glad"; Ecclesiastes 10:19 tells us, "A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry." Bread, on the other hand, (in this case unleavened bread) is the symbol both of bitterness and affliction and of purity and uprightness. Now why did God choose bread and wine to be the symbols of the sacrament? Surely there must be a reason. Christ through the sacrament means to teach and apply to believers certain spiritual truths. What does He teach and apply in the eating of unleavened bread? He teaches the bitter knowledge of sin and corruption. Through proper self-examination the believer knows his sins and the curse due to him for them; and that knowledge is not pleasant, but bitter and distasteful. And when he comes to the table of the Lord, he eats the bread of affliction, the bread of the bitter knowledge and consciousness of his sins. But at the same time he eats the bread of purity and freedom from guilt and corruption, for he has confessed those bitter sins and knows that for the sake of Christ's death and resurrection they are forgiven. Then, and only then, does he drink the cup of joy, the joy of the forgiveness of his sins. Thus the bread is always first and the wine follows, both in the sacrament and in the experience of the Christian. In the way of the bitter acknowledgement and confession of his sins, and in the way of spiritual purity for Christ's sake, the believer is assured joyously that his sins are forgiven. In this light the eating of unleavened bread takes on a full and beautiful mean-

ing of the child of God.

Thirdly, this meaning becomes even fuller and richer when we realize that the sacrament is a reflection to us of Christ. The elements of the sacrament in the final analysis point not to our experience, but to Christ. The wine is the symbol of His blood, not only as to its color and its being poured out, but also as to its significance of the joy of forgiveness to be found in the blood of Christ alone. And the unleavened bread points to Christ's body, not only as to its being broken or as to its being the staff of life both physically and spiritually, but also as to its significance. It points us to the bitter affliction that Christ suffered for us, even to the extent that He allowed His blessed body to be nailed to the cross in our stead. And it also points us to the great truth of Christ's purity: He was the sinless one in His whole being, also as to His body, for He was God in the flesh. He who knew no sin became sin for us, even in the way of partaking of the bitter bread of affliction unto death.

The use of unleavened bread: Scripturally correct, a practice instituted by Christ and fulfilled in His own death, and the experience of the Christian in partaking of the Lord's Supper. Should we adopt this practice? By all means, at the same time remembering that this is a matter of practice, not of doctrine, though it is connected with and based on doctrine, as all practice must be. Obviously this is not a matter of earth-shaking doctrinal importance, nor is it a matter of spiritual life or death for the Christian. But it is a matter of practical Scriptural consistency. Thus it is not mandatory, but desirable; not necessary, but advisable, to adopt this practice. Let us as churches adopt this practice as a continuing part of our contribution to the development, practice, and preservation of the Reformed faith of Scripture.

Book Review

Prof. H. Hanko

PEACEABLE FRUIT, by Gertrude Hoeksema; Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1974; 310 pp., \$5.95.

There is a great lack of good material on covenant instruction and child-training which is written from the perspective of Scripture, which is suitable for covenant parents who are dedicated to "bringing up their children in the fear of the Lord" and who are aware of the difficult task this really is. This book can and will go a long way towards filling that lack.

As far as the general contents of the book are concerned, the author treats first of all the important questions of *who* and *what* is the child, discussing this from a spiritual and psychological viewpoint. With chapter three, the book divides the life of the child into specific periods and treats each period rather extensively. The divisions however, are not arbitrary, for each time the author discusses what characteristics are uniquely those of the child during each period of his physical, psychological and spiritual development, and how covenant training must be

directly adapted to these characteristics. There are chapters on "Preparation for the Child", "Birth of the Child", "From Birth to Nine Months", "From Nine Months to Two Years", "From Two to Five Years", "The kindergartner", "Early Primary Years", "Later Primary Years", "Early Adolescence", "High School Adolescence." The author uses an imaginary child by the name of Timothy to bring the book more down to earth and practical.

