

The STANDARD BEARER

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In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.

And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:

And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.

And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.

He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.

— Matthew 28:1-7

MEDITATION

The Necessity of the Cross

Rev. C. Hanko

"Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?"

Luke 24:26

It was the day of our Lord's resurrection.

Two men, wrapped in intimate conversation, were leaving the Holy City as the afternoon shadows lengthened. The intermingling of amazement and fear, of mild hope and deep sorrow in their conversation reveals them as disciples of Jesus. Although not of the eleven, they are included with those who refused to give up the conviction that He was indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God. One of them, who does most of the talking, is Cleopas. The other is probably Luke, if we may conclude that from his extensive account of this event in his gospel treatise.

The travelers are so completely absorbed in their conversation that they do not even consider it an intrusion that a third person quietly comes up behind them, falls in step between them, and joins in their discussion. What does seem so very strange to them is the fact that He seems to know nothing of the events of the past few days that have set all Jerusalem and Judea in turmoil. Wonderingly they ask: "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know all the things that are happening here?"

To that they receive the answer: "What things?"

Still they do not recognize Him as Jesus. One reason for this is that the resurrection was something so new, so strange to them, that they can not yet grasp it. Another reason is, as Mark tells us, that He appeared in another form. Luke says that their eyes were held, that they would not recognize Him. Wisely, Jesus approaches them as a stranger to help them with their problem. Wisely, He urges them on to put their problem into words, and thus to unburden their souls.

What things?

That simple question is all that it took to break open the floodgates, causing a stream of words to burst forth from their troubled, burdened hearts. They have a problem, an enigma, that must be solved before they will ever find peace. Not only their peace of mind, but even their salvation depends on having their problem solved. Jesus is aware of that, and lets them talk.

Of one thing they are convinced: Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God, Who came from God to redeem Israel from all their sins. Proof for their conviction lay, first of all, in the fact that He was a prophet sent of God. No man ever spoke as this man, with a power and authority that put the scribes to shame. What He said was so completely founded upon the Old Testament Scriptures that no one could contradict Him. He could say, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," and the guilt of sin fell away like a heavy load from one's soul. Besides that, He sealed His testimony with signs and wonders. He spoke, and the dead arose. He commanded, and devils obeyed Him. Even the winds and the waves of the sea were quieted at His word. He instilled faith, a faith so strong that it could be severely shaken, but never destroyed.

Hesitatingly they carry on. This is a bit more difficult to put into words, but His attentiveness encourages them to go on. This Jesus died last Friday afternoon. Yes, you understood us correctly, He died. Now listen to this. Early this morning some women, who cherish the same convictions of Him that we do, went to His tomb. They came back with the upsetting, yet wonderful tidings that He is risen. We hardly dare accept that, but here is the evidence. First, they actually saw that the tomb was open and His corpse was gone. Second, they saw angels there, as they tell us, who said that He was risen. Third, others went to investigate this seemingly impossible report, and they came back confirming every word of it. Fourth, we keep thinking that this is the third day, for somehow Jesus attached importance to that third day when He was still with us.

Now for the real problem.

As we said, He died last Friday afternoon. Had He died an ordinary death at the early age of thirty-three years, we would have been sorely disappointed, but He died the worst death conceivable. He died the shameful and accursed death of the cross as the worst of sinners. No, it was not Pilate, the representative of the Roman government, who took Him under arrest and sought to kill Him. Our own rulers, our High Priest and our Sanhedrin, whom we were always

taught to respect as representatives of God in meeting out justice, captured Him, tried Him, and condemned Him to death, seeking the aid of Pilate to carry out the death sentence. Why, if He was innocent of any crime, did these rulers condemn Him? Why, if He is indeed the Christ, did He submit to such an infamous death?

Why? O, why? The cross is the real enigma.

Added to that, there is the second problem, if He is risen from the dead, where is He? Why did He not come to the home of John and Mary to stay with them? Why is He in hiding? Why does He not come to us and be with us as before? We simply do not understand!

It was a relief to put it all in words. Their attentive listener had made it so easy for them, urging them to pour out their souls completely. He was so amazingly understanding, that even as they talked they wondered Who He might be.

The cross is their problem, as it still always is. Actually, it is a double problem, for there is also the mystery of the resurrection. This will always remain, unless we listen by faith to Him Who knows all!

"Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things?"

Jesus strikes at the very heart of the problem. These men have their hands full of pieces of a puzzle, none of which seem to fit. Jesus picks out the one piece, the key to the solution; holds it up for them to see and then fits it in its proper place, so that all the other pieces fall into position.

This divine Instructor says: "Let us begin here: Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God. Your evidence stands. Everything that happened since only confirms that fact. We must, however, look at it in the light of the Scriptures.

"What do the Scriptures say about Him? Let us begin with Genesis with the promise of the Seed of the woman, the Christ, Whose heel is bruised as it bears down heavily upon the head of the serpent, Satan. Consider that God Himself covered Adam and Eve from His penetrating, condemning eyes when He gave them skins of animals to hide their nakedness. Think of the sacrifices of innocent lambs that were slain, the rivers of blood that flowed throughout the old dispensation, which never atoned for a single sin, but spoke of better things to come. Listen to David as he mournfully sings in a minor key of the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. Hear Israel chant in solemn strains of their promised Messiah, 'The offering on the altar burned gives no delight to Thee; the hearing ear, the willing heart, Thou givest unto Me.' Consider Isaiah's suffering Servant, the Man of Sorrows, so thoroughly

acquainted with grief, that everyone hid, as it were, his face from Him. Even Isaiah could tell, that He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep dumb before its shearers, so He opened not His mouth."

That, and obviously many more mysteries were unfolded during the seven mile journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus. As patiently as He had listened, so eagerly He now draws away the veil revealing step by step the wonder of grace in sending Jesus into the world to seek and to save that which was lost.

The travelers hearts were all afire. This Stranger knows His Bible. He speaks with the authority of God, as no man has ever spoken before. Never had they understood prophecy as clearly as He explains it. Never had anyone shown so convincingly from the Scriptures that every piece of the puzzle fits, even falls into place, when the cross is centered as it should be. Jesus is indeed the Christ, powerfully proven to be the Son of God, the only possible Savior, by His death and resurrection from the dead. Indeed, Christ was working His power in the Hearts of these travelers as the power of God unto salvation, even as He spoke. "Were not our hearts burning within us."

Here is an inescapable "ought".

"Ought not the Christ to suffer these things and enter into His glory?"

God is not compelled by circumstances and conditions outside of Himself to do something that He never intended or wanted to do. God is GOD. Let no one in any way deprive Him of His glory. He eternally knows the only possible way in which He may reveal Himself in all His infinite perfections as the all-glorious, ever blessed covenant God. He knows how to take His people into His covenant fellowship, that they may forever enjoy His dazzling majesty, radiating the light of His life in intimate covenant communion with Him. God knows how to do that in Christ Jesus, our Lord. He carries out that purpose in all of history. His counsel stands and He does all His good pleasure. I stammer to say that there could be no other way, there simply is no other way possible, in which all creation may be united to declare: "My God, how great Thou art." This is so true, that God did not hesitate to surrender His Son, the Only Son of His bosom, to infamy and the horrors of hell. God spared not His only begotten Son, but gave Him as a ransom for the sins of His people. There was a "must" in God that demanded the way of the cross to bring many sons into glory. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God: How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out." (Rom. 11:32, 33)

There was also a divine "must" for the Christ.

What a joy for Him to be able to talk about that divine necessity that had led Him by way of the cross to His wonderful resurrection.

Christ thinks of the angel Gabriel visiting Mary to explain to her the wonder of the virgin birth. He recalls how He lay as a helpless, poverty stricken Babe in a borrowed cattle stall, already hated, rejected, hunted as a beast of the forest. Jesus recalls His tender age of twelve, when He was in the temple asking His mother, "What, wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" There were the forty days in the wilderness when He asked: "Father, what wilt Thou have Me do?" And the answer came in the form of Satan and their bitter encounter. Yes, there were those bright moments, when the voice from heaven confirmed Him saying, "This is My Beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased." There was that unforgettable experience on the mount, when He spoke with Moses and Elijah and was given a brief foretaste of the glory that God had prepared for Him before the world was. But there was also that anxious night in Gethsemane, when drops of real blood oozed from Him, as He cried: "Father, if it is not possible that this cup pass from Me, Thy will be done." Well Christ remembered the powerful, sustaining hand of the Spirit as He bent His back to the smiters and turned His cheek to the spit of His mockers. He had prayed: "Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son with the glory that He had with Thee before the world was." Here is the answer in His presence among them! He speaks of a confidence of victory that these men cannot yet fathom.

He also puts the question to them, and to us: Ought not your Christ to have suffered these things, to bring you glory?

As personal as the question was for Jesus Himself, so personal it was also for His attentive audience.

Perhaps they did not fully understand at the moment. Surely they did not understand as clearly as they would later, or as we see it today. Finally the

light began to dawn on their sin-weary souls. Our Shepherd laid down His life for His sheep. We all like sheep have gone astray. It belongs to our very nature to be like stubborn, wayward sheep, prone to wander from the fold, and once lost, unable to find our way back, defenceless over against the enemies, perishing in our sins. The Good Shepherd loves His sheep, comes to seek them, to take them into His bosom, and to carry them safely all the way, even into the sheepfold of glory.

The light begins to dawn.

There still remains that needling question: "but Him they did not see."

At this point Jesus could well remind the travelers and us once more, that we are fools and slow of heart to believe all that is written of Him. We are of the earth, earthy, minding earthly things. How difficult it is for us to fathom heavenly things! Yes, that is not only difficult, but impossible. We need the enlightening power of Christ through His Spirit to give us eyes of faith, eyes to behold that which eye cannot see, ear cannot hear, and never can enter into the heart of man.

What these men still had to learn was that the risen Lord was now heavenly, spiritual, immortal. The man Jesus was no more among them as before. He had passed from death into life to bring them with Him into Father's house with its many mansions.

Jesus waits until they have arrived at their destination. He pauses yet for them to ask Him to tarry with them. He sees a hasty meal prepared for them. Then He assumes the position of Host. He prays for a blessing upon this food, and they take no offence, for before the men recover fully from their surprise, *they see Him!*

The Lord is risen; is risen indeed!

And our salvation is complete. Hallelujah!

My Savior and my Lord!

EDITORIAL

More Light On The Woudstra-Geelong Affair

Prof. H.C. Hoeksema

There continues to be much ignorance of the facts concerning the dismissal of Dr. S. Woudstra from the Reformed Theological College at Geelong, Australia; and, as a result, there is no little confusion in the situation. This is not a subjective judgment on my part, but is an objective fact. As of the date of this writing no one "down under" has done anything to

inform the churches and the people specifically as to what has taken place. This is not due to the fact that what has taken place is of a private nature. For it concerned Dr. Woudstra's public labor as professor at Geelong. Nor is it due to the fact that the churches and people are not entitled to know what has taken place at Geelong. For while it is true that the

Reformed Theological College is operated by an association, it nevertheless remains true that it is from this college that the Reformed Churches of Australia and New Zealand receive their candidates for the ministry. Moreover, the college is under the supervision of synodical deputies from these churches. Hence, it is very plain that the churches have a real stake in the college, and therefore they are entitled to be adequately informed.

