

The **STANDARD BEARER**

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

It is well for us who still enjoy a great measure of freedom of religion to remember these saints in other lands who suffer persecution for the name of Christ. Their suffering is acute, and they know far better than we what it means to be faithful unto death. We must remember them in our prayers daily. [See page 209]

MEDITATION

Israel's Example of Unbelief

Rev. H. Veldman

"So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief."

Heb. 3:19

We see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. We *see* this. It is plain, the holy writer implies, that they could not enter in because of unbelief. He bases this upon the preceding. We read in verse 16: "For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses." Literally we read: "For who, when they had heard, provoked him? Were they not all who had come out of Egypt by Moses?" This is surely verified by what we read in verse 10: "They do always err in their heart; and they have not known my ways." And this is also substantiated by the history of these terrible events, according to which all those of twenty years and upward perished in the wilderness. Of these we read that they provoked the Lord (verse 16), had sinned (verse 17), believed not or were disobedient (verse 18). It is plain, therefore, that they did not believe, and that it was impossible for them to enter into Canaan because of their unbelief.

And this is for us a very serious warning. Notice what we read in verses 12-13. Do we appeal to the fact that we are members of the church, and that we, therefore, have no need of this admonition of Holy Writ? However, let us remember that also all those who perished in the wilderness belonged to the church, the Church of the Old Dispensation. They, too, lived in God's house, whereof we read in this chapter; and yet they could not enter into the Rest because of their unbelief. Let us, therefore, take heed and give full consideration to this terrible example of Israel in the Old Dispensation.

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What a terrible example of unbelief we have here! The history is familiar to us. How wonderful had been the Lord's guidance of His people out of Egypt until now! How the Lord had displayed His power while Israel was in the land of bondage and when He had led them through the Red Sea! At Kadesh-Barnea, however, Israel had rejected the report of Joshua and Caleb, had accepted the majority report of the ten spies, and had refused to enter the land of Canaan because of unbelief.

What is unbelief? Unbelief must never be confused or identified merely with doubt or distrust. God,

then, had promised the people of Israel the land of Canaan. The ten spies, however, had emphasized in their report the difficulty of Israel's task to subdue the land. And now, because of the difficulties confronting them and aware of their own weakness, the people of the Lord did not believe in the sense that they doubted whether the Lord would give them the victory.

This presentation of unbelief, however, cannot be accepted. On the one hand, unbelief must never be identified with mere doubt or distrust. To be sure, even if Israel had doubted the word of the Lord, this would have been a serious offence. However, unbelief is never mere distrust; it is always an act of the will, rooted in the heart, a wilful refusal to believe in God and in His Christ, a godless refusal to enter into God's rest in the way of repentance and faith. Moreover, and on the other hand, that Israel's unbelief is not to be confused with doubt is obvious from two incidents in this history. First, this is certainly refuted by the example of the faith of Joshua and Caleb. And, secondly, that Israel did not refuse to enter Canaan because of fear appears from the fact that, shortly afterward, they did attempt to conquer the land but were driven back by its inhabitants.

Unbelief is always the wilful rejection of and rebellion against the Lord and the Voice of the Most High. The viewpoint of this text is not that of God and His promise. It is surely not true that the Lord would give them the promised land, that "if only the Lord had His way" all would have entered, but that the Lord was frustrated in His desire by the unbelief of the people. Indeed, it never was the Lord's intention to bestow upon all Israel the land of Canaan. This is surely corroborated by Rom. 9:6-8, Gal. 3:16, 19, and Hebrews 6:17-19. The viewpoint of this text, however, is that of *Israel's* not entering, *Israel's* refusal to inherit the land of Canaan, *Israel's* unbelief and refusal to enter into the rest of the Lord. The viewpoint of the text is, subjectively, the sin of Israel.