It is uniquely characteristic of the Reformed faith that the beautiful truth of God's covenant is taught and emphasized in such a way that it pervades the whole confession of those who hold to the Reformed faith. The doctrine of the covenant is however, not objective and cold theory, but is warm and vibrant, filled with practical implications for the whole life of the child of God. This book proceeds to describe *covenant* instruction. The truth of God's covenant pervades the whole of the book and affects every part of it. It will give to those who love this doctrine a greater appreciation for this glorious truth and a greater realization of its profound and awesome implications for covenant instruction in the home.

The book is also filled with practical suggestions of a very concrete kind. It is not merely fine-spun theory, but brings instruction into the every day problems of life in a way which can be of use to

Godly parents. It has been said that the book is somewhat idealistic and loses considerable value because it does not reckon sufficiently with the reality of sin both in the child and in the parents who are called to engage in this difficult task. There probably is some truth to this assertion; but there are two matters which come to mind in this connection. In the first place, Scripture also holds before our eyes the ideal. Scripture does this fully aware of the fact that we are sinful people and that we shall never attain perfection on this side of the grave. But the ideal is nevertheless held before us so that we may continue to strive for it, for this is our calling. In the second place, I read both the original manuscript and the final product, and it was my experience that the second reading of the book was more fruitful than the first. I think therefore, that the book is valuable for repeated reading and for study. Parents can and should consult the book often and refer to it again and again as they face the concrete problems of raising a family. From this point of view, it is somewhat too bad that the book does not include an extensive index of subjects.

The format of the book is excellent and makes for easy and enjoyable reading. We recommend this book highly to all our readers and to all such as engage in the high calling of covenant training. May God bless the use of the book in many covenant homes.

NOTICE!!!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Isabel, South Dakota on Wednesday, September 3, 1975. Material for the agenda must be in the hands of the Stated Clerk thirty days before Classis convenes. Delegates in need of lodging should notify the Clerk of the Isabel consistory.

Rev. David Engelsma
Stated Clerk.

ANNIVERSARY ANNOUNCEMENT

Jehovah God, who delighteth in mercy, has bound in holy matrimony our loving parents, REVEREND AND MRS. GEORGE C. LUBBERS these FORTY-FIVE YEARS.

We extol the faithfulness of Jehovah when they celebrate this milestone of their lives on August 17, 1975.

"Jehovah is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage. Psalm 16:5-6."

Their grateful children and grandchildren,
Miss Agatha Lubbers
Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Newhof, Jr.
and five children
Mr. and Mrs. Case Lubbers and two children
Mr. and Mrs. Lamm Lubbers and six children

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The members of the Hudsonville Ladies' Society express their sincere sympathy to their vice-president, Mr. Kenneth Lanning, and his family in the passing of his mother, MRS. FANNIE LANNING. "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (II Cor. 5:1).

Rev. C. Hanko, Pres.
Mrs. J. B. Lubbers, Sec'y.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Consistory of the Hudsonville (Michigan) Protestant Reformed Church expresses sincere sympathy to their fellow-elder, Kenneth Lanning and his family in the loss of their mother, MRS. FANNIE LANNING. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." (Psalm 116:15).

Rev. C. Hanko, Pres.
Hib Kuiper, Clerk.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Church Council of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church of Wyoming, Michigan extends its heartfelt sympathy to our fellow Office-Bearer, Deacon William De Kraker and his family in the loss of Mr. De Kraker's mother.

May our Covenant God comfort and sustain them in the knowledge that "... if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (II Cor. 5:1).

Southwest Protestant Reformed Church
Phillip J. Lotterman, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The members of the Ladies' Aid Society of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan, extends heartfelt and sincere Christian sympathy to their vice-president, Mrs. Lucy Woudenberg, in the passing of her husband, MR. BERNARD WOUDENBERG, SR. Our prayer is that she and her family will find comfort in the Word of God as expressed in Habakkuk 3, vss. 18 and 19 — "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and He will make my feet like hind's feet, and He will make me to walk upon high places."

Mrs. Tom Newhof, Sr., Pres.
Mrs. Charles Pastoor, Sec'y.