Yet they have been kept in ignorance. Neither the Board of Directors of Geelong nor the synodical deputies has seen fit to shed light on the situation.

And there are complaints about this. Thus, for example, in a little paper published by Classis Queensland (*Church Review*, December, 1974) a Mr. A. Tigchelaar writes under the title "Quo Vadis?" and complains about this lack of information: "An Editorial in the November issue of 'Trowel & Sword' and a Statement by the President of the Board of Directors of the Reformed Theological College at Geelong, the Reverend Mr. J. J. van Wageningen, have finally broken the long period of official silence surrounding the dismissal of Dr. S. Woudstra from his teaching position at the R.T.C. Both the Statement and Editorial are an apologetic intended to clarify and justify the dismissal. Both fall very far short of the mark as neither article really comes to grips with, or justifies the action taken, by submitting properly documented evidence that the dismissal was indeed justified or even stating that such evidence exists. This is particularly puzzling with respect to Mr. Deenick's Editorial since he is one of the Synodical deputies who recommended to the Board of Directors of the R.T.C. that Dr. Woudstra be dismissed."

It is not clear whether the writer is for or against Woudstra. But that is not important in this connection. What is clear is that he is complaining about being kept in ignorance. He is rightly critical of the same editorial in *Trowel and Sword* which I earlier criticized. He criticizes the Rev. Deenick for making indirect and oblique accusations against Woudstra when he (Deenick) refers to "the theological confusion in the (Dutch oriented) Reformed communities." And he goes on to state: "In summarizing the Editorial in T & S, my general reaction is one of puzzlement. I cannot understand that the author, who was so closely and intimately associated with the events at the R.T.C. as a Synodical Deputy, wrote such a vague and uninformative article dealing with the event. One gains the impression that the editorial was intended to soothe rather than inform." And I can certainly agree with this: "What the Reformed Church of Australia community now needs is some clear, unambiguous answers to the questions that have been raised by the recent events at the R.T.C."

Meanwhile, as of this writing those clear, unambiguous answers have not been forthcoming. In this country, *The Banner* simply carries an announcement that Dr. Woudstra has accepted a call to Hobart, Tasmania (the island state south of mainland Australia), without reference to his having been at Geelong and certainly without any reference to the fact that he was dismissed from Geelong. Yet it should be remembered that Dr. Woudstra is on loan to Australia from the Board of Foreign Missions of the Christian Reformed Church. In Australia, no one has furnished adequate information thus far. Also the Rev. van Brussel is a synodical deputy. But he sheds no light when he writes under "Australian Gleanings" in the December, 1974 issue of *Trowel and Sword*. He only adds to the confusion by writing: "There is some considerable confusion round the decision of the Board of Directors of the Association for a Christian University to bring Dr. S. Woudstra's term of ministry as a professor at the Reformed Theological College to a close. Many members and even sessions are not quite informed on the official rules for such a decision. Some are also wondering about the consequences for Dr. Woudstra's ministry in connection with all this. It was a helpful initiative of the Geelong session (where Rev. Deenick is pastor, HCH) to request a special meeting of Classis Victoria to consider Dr. Woudstra's position as a minister in the Reformed Churches. This meeting has been held on November 16.

"After a long and open interview with Dr. Woudstra on several points of doctrine, the classis concluded that from its thorough discussion with him the churches were satisfied that Dr. Woudstra's ministry in the church was faithful to the gospel. Since this decision was not fully unanimous and since Dr. Woudstra's ministry in the church and his position as professor at the college are two different matters the classis decided to postpone to its meeting of November 30 a decision on the question whether an approach should be made to the board of the theological college."

Again, no light!

Besides, it should be kept in mind that while from a formal point of view Woudstra's ministry in the church and his position at the college are two different matters, from a doctrinal point of view they are not. Both positions require the same doctrinal allegiance to the Reformed confessions. And if the synodical deputies, Revs. Deenick, van Brussel, and van Dam, took the stand that Woudstra should be dismissed for doctrinal reasons, they should never tolerate his being cleared in Classis Victoria and his being allowed to accept a call to the congregation of Hobart.

Yet this has now happened.

To compound the confusion and ignorance, it is being noised abroad now that there is nothing wrong with Dr. Woudstra's preaching, but that it is the teaching which was at fault — as though it were possible to be a faithful Reformed preacher, but a doctrinally unsound teacher, unfit to teach future ministers. It is even being suggested that it was not so much the content of Woudstra's teaching, but the method of approach to his students which was at fault. And it is also suggested that if the college was supported by the Reformed Churches only, there would not have been any problem. This last statement, by the way, is probably true. It appears that Dr. Woudstra could have been retained at Geelong only at the expense of losing support from the Free Church and — even more — only at the expense of losing from the faculty the services of Prof. Harman, the newly appointed Old Testament professor, and Prof. Barkley. Nevertheless, if this is true, it puts the synodical deputies in a very uncomfortable position, as we shall see: for they very definitely condemned Dr. Woudstra on *doctrinal grounds*, and that, too, on doctrinal grounds which are confessionally valid also in the Reformed Churches. And therefore the question may well be asked whether they were acting merely from expediency (because it was either Woudstra or Harman and Barkley), or were they acting from principle?

Further to compound the confusion, Dr. Woudstra is now remaining on the Australian scene, having accepted the call to Hobart, Tasmania. This gives him the opportunity to continue to curry the favor of the Reformed clergy and people — among whom he is already said to be popular — and to enhance his popularity. It will also give him the opportunity — and this possibility has already been talked about — of eventually seeking reinstatement at Reformed Theological College. Apparently there can be no further action in the case until the next Synod in 1976. But should there be a change in the Board of Directors of Geelong by that time, and should Woudstra's condemnation get the Synod's disapproval, it can readily be understood that the attempt might be made to get Prof. Woudstra back into the college. However this may be, even the fact that Woudstra remains on the Australian scene as a pastor — ousted from Geelong for serious doctrinal errors, but approved by Classis Victoria because his "ministry in the church was faithful to the gospel" — adds to the confusion of the situation because of its obvious inconsistency. For how, pray tell, can a man's ministry be called faithful to the gospel when he is guilty of serious doctrinal error? To put it bluntly, Dr. Woudstra is a heretic! And a heretic is not faithful to the gospel; he is the very opposite.

All this would be plain beyond a shadow of a doubt if only the facts concerning Dr. Woudstra's dismissal were made known. I can assure the readers on the basis of unimpeachable evidence that if the facts concerning this case were made known, it would become plain:

1. That Dr. Woudstra deviated from the confessional position of the Reformed Theological College with respect to the truth of the authority of Holy Scripture, and that, too, in such a way that he opened the way for a distinction between reliable and unreliable aspects of Scripture, between the core of the truth and the periphery which may be erroneous. This, by the way, is quite in harmony with our earlier report that Woudstra was hiding behind the Christian Reformed Report 44 on the Nature and Extent of the Authority of Scripture.
2. That Dr. Woudstra deviated from the confessional position of the Reformed Theological College with respect to the doctrine of predestination, specifically with respect to the doctrine of eternal and unconditional reprobation as taught in the Canons of Dordrecht, I, 6 and 15.
3. That there were reasons for suspicion with respect to Woudstra's views on Church government and the principle of presbyterianism, rule by elders.
4. That Dr. Woudstra by his teachings had fomented considerable doubt and concern among the students of Geelong with respect to his views on Scripture and on predestination.

If the above is incorrect — and I assure you that it is not — then let either the Board of Directors or the synodical deputies show this from the official record.

Now there are important implications in all this.

In the first place, this simply confirms what I wrote and predicted before Dr. Woudstra ever arrived in Australia in connection with a sermon which he preached in the Borculo Christian Reformed Church, a sermon in which he plainly questioned the authority of Scripture. Geelong might have avoided the present problem if they had heeded my warning at that time. And I know that they had the evidence at that time.

In the second place, everyone will recognize that the matter of Scripture and that of reprobation are the very same problems with which Geelong was confronted in connection with the teachings of Dr. Runia. At that time, you will recall, there were official complaints against Dr. Runia on these matters. The *Standard Bearer* commented on these matters, as did also the little paper published at that time in New Zealand, the *Reformed Guardian*. And at that time the objections against Dr. Runia were rejected. And while I maintain that Dr. Woudstra is

now quite properly dismissed from Geelong, the question may well be asked whether they measure with two measures at Geelong. Today Dr. Runia belongs to a denomination which has set aside the binding force of Canons I, 6 and 15 and which openly tolerates the denial of the authority of Scripture. It would be interesting to know whether he would still be received at Geelong and whether he would be given access to the pulpits in the Reformed Church of Australia, especially in the light of the fact that Runia's erstwhile defenders have now condemned Woudstra's doctrinal deviations.

In the third place, it is obvious to everyone that calling Woudstra's ministry faithful to the gospel is flying in the face of facts. In the light of the grounds for his dismissal is this possible? I ask this not only because the confessional standards of the Reformed Church of Australia, the same as those of Geelong, have been violated. But I ask it, too, in the light of the *nature* of these doctrinal errors. They go to the very heart of the preaching! How can one's preaching be faithful to the gospel if he denies the authority of the very Scriptures which he is supposed to proclaim?

Impossible! And how can one's preaching be faithful to the gospel if he denies what our fathers called "the heart of the church" — predestination? Impossible!

In the fourth place, it is nice to philosophize about keeping Geelong and the Australian churches from being identified with developments in other Reformed communities. As I said before, this is really impossible in today's world. And the thing to do is not to attempt such divorce, but to take a correct and sound stand with respect to those developments and to strive to keep the churches free from the evil influences of false doctrines and false teachers. But, surely, if this is to be done, then Geelong had better stop importing teachers from the Christian Reformed Church and/or the Gereformeerde Kerken. It seems as though they do not realize in Australasia that the likes of Runia and Woudstra in this country and in the Netherlands are very common.

In conclusion, the churches "down under" had better wake up. If they do not, then they will very quickly go the way of many others in the Reformed community today, the way of apostasy. The hour is late!

ALL AROUND US

The Abortion Question In The GKN

Prof. H. Hanko

The Gereformeerde Kerken in the Netherlands have now also faced the question of abortion. Apparently the Synod has spoken, and the decision which was taken proved to be a major concession to those who favor abortion. The whole matter is reported in the *RES News Exchange* under the title, "Netherlands (GKN) Synod Speaks Out On Abortion." The article reads:

At a previous sitting, the Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN) refused to make a statement on abortion because opinion was divided. Rather than issue a pastoral statement which had the support of a scant majority, the Synod requested its study committee to resume the discussion and come to a formulation that would be acceptable to a larger number.