To understand this unbelief of Israel we must understand the land of Canaan. Canaan was certainly a land flowing with milk and honey. This is

confirmed by the return of the spies with a cluster of grapes that had to be carried by two men. Indeed, God had spoken the truth when He had spoken of the richness of the land. This is the significance of that cluster of grapes. Canaan, however, was the land of the promise. And this does not merely mean that it had been promised, but also that it was characterized by the promise. Everything in that land would remind them of the promise. Everything in that land centered in the promise. It is for this reason that an entering and inheriting of the land of Canaan would be inseparably connected with a walking in the ways of the Lord. Always the people must walk with their eye upon the Christ. Always they must separate themselves from the idolatries of the nations around them, and conduct themselves as the people of the Lord. And this also applies to us as in the New Dispensation. To enter into the heavenly Canaan we must walk as heavenly citizens.

This explains Israel's unbelief. Indeed, it had become plain to them from the report of the spies that they could receive this land only out of the hand of the Lord. But then they must also continue to walk in the ways of the Lord. Israel, however, did not believe. They hated God and His statutes. They despised the thought of entering Canaan as God's people, to be devoted to the living God. And, therefore, they refused, wilfully, to enter into the promised land.

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How must we explain this terrible unbelief? Israel lived in the house of God. We may apply this, first of all, to Israel in the old dispensation. We read of this house of God and of the Voice of the Son of God which is heard in this house in this chapter, verses 2-7. In this house of God the Voice of God is heard, the Voice of the Son of God as it speaks of His eternal covenant and all things connected with that covenant. And this Voice must and shall be heard and answered! Also Israel lived in this house of God. It is true that this house of God in the old dispensation was a house of shadows and types. But there is essentially no difference between this house of God as in the old and new dispensations. In this house Israel heard the Voice of the Son of God. It is true that this voice came to Israel from God through Moses. But Israel knew that it was not Moses but God Who had dried up the Red Sea and had led them until now. God had spoken to His people through all these signs and wonders. And Israel always heard that Voice of God. Through all these things God had spoken to them of His covenant and salvation, of eternal life and peace, but also of their calling to walk as a redeemed people and in the ways of the Lord.

And we, as in the new dispensation, hear the same Voice of God. Indeed, we live in the new

dispensation, the day of the fulfillment. This Voice we hear through His Word and testimony. From infancy on we have been in contact, as in God's house, with His testimony, through His word and sacrament, in the home, the church, and the school. And it is always the same language: we are hopelessly lost in sin, redeemed and saved by the blood and Spirit of Christ, and therefore called to walk in all the precepts of the Lord.

Now we also understand the possibility of Israel's terrible unbelief. Indeed, all men are sinners, all sin is disobedience, and all disobedience provokes the Lord. But it is especially in God's house, in the sphere of God's covenant, that this sin attains to its most abominable manifestation. We know the history. Israel had become accustomed to this Voice of God! Israel had become sick of the most wonderful mercies of the Lord! They had become "used to" the wonderful delicacies of God's covenant. Now, at Kadesh-Barnea, they were "fed up" with God, refused to enter in. And this also applies to us as in the new dispensation. Indeed, also the heathen are sinners. But in the house of God, in the Church, in the sphere of His covenant, where we come daily into contact with God's eternal covenant, with the divine command of repentance and faith which is general, and the particular promise of God's rest for the weary and heavy laden, we trample these wonderful truths of God's covenant under foot, refuse to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ because such faith requires that we walk in all the ways of the Lord. This is the sin of the sinner; for it he is held accountable.

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How serious is the warning that comes to us from this history! O, this history does not imply that it is ever possible for any of God's elect to perish. This is impossible.

Nevertheless, we do well to take heed — see verse 12. In the first place, there is in the midst of the church always much flesh, much chaff, much carnality. There are, on the one hand, all those who are called Israel but are not Israel. But, on the other hand, also as far as the children of God are concerned, there is much sin and carnality in the life of every child of God. We have within us but a small principle of the new obedience.

Unbelief always makes it impossible to enter into the land of Canaan. Please notice that we read in the text that they could not enter in because of unbelief. They perished in the wilderness, eternally. They did not simply die, pass away; they perished, the curse of the Lord pursued them, struck them down in the wilderness. They could not enter because of unbelief. They did not perish because of the terrible wilderness, because of the mighty heathen nations,

because they were few and weak. One child of God could have put a thousand to flight. They did not enter in, could not enter in, because of unbelief.