News From Our Churches

It happens that, because of an unusual summer schedule, this column was written on June 12 — which shouldn't really make a particle of difference, since the *Standard Bearer* news is never current anyway. I just finished my copy for the July 1 issue, and I find that I still have some material left over. I figured that, if it would have been good enough for July news, it ought to be good enough for the August column too. (What we need is a new news writer.)

Let's start with an item which could have made the May 1 issue. On March 30, Rev. Slopsema, pastor of our Edgerton congregation, led the chapel services at Edgebrook Rest Center. Students from the lower room of our Edgerton Protestant Reformed School, provided the special number.

On May 2, the Young People's Federation Board sponsored a Church League "All-Star" basketball game in Grandville Junior High School Gymnasium. Special half-time entertainment was a volleyball game which pitted the Federation Board members against the students of the Seminary.

On May 7 the young people of Faith and Hope sponsored a casserole supper in Hope School's Gym. Donations were "for transportation expenses for three girls to go to the convention from Houston, Texas."

On Sunday evening, May 11, the people of our Loveland congregation enjoyed a singspiration, directed by Mr. Gerald Kuiper. Special numbers included an accordion/piano/organ instrumental trio, singing by the Men's Quartet, and a couple of songs by the lower grades of the Sunday School.

On May 16, Adams Street Protestant Reformed School held its 25th Anniversary program. Numbers by the school's advanced band, and its two choirs, preceded a very fine speech by Prof. Decker. The speech was entitled, "No Greater Joy." The program in its entirety was taped by Mr. Henry Vander Wal. Mr. Vander Wal, incidentally, has graciously offered, too, to make tapes of that program available on request through the offices of the R.F.P.A. They sell for \$3 a copy — for either reel-to-reel or cassette.

On May 21, the band of Covenant Christian High School, and the Junior High band of Hope School gave a combined concert in Grandville Junior High Gym. And on Sunday evening, June 1, Covenant's Music Department presented a concert in First Church. The program included numbers by the band, by the school choir, and finally by the choir as it was joined by various alumni who had themselves once been part of the choir.

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From the May 25 bulletin of Faith Church we learn that the consistory there has decided that the entire congregation will join in unison in the confession of faith as it is found in the Apostle's Creed.

And a June 8 bulletin from Hudsonville noted that that consistory had decided "to continue for a time the song service for ten minutes before the morning service."

How about this after-recess topic of discussion in an end-of-the-season Senior Young People's Society of Hope Church — "Is Vacation From Society Necessary?"

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Near the beginning of May, as we learn from a Hull bulletin, Rev. Kortering and Rev. Moore spent a few days in Omaha and Beatrice, Nebraska, to meet with groups there who had shown interest in our churches.

I imagine that that interest came in response to efforts of the Reformed Witness Committee, of Doon, Edgerton, and Hull. That committee plans, by the way, to hold five lectures in the Rock Valley area next fall and winter. Plans are, too, to send pamphlets to all the boxholders and residences in that town and the countryside.

An early June bulletin from Jenison, indicates that Faith Church's consistory has decided to participate with Hope Church in the publishing of the article entitled "A Truly Reformed Meditation" which appears bi-weekly in three of the area newspapers. Rev. Joostens will contribute periodic meditations for that purpose, and the cost of publishing is to be shared by the two congregations.

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Then there's one final announcement from the Field Day committee:

"Don't forget the Field Day. Still time to come and unite with fellow-Protestant Reformed brethren in the praise of our God for His faithfulness. Douglas-Walker Park, 84th St. between Byron Center and U.S. 131. Come at noon and enjoy a full day of Christian fellowship."

D.D.

Editor's Note: This copy was written early because our News Editor has left with his wife for an extended (six-week) trip to the Northwest United States and the Orient. Their plans are to visit several countries in the Orient, but to return in time to report on the Anniversary celebrations scheduled for this month. We bid them Godspeed and refreshment during their sorely needed vacation.