In the discussion several expressed the opinion that the new report did not represent a convergence of the two different positions but only combined the two original directions, side by side. A pastoral letter, one held, cannot be drafted to include differing positions. "The church should not speak if it has nothing to say." It was also argued that the church should not attempt to provide guidelines for border situations; this should be left up to the doctor and pastor.

The committee was agreed that human life is never without value either in its beginning or in its final stages and must, therefore, always be respected. Abortion is also not an acceptable means of family planning. The question, however, was raised whether the fetus in the womb has a value equal to that of a full-fledged human being.

Dr. Klaas Runia and the Rev. J. C. Seegers framed a counter-proposal which broke the impasse. The Synod stated that 1) the church, which confesses that man is created in the image of God, testifies to society regarding its deep reverence for life, also in the process of becoming. 2) Arbitrary administration of abortus provocatus should therefore be condemned. 3) Abortus provocatus (Induced abortion, H.H.) can only be acceptable if the mental or physical well-being of the mother is seriously threatened. 4) In doubtful situations the church should not give general guidelines: here office-holders will have to provide pastoral guidance on the basis of their own responsibility. Both parents, or, if an unwed mother is involved, the mother will ultimately have to decide in responsibility toward God and man. 5) The church and its members must do everything possible to see that the newborn child is received and cared for in love: this means, i.e., insisting that the possibilities for adoption be speeded up and made more effective. (RES N E 3/4/75)

There are a number of remarks which a decision of this nature prompts. In the first place, there is little evidence of principle in such a decision. According to the first paragraph, Synod postponed a decision because of divided opinions. Whatever the position of the "scant majority" may have been, Synod was afraid to express it officially because there were too many opposed to it. So Synod decided to refer the matter back to a committee to come up with a position which would be "acceptable to a larger number". This is not the way of principle, but the way of expediency. Synod was not concerned about the rightness or the wrongness of abortion, but was interested solely in making a decision which most of the delegates could accept.

Dr. Klaas Runia and Rev. J. C. Seegers formulated a proposal which apparently contained the gist of what Synod finally adopted. And the way of compromise was the way of approving abortion. This is inevitable. A compromise is always a devil's compromise. The truth cannot be compromised without losing it. This is what happened in Synod's decision.

In the second place, the statement numbered "1" sounds, at first reading, to be rather pious. One wonders, of course, why a Reformed body has to testify to society that it has a deep reverence for life. But, be that as it may, it is always good to have such a deep reverence for life. But this first point adds that it has a reverence for life "also in the process of becoming." Now this latter expression is not new with the Synod of the Gereformeerde Kerken. It was an expression used a number of years ago in the *Reformed Journal* when Dr. Henry Stob also gave qualified approval to abortion. But the point is that this expression makes a distinction between human life as such and human life in the process of becoming. In other words, the fetus is not human life as such, but is only human life in the process of becoming. I have no idea of how anyone can make any real sense out of that distinction; but the fact is that the distinction is exactly pertinent because it provides a handy ground for the approval of abortion. When a fetus is aborted, so the argument goes, human life is not taken; rather human life in the process of becoming is destroyed. And thus abortion is supposed to be freed from the charge of murder. It is apparent from what follows that this is exactly the argument of the decision.

In the third place, the grounds given for abortion are the mental and physical well-being of the mother. At any time the mother's mental and physical well-being is threatened, an abortion may be performed. This, however, is purely subjective. Who is to judge when especially the mental well-being of the mother is threatened? Only the mother herself can

really judge this. No doubt, the Synod felt the force of this because it adds, "Both parents, or, if an unwed mother is involved, the mother will ultimately have to decide in responsibility toward God and man." Hence, at any time the parents decide that an abortion is justified, the church can say nothing about their decision. It is theirs alone to make. And the church can only express its approval.

This is the same position which the world takes: for the world, too, has liberalized its abortion laws on the grounds that the ultimate decision rests with the parents, or perhaps with the mother alone. Hence, murder is condoned.

We have written concerning this matter before. But we want to emphasize again that abortion in all cases except where the choice is very concretely between the *life* of the unborn child and the mother is murder. And it is murder because it is the killing of a *person*. To speak of "life in the process of becoming" is a subterfuge. To ask the question, when a fetus becomes viable, i.e., when a fetus can live apart from its mother, is to ask an irrelevant question. The child in its mother's womb is a *person* from the moment of conception. Abortion is the destruction of a person. This is, by definition, murder.

When the world condones murder, it is a dreadful thing, for abortion is even contrary to nature. There are many in the world who recognize this. There are many members of various "right-to-life" groups who are not Christians. There are many, even of the world, who shudder at the idea of abortion. There are many doctors and nurses who refuse to perform abortions even though they have no faith. They do so because the very idea of taking the life of a person is contrary to nature. It is opposed to the natural knowledge of the law of God which every man has. Paul speaks of this in Romans 2:14, 15: "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another."

But when the Church condones murder, one can only shake his head in puzzlement. After all, the Church not only knows the law of God as it is contained in the whole of the Scriptures, but it has no other reason for existence than to uphold that law, defend it, fight for it and condemn at the top of its voice all those who oppose it. This can only be an indication of how apostate the Church has become.

There is something terrible here. It involves the whole matter of the conscience. The conscience of a person is, after all, the voice of God testifying in a person concerning God's law. This conscience is not

some sort of inner light, some sort of inner voice of God which speaks only subjectively. It is always the inner voice of God which speaks subjectively in connection with the objective testimony of God's Word. The objective testimony of God's Word may be in creation, for Paul writes in Romans 1 that "the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." Even in creation God testifies to the wicked that He alone is God and that He must be obeyed. The conscience is never apart from that objective testimony. But those who are born and raised in the sphere of the gospel have the testimony of the Scriptures which are so much clearer than the testimony in creation. The conscience of these people speaks all the more clearly; for the nearer one stands to the center of the testimony of the truth, the more clearly does also his conscience speak.

This is why it is always very hard first to condone and practice a sin. One must fight against his conscience. But if one persists and continues to practice such a sin, gradually the voice of the conscience is stilled. It doesn't speak any more. It is,

to use an expression of Scripture, seared with a hot iron. (See I Timothy 4:2) It is, from a certain point of view, impossible for a man to continue to violate the voice of his conscience. A violation of his conscience will drive him insane. And so he *must* still it. He must silence it to preserve his own sanity. This he does by inventing all kinds of specious arguments, making all kinds of foolish distinctions, committing repeatedly the sin of intellectual dishonesty by which he persuades himself that the position which he knows is wrong is after all right. Such subjective persuasion is indeed possible. In fact, really every man does this more or less. The only escape ever from this perpetual self-deception is confession of sin.

But having succeeded in convincing himself that the wrong is right, he has silenced his conscience. Then he can sin with impunity. He may still have his moments when doubts arise; but he is now adept at silencing any doubts, so that he may continue his evil way. This is a terrible thing, for this is exactly what Scripture means when it speaks of hardening. For one who is hardened, there is no hope. He is of a reprobate mind. This is what is happening in the world. This is now also happening in the Church.

THE VOICE OF OUR FATHERS

The Sufficiency of the Scriptures

Prof. Robert D. Decker

"We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe, unto salvation, is sufficiently taught therein. For, since the whole manner of worship, which God requires of us, is written in them at large, it is unlawful for any one, though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures: nay, though it were an angel from heaven, as the apostle Paul saith. For, since it is forbidden, to add unto or take away anything from the word of God, it doth thereby evidently appear, that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects. Neither do we consider of equal value any writings of men, however holy these men may have been, with those divine Scriptures, nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, for the truth is above all; for all men are of themselves liars, and more vain than vanity itself. Therefore, we reject with all our hearts, whatsoever doth not agree with this infallible rule, which the apostles have taught us, saying, Try the spirits whether they are of God. Likewise, if there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house."

Article VII, The Belgic Confession

This article completes the *Confession's* treatment of the doctrine of the Word of God. This statement is in effect a summation of the points of doctrine presented in Articles II through VI. Thus, too, it expresses beautifully that which we as Reformed believers confess with our mouths and believe in our hearts concerning the Holy Scriptures. In general, this article teaches: 1) That the Holy Scriptures are complete and perfect in themselves and, therefore, are sufficient unto salvation; 2) That no human writings

are or may be considered of equal value with the Bible; and, 3) That whatever disagrees with the Scriptures is to be rejected, and all other writings are to be judged according to the criterion of Scripture. We consider each of these truths somewhat in detail.

The Perfection and Completeness of Scripture

Our *Confession of Faith* in this statement of Article VII underscores a major and fundamental difference between the Churches of the Reformation

and Rome. The Roman Catholic Church does not believe that "those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God." Rather, Rome accords "tradition" a place of equal authority with God's Word. That this is true is obvious from this statement from "The Canons and Decrees Of The Council Of Trent": "[the Synod] following the examples of the orthodox Fathers, receives and venerates with an equal affection of piety and reverence, all the books both of the Old and of the New Testament — seeing that one God is the author of both — as also the said traditions, as well those appertaining to faith as to morals, as having been dictated, either by Christ's own word of mouth, or by the Holy Ghost, and preserved in the Catholic Church by a continuous succession." (Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. II, p. 80) Over against this error our Creed maintains the "*sola Scriptura*" principle of the Reformation without compromise. The Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God and "whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation, is sufficiently taught therein."

This means that Scripture fully contains the will of God, i.e. the counsel of God with respect to all things. That God created all things, that He created all things by and for Jesus Christ (John 1:1ff., Col. 1:15, 16), that God's ultimate purpose is the manifestation of His glory in the elect in Christ as that shall be realized in the new creation (Eph. 1:3ff., Eph. 3:17-21, Col. 1:17-20), and that, therefore, all things must serve the salvation of the elect in Christ (Romans 8:28ff.), all this the Scripture fully contains. Still more, all that man must believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught in the Scriptures. Scripture contains, this means, the whole will of God concerning the faith and life of believers in the midst of this world. This is further emphasized when the creed speaks of "the whole manner of worship which God requires of us" being written in the Bible. This "whole manner of worship" refers to the actual, formal worship of the church. How the church is to worship her Lord; by singing "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," by preaching and teaching, by the giving of our offerings, and by prayer, all these are taught by Scripture. But not only this, also our whole life of thankful service as the redeemed of the Lord is written in Scripture. Scripture plainly teaches exactly how God wills to be served by us.

Hence, the doctrine contained in the Word of God is perfect and complete. The Reformed believer confesses that that doctrine, because it is perfect, cannot be improved upon or corrected. It is perfect, without error. And it is complete. Nothing can be taken from that doctrine and nothing can be added to it. Neither is this merely something which the creed says about the Word of God. This is the express testimony of the Bible itself. The inspired Apostle

writes to the saints at Galatia: "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." (Gal. 1:8, 9) This is also the word of Christ Himself: "For I testify to every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." (Rev. 22:18,19)

The Unique Value of Holy Scripture

This, too, we confess! Because the Scriptures fully contain the will of God and whatever man ought to believe unto salvation, those Scriptures are of incomparable value. Nothing can be considered of equal value with the teaching of the Bible. This is true of the writing of men, "however holy these men may have been." The reference here is to holy, that is, outstanding men in the history of God's Church. Men such as; Luther, Calvin, and others are meant. This is not to deny the importance of these giants of the faith. God certainly used these and others in mighty and wonderful ways. But their writings may never be considered of equal value with the Bible. In fact their strength lay precisely in the fact that they adhered so carefully and faithfully to the truth of the Scriptures.