This is also applicable today. That we do not enter into God's rest is not because of the powers of sin and death all around us, is not because that world is too mighty and strong — God has overcome and destroyed that world in Christ Jesus. But the flesh is unbelieving, and unbelief can never enter into the rest of God. This is surely true of the reprobate sinner. But this also applies to the children of God. When we are assailed by unbelief, fail to walk out of faith, then it is impossible for us to walk with our eye fixed upon the city that has foundations.

Let us, therefore, take heed! Are we entering into the eternal Rest? Are we enroute to Sion? Is this faith

wholly foreign to us? Remember: unbelief can never enter into the Rest. And the command of God remains: repent! Or, are we as children of God enroute to the city that has foundations? Consciously? Are we struggling to Sion's top? Or, do we lack that joy and assurance of entering into eternal glory? Let us examine ourselves. Take heed, lest there be in us an evil heart of unbelief? Unbelief never enters, cannot enter; we enter in only through faith! God has fought the battle for us; Christ suffered and died; in Him we have the victory.

Unbelief always fails!

Faith never fails!

Believe in Him, the Author and Finisher of the faith, the Captain of our salvation!

EDITORIAL

The GKN and the Wiersinga Case-Sequel

Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

As long ago as 1971 Dr. H. Wiersinga, who performs pastoral work among the students in Amsterdam, publicly denied in his doctoral thesis the cardinal Reformed truth of Christ's atonement. He taught what has come to be called briefly "a doctrine of effective reconciliation," but he denied the truth that Christ bore the wrath of God in our stead. It was not long after the publication of Dr. Wiersinga's thesis — and he obtained a doctoral degree from the Free University of Amsterdam for this thesis — that his denial of the truth of the atonement became a case pending before the General Synod of the Gereformeerde Kerken. And although in 1972 the Synod of the GKN sent out a pastoral letter to reassure the churches with respect to their adherence to the truth of the atonement, nevertheless it was not until June of 1974 that the Synod finally took a decision with respect to this essentially simple case.

It was sad enough that it took a Reformed Synod so long a time to reach a decision with respect to the denial of this cardinal truth.

It was even more sad, however, that the decision which was reached was, from a Reformed point of view, anything but satisfactory. (For this decision and our comments about it, see the *Standard Bearer* of August 1974.)

There was considerable dissatisfaction in the Dutch churches about the Synodical decision of June, 1974.

A society known as the Reformed Confessional Council — in my opinion, a rather moderate organization — published an open letter addressed to the Synod, the churches, and the church membership. In this letter it expressed unequivocally its feeling of doubt, concern and responsibility. The letter saw the churches being led along the wrong path of a dialogue-church and of the forsaking of the confession. Partly through this letter, but partly also on their own initiative, no less than 124 churches, five classes, one particular synod (of Drente) and almost two hundred individual members addressed the synod in writing about this matter. It should be remembered, by the way, that in the Dutch churches the Synod meets over a two-year period in several sessions, so that it was possible to address the same synod which made the decision in June of 1974. Hence, while this could hardly be called a *storm* of protest, nevertheless the Synod was confronted by considerable reaction against its decisions of June. These were given into the hands of an advisory committee. This advisory committee pointed out that much of the correspondence which was received could have been declared out of order on the grounds of the Church Order; nevertheless, the committee felt that this correspondence could not be ignored because of the widespread dissatisfaction with Synod's decision of June. It seems that most of the correspondents complained about a lack of clarity

and about ambiguity in the June decision. Hence, the Synod was moved to reconsider its earlier decision, not for the purpose of revision, nor for the purpose of sharpening that decision (for it was explicitly denied by the committee that this was the purpose of its advice), but for the purpose of clarification. The advisory committee was of the opinion that Synod had clearly rejected Dr. Wiersinga's views as being in conflict with the confessions, but that the judgment of the Synod was spread out over the several points of the decision, and could be stated more clearly and directly.

What clarifications, then, were made?

We shall not quote all of the considerations and all of the points of Synod's decision, but try to point out the chief elements of clarification in Synod's decision of November 22, 1974.