The same may be said for "custom" or tradition in the Church. No matter how old or well established that "custom" may be, it may never be considered to be equal with the Word of God. Likewise we may never regard the "great multitude or antiquity" of equal value with the truth. The majority can never decide what shall be the truth. "Succession of times or persons" (such as the pope) may not be judged equal with the truth. The same is true of "councils, decrees, statutes" of the church. This includes even our Three Forms of Unity. This is not to deny the significance of the doctrinal pronouncements of the Church or the value of our creeds. It is, however, to say that these can never approach the value of the Scriptures themselves. In fact, the value of the decisions of the church and of her doctrinal statements and creeds lies exactly in the fact that these are expositions and faithful presentations of Scripture. The value of these is always *derived* from the Word of God.

The reason for this is stated in no uncertain terms: "... for the truth is above all; for all men are of themselves liars, and more vain than vanity itself." Men of themselves, men by nature, are incapable of

finding and unwilling to speak the truth. The truth is always the truth of the Word of God.

The Scriptures, the Sole Criterion

The conclusion is inevitable. With the fathers we maintain that everything must be judged by the criterion of the Bible. Without hesitation our confession is: "Therefore, we reject with all our hearts, whatsoever doth not agree with this infallible rule, which the apostles have taught us, saying, Try the spirits whether they are of God. Likewise, if there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house." In this sense the Scriptures are to be received by us as completely sufficient unto salvation. Obviously this cannot be taken to mean that the Word of God needs no interpretation or that the church may not preach or elicit a system of doctrine from Scripture. But most emphatically this does mean that whatever doctrine is developed, whatever creed is adopted, whatever may be written concerning the teaching of Holy Writ must agree with the Holy Scriptures. Whatever is produced by the church through its theologians and councils must be subject to the test of the Word of God. And, whatever is found to be in disagreement with the Scriptures must be unconditionally rejected.

In our times of doctrinal apostasy, compromise, and tolerance it is well that we be reminded of this confession. According to this "voice of our fathers" the church is called to a *holy intolerance* of all which cannot meet the test of Scripture. We do well to hear the voice today. In our times the plea is for unity at any price. Theologians plead for the freedom to discuss and theologize. Meanwhile the truth is assailed on all points and all manner of error is tolerated in

the church. The tragedy of all this is that the sheep of God are impoverished and even led astray. May God give us grace to maintain the truth so beautifully set forth out of Scripture in this article of the *Confession of Faith*. This, too, is Scripture. The Apostle John warns: "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." (II John 9-11) May we be given the courage to "Try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." (I John 4:1)

It follows from this truth that we may never approach the Scriptures with an open mind to determine for ourselves what is inspired and what is not. When one, for example, begins to tamper with the simple account of creation given in Genesis 1 and 2 by calling this not a literal rendering of what actually happened but only a "teaching model," this is exactly what he does. He sets himself above the Scriptures and becomes the judge of what is God's Word and what is not. This must never be our approach. WE are under sacred obligation to bow unconditionally before the Scriptures, to believe them without question or doubt. Our calling is to search them as the "light which shines in the dark place" of this world. They are our meat and drink for "man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live." (Deut. 8:3, Matt. 4:4) In childlike faith we are to feed on God's Word. In this way, and only in this way, will we experience the power of the Word in our daily living.

THE DAY OF SHADOWS

Blessed Of The Better

Rev. John A. Heys

It would be a serious mistake to take the position that because God called Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees and into the land of Canaan in order there to establish His covenant with him, Abram, Sarai, and Lot were the only believers in the whole land of Canaan.

The whole land was given over to idolatry. It contained some desperately wicked cities such as Sodom and Gomorrah. But there were dwelling within it also devout children of God. How many we do not know. But that they were there is evident not

only from Genesis 14:13, where we read of men who were confederate with Abram, but also from Genesis 14:18 where we read of Melchizedek king of Salem and priest of the most high God. We may be sure that Abram would not be confederate with unbelievers. He, who would not buy or fight for one square inch of the land, because God promised to give it all to him, would not do anything but that which is recorded of him in Hebrews 11, namely, live as a pilgrim and stranger. And that means that he lived according to the principle of the psalmist in Psalm

119 when he declares, "I am a companion of those that fear thee." Abram did not join himself to the ungodly of the land.

Melchizedek is another matter. He is literally called priest of the most high God, and is mentioned again in Hebrews 7. In this chapter he is called the better who blessed the lesser, namely, Abram. And all this after Abram had returned victoriously from his battle with the four kings of the north and east who had taken Lot captive together with the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. He, Melchizedek, lived thirty and more miles from Sodom and Gomorrah. For he was king of Salem. And today we know that city with the addition to it that makes it *Jeru-salem*. To him Abram gave tithes of all that which he had taken from the four kings that was beyond the possessions of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The attack upon these cities together with three others was due to the fact that they rebelled against the four kings from the north and east. Although they had come from far — as far as the place where the tower of Babel had been partially erected, and Ur of the Chaldees from whence Abram had been called — they had direct connection with these inhabitants of the five cities of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim and Zoar.

This is a rather interesting item to note. Although after the confusion of speech Ham's descendants had moved away from the plain of Shinar and gone to Canaan and down into Egypt and Africa, all connection between them and Shem's descendants who remained in the area where the tower of Babel was built was not broken off and ended. It may quickly be added, however, that it was not a friendly relationship. But those of Shem's descendants who had come out of Mesopotamia to attack the descendants of Ham in Canaan had sought to lord it over Ham's descendants. They subjected them to taxation for twelve years. This was not, however, a fulfillment of Noah's prophecy that Canaan's children would be servants unto their brethren. The explanation of this subjection may perhaps be found in the fact that between Sodom and Gomorrah and the Gulf of Aqaba there were rather rich copper mines which were under the control of these five cities. And the envious, and at that time superior, forces of the descendants of Shem subjected these peoples and taxed them to get a share of the wealth that was mined out of the earth. It is the old story of greed. And the effect of the confusion of speech is here in that no friendly relation exists, but one of bitterness, which manifests itself in rebellion on the part of the descendants of Ham and a campaign of war on the part of Shem's descendants to punish those who rebelled.

Abram, for the sake of Lot, his spiritual brother and physical nephew, went to fight these four kings of the north and east and restored to Sodom and Gomorrah the inhabitants with their goods, including Lot.

A gift from the king of Sodom Abram refused, lest he should boast that he had made Abram rich. But a blessing he did receive from Melchizedek. Now Melchizedek stands here on the pages of Holy Writ as an unique figure. And if we are of the opinion that God called Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees and brought him into Canaan "to preserve the true religion," we had better revise our thinking. For here is a priest of God in the land of Canaan who was king over a city that undoubtedly feared God. He was certainly not a lone figure that believed in God and was priest of the most high God. A priest serves people and sacrifices and prays for them.

And why should we think this to be strange? At a much later date we also find a Jethro in Midian who is a priest of God. Even in the days when deacons were appointed to insure the support of the Grecian widows in the early New Testament church there is an Ethiopian eunuch who had come all the way to Jerusalem to worship; and, if you please, he had a copy of the prophecy of Isaiah in a day when the Word of God was precious and men did not have the scrolls of the Old Testament books in their homes as we have Bibles today. Then even before this there was the Queen of Sheba, who came to Solomon to enquire concerning things spiritual as well as material of his reign.

But the striking thing is that Melchizedek is called "better," and Abram in Hebrews 7 is called the "lesser." Melchizedek appears very briefly in this account; he is mentioned almost in passing. And yet in Hebrews 7 he occupies a position higher than Abram. We read, "Consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils. And verily they that are the sons of Levi who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham: But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises. And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better." Hebrews 7:4-7.

Now the idea is not at all that Melchizedek individually and personally was of superior spiritual strength over Abram. The word "better" in the text does mean stronger, more powerful and better in that sense. But it must not be applied to Melchizedek personally, as though he outshone Abram in spiritual strength. Nor does it mean that those who are in

office in the church of God today are naturally superior in spiritual strength and faith. They should be men of faith. They should walk a strong life of faith. But the mere fact that they are in office does not make them superior. You may find some very strong women, for example, who are never in the office in the church, whose faith is unusually great. These women according to God's ordinance will never serve in any office in the church; and yet they shine in the congregation as brilliant lights, manifesting tremendously strong faith.

In his office of being priest of the most high God and King of Salem Melchizedek was above and over and better than Abram. Abram also recognized this fact and therefore gave him tithes of what he had captured from the four kings who had attacked Sodom and Gomorrah. Abram was conscious of the fact that he owed Melchizedek tithes of all that which he had gotten. It was not a gift to this priest-king. It was an obligation which he had to fulfill.

And consider once that Christ is a priest after the order of Melchizedek, and not after the order of Aaron who came out of the loins of Abram. That is why we read of Melchizedek that he was without father and mother. This refers to his office and means that he obtained his office as priest without consideration of who were his father and his mother. He certainly had an earthly father and mother. Only Adam and Eve had no such earthly parents. Even Jesus had an earthly mother. But Melchizedek's priestly office was his even though he was not — and how could he be? — of the seed of Levi, the son of Jacob whose descendants became the priests after Israel's sojourn at Mt. Sinai. Neither Melchizedek nor Jesus came out of the loins of Levi. Jesus was from the tribe of Judah concerning which God gave no commandment about serving in the priesthood. He was in the line of the kings of Israel. Melchizedek, born years before, yea, generations before Levi ever appeared on the scene, before Abraham begot Isaac and Isaac begot Jacob and Jacob begot Levi, was priest of the most high God. And this means that he sacrificed and offered up sacrifices to God for his people in Salem.

It is a mistake to think that only after Mt. Sinai did the Israelites begin to sacrifice burnt offerings to God

and have a priesthood to do this. God taught man in paradise already to come before His face with a sacrifice. Adam taught this to his sons, and that is why we find Cain and Abel sacrificing to God, Abel by faith and in the God-ordained way of coming with the life of an animal, Cain in unbelief with the fruit of his garden. We read of Noah using the clean animals to sacrifice to God after the flood. Of Abram it is recorded that when he came into the land of Canaan he built an altar unto God, and that is the same as to say that he sacrificed burnt offering unto God. And so it is not strange to find Melchizedek at this point of history as a priest who sacrifices for His people and is priest of the most high God.

Being priest he also blesses Abram. This is part of the work and duty of a priest, and certainly is an important part of Christ as our only High Priest. Because the priest was the one who brought the atoning sacrifice (only typically, of course) that spoke of the blotting out of sin, he was also the one through whom God would speak the blessing of salvation and of His covenant. The priest after the order of Aaron and from the line of Levi would not only receive the sacrificial animal and slay it and offer it up. In the name of God he would also bless the one who brought that sacrifice and assure him that his sins were blotted out and that God's blessing rested on him. And when Abram brought tithes to Melchizedek, he, in the name of the God Whom he represented, pronounced God's blessing upon Abram for this work which he had accomplished of rescuing Lot.

And then Melchizedek fades into the background again while Abram stands forth on the foreground. He was the "better" in his office. But he was not the one in whose seed God would establish his covenant. In that respect Abram was the greater and the better. And Abram became the father of all believers. To Abram this was a rare privilege even as *Abram*. We have repeatedly spelled his name that way because he does not become Abraham until Isaac is born. Then he begins to be the father of many nations. Up to this point he is childless. But he is not without a rich and wonderful promise which God will soon begin to fulfill. And it is while he is still Abram that Melchizedek is presented as the "better" that blesses him in the name of God.

ATTENTION!!!

Secretaries of standing and special committees of Synod must submit their reports to the undersigned by April 15, 1975, if they are to appear in the Agenda of the 1975 Synod.

Rev. D. H. Kuiper, Stated Clerk
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FROM HOLY WRIT

Exposition of Hebrews 12: 18-24 (continued)

Rev. G. Lubbers

THE GLORIOUS REALITY OF THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM (Heb. 12:22-24)

Sharper and more telling contrast could hardly be imagined than what is drawn here by the writer of Hebrews between Mt. Sinai and Mt. Zion, the city of the living God. What is so striking is that in the case of the latter we are told beautiful and comforting details of the life of the New Testament church, while in the case of the former we are simply told some of the awe-inspiring dreadfulness of a touchable mountain, which if touched, even by a beast, would incur death upon it. However, here we take the shoes from off our feet, and we can draw nigh with full assurance of faith. God is come very near to us; He has come to dwell with us, and we with Him.

Mt. Zion is a mountain which is beautiful for situation. For Jehovah is great in Zion, His holy mountain. It is beautiful, the joy of the whole earth. God has made known Himself in her palaces for a refuge. (Ps. 48:1-3) This glorious mountain on which is situated the city of the living God is pictured here to us in Hebrews 12 as the "city of the living God." And it is a mountain to which we "have come" as the New Testament saints.

Historically, in the prophetic history of Israel, the church of the Old Dispensation never even "came to" typical Mt. Zion until David became king over all Israel. It was then that David dwelt in the stronghold of Zion and called it "the city of David." (II Sam. 5:7-10) In a certain sense Israel then came to Mt. Zion, the city of the living God. Something of what Abraham saw from afar was realized at that historic occasion; we see a little of the city whose builder and maker is God. (John 8:56; Heb. 11:10, 13) But this was not yet the resting place of God's ark. David did soon bring the Ark of the Lord to Zion; he built a new tabernacle in the place of the one which had come to Shiloh in the tribe of Ephraim.¹ However, it was not till he actually brought the Ark of the LORD, carried by the priests, to Jerusalem that we have the typical-symbolical fulfillment of the ascension of Christ into the heavenly Jerusalem. Then the Ark comes to the mountain which God has desired for His abode. All the wicked may look askance at the church of God in the world, yet the Lord will dwell in His Church, His Zion, forever. The God Who appeared at Sinai, with His chariots thousand-thousandfold here ascended before the "humble David" to Zion to give gifts unto men. (Ps.

68:16-18) For this is the mountain in which it shall be seen what the Lord has in store for His people in fulfilling His oath to Abraham; here we see "Jehovah-Jireh" spoken of at the occasion of the sacrificing of Isaac by his father Abraham. (Gen. 22:14) The Lord declares the decree: I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion. (Ps. 2:6, 7)

This city in our text is not the earthly, but it is the *heavenly* Jerusalem. It is, therefore, not found on the earthly hill of Zion where David's throne was placed in the earthly land of Canaan. It is not here below; but it is above, where Jesus ascended when He passed through the heavens. In this respect it also is different from the earthly mount. It is outside of the world of our experience, natural experience. It cannot be touched, seen, nor ascended by any natural man. David never could have brought the Ark of the Covenant into this heavenly Jerusalem. The readers of the Hebrew Christians must, therefore, look away from the earthly city, which in character is the smoking mountain which can be touched, to the heavenly city, whose builder and maker God is, by His own *fiat*, as Creator and Recreator of heaven and earth. This is the city of peace; it is the true "*Salem*", the peace which is brought about by the blood of atonement and of reconciliation. (Col. 1:15-20)

It is to this city that "we have come." The city is all ready and prepared. For the sake of this city God is not ashamed to be called our God. (Heb. 11:16) This city is so wonderfully great in manifesting the glory of God's gracious purpose and design from eternity in His Son over His people, that it is an honor and a glory forever to the builder and architect of this gracious work. Surely, He need not be ashamed to be called our God. Had nothing more been done for us than what we received at Sinai, the words of the law written upon tables of stone, we all would die. This is the letter which killeth. Then God would not have been able to bring us into the land of the heavenly kingdom. Moses' plea for Israel would have forever gone unheard, were it not for the "exodus at Jerusalem" (Ex. 32:7-14; Matt. 17:1-8;

¹) It appears that after the Lord had made Shiloh a desolation, removing the Ark from there, that the tabernacle proper also was removed from Shiloh. God made Shiloh entirely desolate forever. (Jer. 7:12, 14; 26:6, 9) However, the tabernacle was set up in Gibeon, the highplace, where also Solomon went to sacrifice and where the Lord appeared unto him. Howbeit, the Ark of the Covenant was never again set in that tabernacle, but was removed from the houses of Abinadab and Obededom respectively to a new tabernacle in Jerusalem, which later David made. (II Sam. 6:4, 12 ff.)

Luke 9:28-36) But now "we are come" to a better covenant, and we have come to the heavenly Jerusalem. Such is our legal status. We are not under the law, but we are under grace! And to this city of peace, city where the living waters of grace flow softly, we have come. Here the living waters flow from the throne of God and of the Lamb, waters which are for the healing of the nations.

Do not overlook that the text calls this city: the city of the *living* God. He is not a dead God like the idol-gods of the nations. In His very character and being He is a *living* God. He is the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of the world. He was the living God Who spoke at Mt. Sinai, as Moses says, "for who is there of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God out of the midst of the fire as we have, and live?" (Deut. 5:26) That the Canaanites are driven from before the face of Joshua is evidence and proof that the "living God" is in their midst. (Josh. 3:10) David cannot endure that Goliath defies the armies of the "living God." (I Sam. 17:26) For the living God fulfills His counsel; His thoughts and action are always alike. Well, now, we have come to the city of the living God, Whose power and glory are great in delivering Israel and in destroying the armies of the wicked nations who would destroy the city of God. (Jeremiah 23:36)

Such is the glorious reality of the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and of our abiding and certain status before the throne of the living God, the Judge over all.

SOME DETAILS OF THE GLORIOUS HEAVENLY CITY OF GOD (Heb. 12:23, 24)

What strikes our attention here in this passage of Hebrews is that the city of the living God is really inhabited. It has all the earmarks of a city where there is life.

There are myriads of angelic hosts in this heavenly city. They are portrayed as being in festal array. It is a heavenly "panegyric," the assembly of the entire angelic world, having come to the eternal festal occasion of the church of God having come to Mt. Zion. These angels are not in the status of "sons" but of ministering spirits in the church. They do not simply come to present the law of God, within the thunder of Sinai, in the hands of the Mediator, Jesus, (Gal. 3:19; Deut. 33:2); but they see now that the fiery oracles were fulfilled by the Mediator, Jesus. That is cause for great rejoicing in the angelic hosts of heaven.

Besides, the text calls attention to the presence of the "church of the firstborn, written in heaven." This is the church as she is called, gathered, and defended and preserved by the Son of God out of the whole human race. They are citizens of heaven and of this

heavenly city. Their names are registered there. They have a right to be there. They are called church of the "firstborn" with good reason. They belong to the firstborn Son among many brethren. The firstborn Son is the Firstborn of all creatures. In the womb of the counsel of God, the Son of God has the preeminence. All things are there because of Him. And all things are not only because of Him, but also *by* Him and *unto* Him. He has the central place and is set as the head over all things, in heaven and in earth. (Eph. 1:9, 10; Col. 1:18) And He is the Firstborn over all things as the Firstborn out of the dead. In this death and resurrection He is set high above all the heavens, that He might fill all things. The church in heaven is, therefore, the church composed of those who are, with Christ, born out of death, and set over all things with Him. Thus Israel is brought from sin's bondage of Egypt and set in the Jerusalem above as God's firstborn. (Ex. 4:22) And the firstborn sons of God are sanctified to the service of God in the church, to be a kingdom of priests unto God. Everyone of the children of God is a firstborn son. Each has his own preeminence in the great preeminent Firstborn Son out of the dead. Thus they are recorded in heaven. (Ex. 13:2) None of this was possible at the mount of the law-giving. To this great privilege of the firstborn we have arrived. No Levitical priesthood need to redeem us from the temple-service; we have been redeemed unto the temple-service of the living God.

Yes, as such sons we have arrived to the judge over all things, God. He is the final and perfect Judge. He sits in judgment over all things, and also over the church. His is the final verdict. He judges in strictest justice according to His law. It is the law which He Himself has spoken out of the darkness, the tempest, with a loud voice, the sound of the trumpet! And now He adjudges that we are worthy of the name of sons, firstborn. He delivered Christ for our sins, and raised Him for our justification. (Rom. 4:25) His throne of judgment is called elsewhere: the throne of God and of the Lamb. He is the Lamb standing on Mt. Sion. (Rev. 22:1; 14:1)

This heavenly city of the living God also has the "spirits of just men made perfect" dwelling there. These evidently are those saints who are now in glory and who are not yet reunited with their bodies which are in the grave. That is why they are called "spirits." They are called spirits of men, to distinguish them from the angel-world. They are called "perfected" spirits. The term *perfected* means: come to full maturity, and the highest potential of sons as firstborn. They need not go through the trials and discipline of the heavenly Father of spirits again. They have finished the course, run the race; their dying was not a payment for sin, but was a dying

unto sin and an entering into eternal glory. They have here their permanent and everlasting abode in the city of the living God. What the law could not do, that

these spirits of just men made perfect have attained. (Heb. 10:1, 14; 11:40)

TAKING HEED TO THE DOCTRINE

"Hyper-Calvinism" and the Call of the Gospel (8)

Rev. David Engelsma

The Reformed doctrine of the preaching of the gospel must sail between the Scylla of hyper-Calvinism and the Charybdis of Arminianism. On the one hand is the rock of hyper-Calvinism which denies that the call of the gospel comes, in all seriousness, to everyone who hears the preaching, elect and reprobate alike. On the other hand is the whirlpool of Arminianism which makes the preaching a well-meant offer of God to all who hear. The Reformed view, and practice, of preaching must neither be smashed on the one nor sucked down into the other.

We have already defended the Reformed conception of preaching against hyper-Calvinism in the second and third articles of this series. It remains to give account of Reformed preaching over against objections raised against it by those who maintain a free offer.