The main element of clarification is the following: "Finally, the Synod declares that by denying that Christ has borne the judgment of God in our place Dr. Wiersinga has attacked an essential element of the doctrine of atonement of the Confession and derogates from the proper preaching of the gospel." We point out that this is not a new decision, but that it states more forthrightly something that was already included in the previous decision.

The second element of clarification concerns Synod's conduct and course of action with respect to Dr. Wiersinga in the immediate future. In this connection Synod declared that it was incorrect to refer the current question concerning the atonement and concerning Dr. Wiersinga's objections to the Study Commission for Church and Theology. It belongs to the task of this Commission only to serve Synod with advice in matters of doctrine and life *before* such matters have been brought to the point of a responsible synodical decision. But Synod also made a further clarification. In the decision of June, 1974 the Synod decided to make an earnest appeal to Dr. Wiersinga to listen to the judgment of the Synod and to consider whether his position was not in need of revision, "and to do so *in the expectation* that in his official work he will not contradict this confession of the church." (Italics added) It was the apparent weakness of the italicized words that was the occasion of much dissatisfaction with this decision. This the Synod has somewhat clarified by deciding to write to Dr. Wiersinga and to make "an emphatic appeal to him to remain faithful to Confession of the church, also with respect to Christ's bearing of the judgment of God in our place, and to inform him that the Synod has appointed a committee with the mandate to elucidate the appeal made to him insofar as this is necessary, and, further, to confer with him concerning all questions which may still arise upon the occasion of this appeal, and, further, to request

him to send his answer to this appeal if possible to this Synod." In this connection we may mention that Synod appointed such a committee to confer with Dr. Wiersinga, and that they gave the committee the mandate to report if possible to the present Synod, and at the latest to the first session of the next following general Synod.

These are really the only significant points of clarification. While there were apparently several objections to these changes on the floor of the Synod because some thought that this new decision was intended to serve as a kind of ultimatum to Wiersinga, the committee and the supporters of this decision insist that this is not the intention. It would appear, moreover, that this is indeed true. For in its decision Synod pointedly avoided any measures of discipline. The Synod declared the following: "The present Synod has with respect to Dr. Wiersinga correctly not considered any measure of suspension or deposition: it still saw sufficient reasons to continue the discussion with him; besides, it was not authorized to take any measures of suspension or deposition." The reference in the last statement here is to consideration 4 in Synod's new decision, which points out that the matter of suspension or deposition is one for the local congregation. Suddenly, it seems, the Synod has become very pious about maintaining this principle of Church Government. There was a time, of course, when the general Synod of the GKN did not hesitate to suspend and depose officebearers right and left. Now, however, when they want to avoid any suggestion of discipline of Dr. Wiersinga, they become very insistent upon the rule that discipline is the business of Dr. Wiersinga's consistory. We do not quarrel, of course, with this principle; we do quarrel, however, with the Synod's sincerity.

What about all this?

Has anything really changed?

Our answer is negative. There has been a degree of clarification in the decision. This we will not deny. It is true that the Synod has stated more clearly than before that Dr. Wiersinga's position is in conflict with the Reformed Confession.

However, this very clarification only serves to emphasize the inconsistency of Synod's decision.

Notice, in the first place, that Synod very deliberately fails to take the slightest measure of discipline and fails to advise the slightest measure of discipline *although it admits* that Dr. Wiersinga's theology is in conflict with the Reformed Confession. The Synod lays no prohibition upon him. In fact, the Synod does not even demand a satisfactory answer, but only requests such an answer *if possible* at the present Synod (which already allows Dr. Wiersinga time until the Spring of 1975).