Those who advocate a well-meant offer of grace insist that the offer is essential for free, unfettered preaching, especially for preaching directed to the unconverted in missions. They argue that the denial of an offer inhibits missions, or evangelism, by restricting the call of the gospel. Their argument seems to be, first, that a church, or preacher, that does not believe that God is gracious to all men, will not desire, or dare, to preach to all men; secondly, that this church, or preacher, will not have a message to bring to every man; and, thirdly, that such a church, or preacher, will be unable to call every man, urgently and seriously, to repent of his sins and believe in Jesus Christ.

Through the years, this has been the defense of its doctrine of the well-meant offer by the Christian Reformed Church. H. J. Kuiper was representative when he wrote: "One of the most serious aspects of the present denial of the doctrine of Common Grace is the denial of the general offer of salvation. It robs the gospel of its evangelical note. It is bound in time to create an attitude of religious passivism and fatalism which has been the curse of every church where the preaching of election was not

counter-balanced by the proclamation of the sinner's responsibility and of God's sincere offer of salvation to all without discrimination."¹ Lately, the Calvinistic Baptists have been echoing these charges. In his booklet, "The Free Offer," Erroll Hulse calls the rejection of the offer "hyper-Calvinism," which denies that all men should be "invited" to come to Christ (p. 14); denies that faith is a duty (p. 14); minimizes the moral and spiritual responsibility of sinners (p. 15); and threatens the church that succumbs to it with death (p. 14).

Significantly, Harold Dekker used precisely the same arguments when he pleaded for the *implications* of the well-meant offer: universal redemptive love and universal atonement. He wrote: "The doctrine of limited atonement . . . impairs the principle of the universal love of God and tends to inhibit missionary spirit and activity."² This same thought he later expressed positively: "The conviction that God loves all men and that Christ died for all . . . could revolutionize the missionary motivation and program of our Church and make us truly effective in the evangelization of the United States and Canada."³

The various defenders of the offer of the gospel are agreed that, unless a church believes that God is gracious to all men and desires to save all men, it will not zealously carry out Christ's command to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Dekker merely brought out what is inherent in this position when he insisted that, unless a preacher can say to every man, "God loves you, and Christ died for you," it is impossible to do the work of missions. Essentially, this is the position that the basis of missions is universal grace.

Dekker's unambiguous, forthright defense of universal redemptive love and universal atonement in

¹"The Three Points of Common Grace" (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1925), p. 13.

²"God So Loved-All Men!," *The Reformed Journal*, Dec., 1962, p. 7.

³"Limited Atonement and Evangelism," *The Reformed Journal*, May-June, 1964, p. 24.

the name of missions was a singularly clear indication that the kindred defense of a well-meant offer as something indispensable for missions is nothing else than a variation of the old, old charge by the Pelagian-Roman Catholic-Arminian party, that the Reformed doctrine of eternal, sovereign predestination, election and reprobation, destroys lively preaching, especially to those outside the Church. Now, it is indeed true that the Reformed faith denies – and the Pelagians, Roman Catholics, and Arminians have always understood this well, thus showing themselves wiser than many who claim the name Reformed today – that preaching in general and missions in particular have any basis in a love, or grace, of God for all men or a desire of God that all men be saved. But the Reformed faith has always repudiated as wholly groundless and totally false the allegation that this in any way hinders the full, free activity of preaching the gospel, whether that be preaching within the established church or preaching to the unconverted.

The proof of the Reformed position is evident to all. The apostle Paul was an avowed, ardent predestinarian, holding double predestination, election and reprobation (Rom. 9). As a predestinarian, he did not believe, nor did he ever preach, that God loved all men, was gracious to all men, and desired the salvation of all men, i.e., he did not believe nor teach the well-meant offer of the gospel. On the contrary, the apostle believed and proclaimed that God loved and chose unto salvation some men, and some men only (Rom. 9:11-13; Rom. 9:21-24; Rom. 11:5), hating and reprobating others (Rom. 9:13; Rom. 9:21, 22). He taught that God is gracious only to the elect (Rom. 9:15; II Tim. 1:9), enduring, blinding, and hardening the others (Rom. 9:22; Rom. 9:18; Rom. 11:7). He held that the preaching of the gospel, so far from being grace to all hearers, is a savor of death unto death to some (II Cor. 2:15, 16), in accordance with God's purpose in bringing the Word to them, which purpose is not a saving purpose, but the purpose to render them inexcusable and harden them (Rom. 9:18 – cf. also Jesus' words in John 12:37-41). Paul did not regard the preaching of the gospel as an *offer* of salvation to everybody, directed to everybody in a universal love of God and providing everybody with a chance to be saved. Instead, he viewed the preaching of the gospel as the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16), as the creative call of God that calls the things that be not as though they were (Rom. 4:17), and as the mighty voice of the risen Christ that raises the dead (II Tim. 1:10). Such a quickening, renewing, enlightening power is the preaching *unto God's elect*. This is true, not merely because it turns out to be the case that only the elect are saved by the gospel, but because God in the sovereignty of His grace limits the

gospel as a saving power to the elect. The preaching of the gospel as the power of God unto salvation is dependent on and governed by God's eternal decree of predestination. Romans 8:30 teaches this: "Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called." God sends the gospel as a saving power only to those whom He has predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, and the gospel efficaciously saves every one to whom it is directed.

But this doctrine did not stand in the way of Paul's engaging, fervently and energetically, in the work of missions. (To state such an obvious truth seems faintly ridiculous – those who assail predestination and the Reformed faith as inimical to missions are responsible for this foolishness.) The greatest predestinarian was the greatest missionary, and he was the latter because he was the former. He went preaching the glad tidings to the ends of the earth, and he willingly endured every imaginable hardship in the course of this labor (recall the marvellous list of sufferings in II Corinthians 11), "for the elect's sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (II Tim. 2:10).

Are we really to suppose that, when it came to missions, the apostle set aside the doctrine of predestination, as a teaching irrelevant to missions at best or as a teaching detrimental to missions and embarrassing at worst, in order to ground the activity of missions in, and to motivate the missionary by, notions of a universal love and grace of God and a desire of God to save all men, notions that are not merely extraneous to the doctrine of predestination, but that are in direct conflict with it?

Is this, really, a Reformed man's defense of missions today – that missions are possible *in spite of* predestination?

How utterly foreign to Paul's thought!

How demeaning to the doctrine of predestination!

How inherently *destructive* of the doctrine of predestination! If lively, unfettered preaching, evangelism, and missions cannot find their solid foundation and dynamic impetus in predestination, then predestination has to go – such is the Christian consciousness.

The basis for missions, for urgent proclamation of the gospel to all and sundry, is the theology of predestination. With this conviction, gotten from and strengthened by Holy Scripture, we proceed to give account of our denial of a well-meant offer, in response to the charge that, without a love of God for all and a desire of God to save all, we destroy missions.

(to be continued)

STUDIES IN ISAIAH

The Church's Glory And Duty

Rev. Robt. C. Harbach

"The word which Isaiah the son of Amotz saw upon (the subject of) Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the last days, the mountain of the house of Jehovah is set up in the summit of the mountains, and is exalted more than the hills; and all the goyim shall flow unto it. And many peoples shall go, and they shall say, Come, go up unto the mountain of Jehovah, unto the house of the God of Jacob, and He shall teach us out of His ways, and we shall go in His paths; for out of Zion shall go forth law and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem" (Isa. 2:1-3, Heb.)

I. The Church's Glory. 1. The establishment of the Christian Church. The subject of this prophetic word is the same as the title of the book, except that there Isaiah saw a vision, where here he saw *the word*. "The word which he saw" refers to the spiritual insight he had into what was divinely revealed. Like John the Apostle, what was too blinding to behold with the physical eye he saw "in spirit" (Rev. 1:10).

"And it shall come to pass in the last days. . ." This is a prophecy of the last days, which are the gospel times, when the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22) that is, the above-Jerusalem (Gal. 4:26) would be established. We are now living in the last days. (See Heb. 1:1-2; I Jn. 2:18; Ac. 2:17; I Pet. 1:19-20). This is the time in which Christ appeared in His first coming (Heb. 9:26) and in which also we must look for His second coming (9:28). This is the time when the church would be exalted and the Gentile world brought into it (Isa. 2:1-4; see Mic. 4:1-4; Isa. 4:2-6; 9:1, 2), and looks down to the end, to the heavenly Jerusalem of the last days (1:26, 27), to the destruction of Antichrist and his minions (Is. 2:12, 18-21 with Dn. 8:9-14, 24, 25; Rev. 6:12-17), and to the kingdom of glory (2:4) and the New Jerusalem of the New Earth (Rev. 21:10, 24, 26). Isaiah has no earthly millennium in his view.

"In the last days shall be set up the mountain of the house of Jehovah." By the *mountain* of the Lord's house is meant the *kingdom* of Christ. A mountain in scripture symbolism represents a kingdom, as in Dn. 2:35, "the stone that smote the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth." (Cp. Rev. 17:9, 10). This is not an earthly millennial kingdom, for "it shall stand" not just for a thousand years, but "forever" (Dn. 2:44). The Christian Church and Christianity (the religion of Jehovah) will in those days be the mountain of the

Lord's house, "which shall never be destroyed." The gates of hell cannot prevail against it. "The Lord's house" is the church, as the very word *church* itself literally means "the Lord's house." (From *kuriake: kuriou*, the Lord's, plus *oikos*, house. Cp. Ger., *Gotteshaus*).

"The mountain of the Lord's house shall be set up in *the summit* (head) (i.e., Zion. v. 3) *of the mountains*." Christ's kingdom tops all kingdoms, and He himself is the head and ruler of the kings of the earth (Rev. 1:5). His kingdom is "secured in the everlasting and electing love of God, and in the unalterable covenant of grace, founded on the Rock, Christ" (John Gill). Christ is the Head over all things, and in the last day, in His church He alone shall be exalted (2:11, 17). "And (it is) exalted (lifted up) from (more than) the hills." The false gods had their mountains; Mt. Olympus, the Seven Hills of Rome, Capitol Hill and even Mt. Sinai are superceded by the spiritual Zion. The disciples of Christ are like a city on a hill which cannot be hidden (Mt. 5:14). So the wisdom of God, the mystery of the gospel, outshines all the world's wisdom, philosophy and politics.

2. The Gentiles Entering into It. "And all the goyim shall flow into it." At the tower of Babel the nations were scattered in judgment over the face of the earth. On Pentecost the nations by grace flowed into the church at Jerusalem. Then was, and throughout this age of the last days, is fulfilled, "unto Him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gn. 49:10). Goyim were forbidden to come to the temple at Jerusalem, but Isaiah prophecies they shall come to it. Now the middle wall of partition is broken down, and all the (elect) goyim flow into the Lord's house.

3. The Mutual Encouragement of Its Members in their desire to be instructed in the religion of Jehovah, and in the only place where they may learn of the true God, Zion, the church. For it is in the church where God will teach them. In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel was the center of truth. In the New Testament, the heavenly Zion is the center of truth, and the spiritual Zion is made up not only of one nation, but "many nations," in fact, of "all nations" (v. 2). Gentile converts, speaking here, persuade others to join them in the spiritual Zion to share and enjoy the gospel of salvation. They enthusiastically encourage one another: Let's go! go up to the mountain of Jehovah! to the House of God of Jacob! and He shall teach us of His ways! Where

there is true spiritual life prevailing, there will be great diligence in taking huge delight in going up to the house of the Lord, and in exciting others to go along (Ps. 122:1). When grace is in the soul there will be a delighted concern for the house of God and His worship in it. Going to God's house frequently and regularly will be regarded with pleasure, and though perhaps not without its difficulties, as duty, and privilege. God's ways are learned in His church, in communion with His people, and in the use of the sacraments.

At this point Calvin says, "And shall say, Come. 'By these words he first declares that the godly will be filled with such an ardent desire to spread the doctrines of religion, that every one not satisfied with his own calling and his personal knowledge will desire to draw others along with him. And indeed nothing could be more inconsistent with the nature of faith than that deadness which would lead a man to disregard his brethren, and to keep the light of knowledge choked up within his own breast. The greater the eminence above others which any man has received from his calling, so much the more diligently ought he to labor to enlighten others."

"This points out to us also the ordinary method of collecting a Church, which is, by the outward voice of men; for though God might bring each person to himself by a secret influence, yet he employs the agency of men, that he may awaken in them an anxiety about the salvation of each other. . . Next Isaiah shows that those who take upon them the office of teaching and exhorting should not sit down and command others, but should join and walk along with them as companions; as we see that some men are very severe instructors, and eager to urge others forward, who yet do not move a step. But here believers, instead of addressing to their brethren the command, *Go up*, rather lead the way by their own example. This is the true method, therefore, of profitable teaching, when, by actually performing what we demand, we make it evident that we speak with sincerity and earnestness.' "

"We will walk in his paths." When taught of God's ways men will want to walk in his paths. True doctrine motivates conduct in God's paths. Right doctrine always results in right living. Doctrine and life are inseparable in the Christian scheme. Christian life, if it is stable and solid, is based on Christian

doctrine. True doctrine is here described as "His paths" and "His ways," showing that without pure doctrine we go astray from God. These paths go back to eternity where they were ordained that we should walk in them. These paths continue in Christ's goings forth in time, when God sent forth His Son into the world to bring salvation, and sent forth His Spirit to apply it. All these paths converge in Christ. "So walk ye in Him," and go on in the church of God.

4. The means through which this instruction shall be given: "the law and the word of the Lord." The law is the law of Christ, the law as you have its exposition in the New Testament, the law of faith. The word of the law is to go out from Jerusalem (Lk. 24:47; Ac. 1:8; Ro. 15:19). The apostles were commanded to go and preach the gospel in the temple (on Mt. Zion, Acts 5:20), then from there to take the word of the Lord to the ends of the earth. This was the fulfillment of "Jehovah shall send forth the rod of Thy strength out of Zion" (Ps. 110:2). The rod of Christ's strength is the law of Christ, the word of Christ, the "commandment of the Lord" (I Cor. 7:25; "his commandments," I Jn. 3:24), the testimony of Jesus, which went out from Jerusalem "in these last days." The Church of Christ on earth had its establishment out of Zion in Jerusalem. The Christian Church has no heathen origin, not even as to country. Opponents of the Church cannot validly argue that it is the invention and product of heathenism. The Old Testament church, scattered among the nations, was regathered to its center and origin in Zion at Jerusalem. The New Testament church began in Zion at Jerusalem, and through persecution by the Jews was scattered abroad, going everywhere proclaiming as good news the word. This word is the rod of Christ's strength, the sceptre to which Gentiles bow submitting to His sovereign rule of grace as He holds sway over the nations from His throne at the right hand of God. The preaching of the gospel to the gentiles is, then, the fulfillment of Psalm 110 and the prophecies of Isaiah. That everlasting gospel is Christ's strong rod, His own Word preached in the power of the Holy Spirit. Finally, that word of the Lord from Jerusalem is no less than the word of the King. Christ, who is King of nations, King of saints, the Ruler of the kings of the earth, the King of kings and Lord of Lords is most surely King of the Church. The comparing of the two texts, Psm. 2:6 with Heb. 12:22, 23 is proof of that!

TEACHER NEEDED

South Holland Protestant Reformed Christian School will be in need of a teacher for grades 4, 5 and 6 for the 1975-76 term. Those interested please contact G.F. Van Baren, 15921 Parkside Ave., South Holland, Illinois 60473, or call (312) 331-3818.

FEATURE

Church Deformation

Prof. H. Hanko

In his book, *Tractaat van de Reformatie Der Kerken*, Dr. A. Kuyper devotes a large section to the general subject of the deformation of the church. In this section, he discusses at some length the causes of such deformation. His remarks on this matter are so pertinent that they seem sometimes to have been written in our own time. Parts of this section follow below. We offer these quotes to the reader for two reasons. The first is that we may see more clearly how it is that churches go the way of apostasy and may understand the reasons for this. The second is that we may understand better the process of deformation in order to guard against it.

Kuyper talks about the fact that Satan himself is the cause of much deformation. After explaining this, he writes:

"This bitter enmity Satan has manifested in two different ways, viz., external persecution and internal poisoning. . . . (When Satan understands by hindsight that persecution) generally had the opposite effect (of destroying the church), and that a new sprout of the church of God shoots up from the blood of martyrs. . . . he moves the world to contract peace with the church, prompts magistrates to overload the church with treasure, favor and honor; and when the poor church, stunned by so much brilliance and glory, falls asleep in her triumph, then the evil enemy comes in the still of the night and drops his deadly poison in her veins, so that she, after not many days, feels her spiritual strength give away and must once more exchange her triumphal song for a bitter and sad complaint of deadly exhaustion and spiritual decline.

"Yet Satan cannot bring this fearful evil on the church of God in any other way than under the approval and control of Almighty God. If God had willed that His church on earth had celebrated her cross-triumph in quiet peace, this would have happened. But this is not His good pleasure. Like Job, God surrenders a church gathered from the wicked in the midst of a wicked world again and again into the hand of Satan. This partly because through spiritual struggle and triumph, the truth would glitter; and partly because the power of the Lord of lords is the glorious fruit of the preservation of a church always under fiery attack. God is not the Author or Worker of the evil which comes upon His church, but nevertheless, this is brought about according to His eternal and unshakeable purpose. The evil of suffering

is necessary so that it may be manifest what is the power of the faith which God has put in His church. So also the evil of sin is present so that it may be manifest what is the power of the destruction from which He has delivered her. But however much we pay homage to the majesty of the counsel of the Lord without fear and with all resoluteness, so that God is esteemed not only for tolerating this raging of Satan in the church of Christ, but also for willing it, yet this does not take away from the children of God their deep, shocking and irresponsible guilt. We surely confess from the heart that God's inscrutable decree to permit the history of our race to go through sin and grace mitigates in no respect the damnable guilt of Adam. How much less can there be sought in that counsel of God an escape from guilt for God's regenerated children who have tasted the power of the coming age, who know the love of Christ, and who are able to lift up the shield of faith; and yet who have not quenched the fiery darts of Satan, but who have, with unholy pleasure, received these darts into their own breast. And therefore we must not stay with the farthest cause of this deformation, but must also enter into the nearer causes which lie in the sin of each individual and in the sin of the church as a whole."

After discussing individual sins in this connection, (a section which we omit), Kuyper turns to the corporate sins of the church as a whole.

"Besides the sins of individuals, there is a sin of the church as a whole. As members of the church, men do many things together. Men form together a sphere of life in which a certain atmosphere reigns. They breathe out a certain atmosphere of communal life. They form common ideas. The shape a moral judgment. They create a common opinion which becomes a certain power. And thus it is that there is both corporate responsibility and corporate guilt, which again works most perniciously on the few; and in doing this, it infects the whole of the body of Christ. At last even the holiest is affected, and sin in the church of God becomes general.

"This can go so far that finally also for the church of the New Testament the word comes: 'If you spread out your hands, then I hide my face, and if you multiply prayers, then I do not hear. . . .'

"All deformation of the church of God is apt to begin with this, that faith loses its animation. The church hangs on Christ. Tendrils, half cut off from

the vine, begin to languish and wither. At first, as the fruit of fearful struggles and oppressions, Christ obviously lives in His own, the thrill of His life is experienced, the warmth of His divine love radiates through them. There is enjoyment of His salvation; the manifestation of His power. The Holy Spirit works thus through the children of God to make sensitive, to adorn with spiritual adornment, and to make the purchased of the Lord live close and tenderly with their God. But then comes, one scarcely knows by what cause, an unrecognized cooling. There is a leaving of the first love. It becomes less tender, less close, less inward; and presently the observer sees that the inner fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and by this the inner life of love with the Bridegroom, begins to depart from the heart of the bride. Really, already then the deformation of the church has happened, although it is not yet obvious. But this condition does not last long. Indeed, 'If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.' And so the work of the Holy Spirit is scarcely ceased or the door opens and sin slips in. The ungodly heart is released from its holy bond and begins to howl again in its own devilish lust. This begins in the smallest way, with trifles, which indeed work through. So sin breaks out more strongly. And finally one finds in the church of God whole groups which find the mask of piety burdensome and openly commit fornication with the world. In this stage by no means all the church is seized by this poison. On the contrary, in her large majority, she is still zealous against it. But that zeal is already too little energetic and too inanimate to banish the evil. The evil is still judged, but no one dares to condemn it openly. The faculty of faith for punishing this moral operation with discipline is lacking. But this in turn makes sin and worldliness all the bolder. The situation is quickly turned around. Instead of being able to rise with moral strength against worldliness, the children of God themselves come under the pressure of the world. They are almost ashamed to maintain the old ways of life. They begin to excuse themselves instead of condemning the world. No longer does discipline proceed from them upon the sinners, but the sinners proceed to exercise discipline over God's children by intimidation and mockery. Thus the standard of external spiritual life declines and finally sinks away. And the end result is that the Lord, by His righteous judgment, punishing such faithlessness, gives His church over into the power of her adulterers, so that she shall again have to learn to recognize her guilt and discover the way of prayer."

After comparing this "turning of the tide" with a set of balance scales, Kuyper goes on to say:

"The church then is appalled at what has happened, and evil proceeds to take on greater

proportions, creeping also into the shepherds. In the church of Christ, one is always able to know the turning point. If the church as church knows, in spite of the evil which creeps in, how to hold high her holy character, then one still always finds the shepherds being examples to the flock. In their priestly urgency they plead for the deliverance of the flocks with the sound of the trumpet of penitance, admonishing conversion. But if that sound ceases, the circle of the shepherds itself becomes unsound, and worldliness creeps in among those who, as witnesses of God, ought to fight with and for the sheep. Then also the hour of spiritual decline has irrevocably struck — also for the church, and corruption begins to affect her organization. Thus corruption begins to alter the church in her public manifestation as church. She assumes a corrupt form.

"The power of the lie creeps out of a congregation which has become sick and creeps into the shepherds. And then, as a third stage, it creeps out of the shepherds who have also become sick, into the doctrine and worship of the church, so that the church abandons her confession and introduces into the Lord's house a self-willed form of worship. In this way, heresy, getting to its feet, brings about a new devastation. Doubt comes in the place of faith. The things which were once fixed now are loosened. Everything pressures and prompts a union of the confession of the church and the confession of the world.

"This happens to the worship services. There is no longer any satisfaction with a simple, spiritual character for worship services, but members take flight into a sensuous way to radiate what is for the eye and ear alone; and in this way they grieve the Holy Spirit.

"Thus the tension and opposition arise. The limitations of church government are considered too narrow and are no longer tolerated. And so finally corruption creeps in and pulls loose the fabric of church government. And this tension does not rest until the regulations of church government are so deformed that everything which rejects Christ is done, and everything which in the pattern of these regulations is attached to Christ is lost.

"In this way corruption runs its course. It begins with the loss of the first love. It proceeds to worldliness. This inclination towards the world creeps out of the flock and into the shepherds. Through these shepherds, it finds its way into the doctrine; from the doctrine, into the worship services, in order finally to lay hold on the whole system of the church's ordinances and to alter the church so that she becomes an instrument of Satan lying in wait for the people of God, and, in this people, for God Himself." pp. 91-96.

Book Review

THE NEW HERMENEUTIC, by Cornelius Van Til; Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Nutley, New Jersey; 230 pp., \$5.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. H. C. Hoeksema]

This volume which, I believe, is the latest from the pen of Dr. Van Til, was sent to me by the author personally and was inscribed, "H. C. Hoeksema in memory of your father. C. Van Til." I appreciate this personal gesture of Dr. Van Til, and hereby express my thanks. I also assume that the book was sent to me for review; but whether this assumption is correct or not, I wish to call attention to the book and to recommend it.

This is a book intended for seminarians, ministers, and theologians. As one might expect from the title, Van Til deals in this volume with the "new hermeneutic" which has made its appearance in the Netherlands. But he does more than this. Van Til goes back to the new hermeneutic of Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling, whom he treats as the "main representatives" of the new hermeneutic. Then he devotes a chapter to the reaction of some modern theologians to this new hermeneutic of Fuchs and Ebeling. Next he devotes a chapter to the reaction of some orthodox theologians to this new hermeneutic. It is in this chapter that there is an excellent section of some 70 pages on the views of Dr. H. M. Kuitert. The final chapter of this book speaks of the new hermeneutic of Holland. In this chapter, which is very brief, Van Til writes of Wiersinga, Hartvelt, Koole, Baarda, and Augustijn. It certainly becomes evident, by the way, that Van Til is no friend of Kuitert, and that although he deals with Kuitert's views in the chapter entitled "Reaction of Some Orthodox Theologians," he does not consider Kuitert to be truly orthodox. Dr. Van Til is a foe of the liberal theology that is currently being espoused in the Netherlands.

This is, in my opinion, an excellent book for anyone who wishes to gain an understanding of what the new hermeneutic is all about without delving into the primary sources of such information. I believe that it offers a dependable description not only of the new hermeneutic but also of its failings. Nor is this book difficult to follow. While some of Van Til's books are, in my opinion, marred by the fact that they employ too much philosophical language in dealing with things theological, that is not the case with this work. Although Van Til traces this new hermeneutic to its philosophical roots, the book is very plainly written and interestingly written and highly readable. I believe that all our ministers and our seminary students would do well to get this book

and to read it, in order that they may be aware of evil views which have already made vast inroads into the Reformed community.

I have one negative criticism of the format of this book. I dislike very much the placing of footnote references at the end of a book. To place them at the end of a chapter is bad enough; I prefer to see references at the bottom of the page. But to place them at the end of a book, especially when these references include some comments, always irritates me.

I also have one comment concerning the content of this book. I would have liked to see Dr. Van Til deal with the question whether the current developments in the Netherlands are at all to be traced to elements in the teachings of Kuyper and Bavinck. Dr. Van Til traces the new hermeneutic of the Netherlands to that of modern German theologians. And he states correctly "The background of these theologians is the older modernism of such men as Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Hermann and Harnack and the new modernism, call it neo-orthodoxy if you will, of such men as Barth and Bultmann." And Dr. Van Til appeals to those who espouse the new hermeneutic in the Netherlands "to build their hermeneutical procedures on the theology of Calvin, Kuyper, Bavinck, etc. . . ." Nevertheless, the question arises whether there were elements in the teachings of men like Kuyper and Bavinck which constituted weaknesses in their theology, and which became to some extent the occasion for the Dutch theologians of today to imbibe neo-orthodoxy and the new hermeneutic. In other words, is what is happening in the Netherlands today strictly a *departure* from Kuyper and Bavinck, or is it also in some sense a *development* from Kuyper and Bavinck?

ANNIVERSARY NOTICE

On March 28th, 1975, our beloved parents, MR. AND MRS. HENRY HUISKEN, celebrated their fortieth wedding anniversary. We thank God for His care of them during these years and we thank Him for the multitude of blessings which we, their children, have received through them. In the past, and to this day we are blessed of God to be able to benefit from their instruction, example and counsel. Our prayer is that God will continue to bless them; we commit their care and keeping in the days ahead to Him alone.

The families of
Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Nelson
Mr. and Mrs. Larry Huiskens
Mr. and Mrs. Darrel Huiskens
Mr. and Mrs. Jon Huiskens
and Beth Ilene Huiskens

News From Our Churches

March 13, 1975

Rev. M. Kamps declined the call extended to him from Kalamazoo.

The denominational Office Bearer's Conference held in South Holland on March 4 was attended by nearly one hundred men. Discussions on the office of the diaconate were introduced by two papers — one, "Ministering to the Saints," by Rev. Lubbers, and the other, "A Layman's Observation of the Office of Mercy," by Mr. Milton Alsum of our Loveland Church. The discussions were, according to Hope's bulletin, "stimulating and instructive."

March 2, as you know, was designated the Sunday in which all of our congregations would commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Protestant Reformed Churches. In each of our congregations there were sermons which emphasized God's covenant faithfulness, and our calling to be faithful. In addition, individual congregations held special activities which were planned with a view to this commemoration. In Edgerton, for example, there was an evening singspiration, which included also a short speech, by Rev. Moore, on the anniversary of our churches. Hull, Doon, and Edgerton, incidentally, all provided special numbers for that program.

In Isabel, the February 23 Sunday evening group discussion centered on the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Recommended study guides for that discussion were Prof. Hoeksema's lecture at Calvin Seminary (as it appeared in printed form in the January 15 issue of the *Standard Bearer*), and Rev. Hoeksema's book *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*. Rev. Miersma, according to Isabel's

bulletin, was to chair the meeting and provide for the lunch.

From the March 2 bulletin of Faith Church, this: "Today as a denomination we celebrate our 50th anniversary. We have much to be thankful for. The Lord's hand has not waxed short, but His faithfulness has been abundant. We are thankful that the Lord has seen fit to preserve the truth among us and it is our prayer that He will continue to keep us in His grace."

Rev. Slopsema, pastor of our Edgerton congregation, conducted the Sunday afternoon chapel service at the Edgebrook Rest Center on January 26.

Rev. Joosten and family are settled in Faith Church's brand new parsonage. A March 9 bulletin announced that the Consistory meeting that week would be held in "the meeting room at the parsonage."

The Junior Young People's Society of Southwest plans to hold a Pizza-Barbecue Supper in the basement of Southwest, on April 4 — likely in order to raise money for the up-coming Convention. Members of the Randolph Young Adult Society planned "a night of Fun and Fellowship" for the people of their congregation. That was held on March 1, in the Randolph Christian School gym.

Randolph's new 1975 Church Directory does not include family pictures, as it did last year. But, again, there are what appear to me to be rather unique features. The front cover includes a photograph of the new church's interior. Following the "Congregational Statistics" there is a two page "Church History," which includes interesting facts

(continued on back page)

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On April 10, 1975, the Lord willing, our parents, MR. AND MRS. GERRIT LUBBERS hope to celebrate their 45th wedding anniversary.

We, their children, are thankful to our Heavenly Father for the Christian home and instruction given us through them. It is our prayer that God may continue to bless them as they go down life's path together in the fear of their Lord.

Their children,
Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Lubbers
Mr. and Mrs. Jay Lubbers
Mr. and Mrs. Paul Schipper
Glenn Lubbers
Mr. and Mrs. Ted Miedema, Jr.
Mr. and Mrs. David Doeze
and 25 grandchildren
2 great-grandchildren.

Hudsonville, Michigan

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On April 13, 1975, the Lord willing, our parents, MR. AND MRS. GILBERT SCHIMMEL will celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary. We, their children, are grateful to God for their covenant instruction throughout the past years. It is our prayer that He may continue to bless and strengthen them in the days that lie ahead.

Their children,
Mr. and Mrs. James Schimmel
Daniel Schimmel
Deborah Schimmel
Ruth Schimmel
David Schimmel
Timothy Schimmel
Thomas Schimmel
and one grandchild —
Sarah Schimmel

concerning the founding of the church in Randolph, concerning their past and present pastors, and concerning the construction of their new building. The directory also contained the 1974 Financial Report, the 1975 Collection Schedule, a calendar of birthdays and anniversaries — all in addition to the usual Membership Directory. Again, a very attractive and, certainly, extremely useful little book.

* * * * *

So much for the new news. (As one of the readers of this column remarked the other day, there's always a little bit of that slipped in, in order to keep everyone reading it.) The old news item has been in my box since 1973. It happened that, earlier in that year, I had included in several news columns some interesting correspondence received by Mr. Vander Wal, from faraway places. A subsequent bit of correspondence with Mr. Vander Wal, by one of our ministers, carried reference to those columns. It read as follows:

"With interest we have been reading in the S.B. the information you supplied the news editor re the outreach of the *Standard Bearer* to distant and unexpected points. Last week I experienced in unexpected places the nearness of the *Standard Bearer*.

"Upon entering the admitting room of the local hospital, to be booked for surgery the next day, my eyes fell at once on the *Standard Bearer* in that waiting room. I sat down next to the magazine stand where it lay and noted on the cover, 'Courtesy of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Holland.' A delightful, unexpected surprise!

"Upon being assigned to my room, I was introduced to the other patients. A little later, being questioned by one patient, an elderly (80 year-old) child of God, it became known to them that I was pastor of the local Protestant Reformed Church. The response of this child of God was, 'O, I get the *Standard Bearer*, and like it very much.' I can remember when people used to respond in such circumstances, 'O, I knew Rev. Hoeksema.' Now it is, 'O, I get the *Standard Bearer*.' The *Standard Bearer* was a link between our beds, and I had no strange bed fellow in that three-bed ward."

Rather old news, surely, but interesting nevertheless.

D.D.

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