In the second place, notice that Synod only makes "an urgent appeal." What is that? We can certainly agree with Rev. W. C. van den Brink in *Waarheid en Eenheid* (Nov. 30, 1974) when he points out that when it comes to church discipline in Reformed churches, as long as they have existed, the correct word is not "appeal" but "admonition." He makes reference to the fact that in bygone years those who made confession of faith would be asked whether they would submit to the *admonition* and discipline of the church. And he writes: "That was church style in a time when ecclesiastical decisions had more authority than a dialogue with an earnest appeal." We agree with this. To this date Synod has taken no single measure of discipline, nor advised such discipline, nor warned of such discipline, nor promised such discipline in the future in the entire Wiersinga case. And we agree with the Rev. van den Brink also when he writes: "If you are convinced that a preacher does not preach according to the Word of God, the church must put an end to that *now, today.*"

Meanwhile, the compromisers, who would maintain the unity of the GKN apparently at all costs, are already rejoicing about this decision. According to a report in *RES News Exchange* (Jan. 7, 1975), "Dr. K. Runia, writing in *Centraal Weekblad*, points out that Dr. Wiersinga's proclamation is not hereby condemned without qualification as 'false.' In denying an essential part of the atonement, he does not do justice to the full message of the gospel. But, Dr. Runia goes on to say, he who fails to proclaim the aspect emphasized by Dr. Wiersinga also does not do justice to the fulness of the gospel."

Runia is soft-pedalling even this decision of Synod. For he speaks of "the full message of the gospel." The Synod, however, spoke of "an *essential element* of the doctrine of atonement of the Confession."

Moreover, according to the same issue of *RES News Exchange*, Dr. H. Ridderbos writes: "It is clearly the Synod's opinion . . . that the church's confession and the right proclamation of the gospel are matters that cannot be left to the individual freedom of those who are to proclaim the gospel in

the worship services of the church. For this reason a strong appeal has been made to Dr. Wiersinga. No ultimatums, however, have been issued. There has been room preserved for continued co-deliberation and discussion. I rejoice at this approach, for I still am unable to believe that the only alternative for a solution to such problems consists in either a formal process of discipline or in a so-called pluralistic concept of the church in which individual freedom has the last word. There has to be another way: one that is in accordance with the nature of the church and with the functioning of many members within the one body, as so clearly explained to us in Scripture. This creates mutual obligations — sometimes even self-denial."

Dr. Ridderbos is whistling in the dark. The history of the church abundantly proves that the alternatives for heretics are: discipline or repentance. Failure to insist on these alternatives will not result merely in a "pluralistic concept of the church." This is a deceptive euphemism. It will result in the destruction and death of the church.

I repeat what I stated at the conclusion of my last editorial on this subject:

"The church is not dependent on numbers nor can the GKN retain or regain their true identity as a Reformed denomination by coddling heretics, though they may retain thousands of members. Nor can the lie or the toleration of the lie save the church!

"If a church would retain its identity as church and save itself when threatened by enemies from within, then it must maintain the truth of the Word of God without compromise, must exercise the lie and false doctrine, must expel unrepentant heretics. This is the only salvation of a church, any church. For the chief mark of the church is the pure preaching of the Word!

"And if this can only be done at the expense of numbers, yea, at the expense of the vast majority of a church's membership, so that only a remnant, a tenth, is preserved, — well, so be it, then. It is better, infinitely better, to be small but faithful than to be large but corrupt!"

. . . In like manner Job blesses God, and confesses that he was plundered by the robbers, not only through the permission, but by the will and act of God; for he plainly affirms "that it was the Lord who gave, and that it was the Lord who took away," what He had Himself given. If, upon your authority, giving and receiving are to be understood in the same way as willing and permitting, riches so considered are not blessings actually bestowed of God, but they fall into our hands at random by the permission of God. But if you and your foul band should continue thus to cry out against God until doomsday, He will nevertheless, in due time, fully justify and vindicate Himself. But as for us, we will adore with all reverence those mysteries which so far surpass our comprehension, until the brightness of their full knowledge shall shine forth upon us in that day when He, Who is now seen "through a glass darkly," shall be seen by us "face to face." "Then (saith Augustine) shall He be seen in the brightest light of understanding that which the godly now hold fast in faith. How sure, certain, immutable and all-efficacious, is the will of God! How many things He can do which He yet wills not to be done; but that He wills nothing which He cannot do!"

—John Calvin, *The Secret Providence of God*, pp. 288, 289

QUESTION BOX

About Matthew 5:44-48

Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

About Matthew 5:44-48

At the time of my lecture at Calvin Theological Seminary I offered to answer in writing any question for which time did not permit an oral answer. From a Christian Reformed minister who was present I received two questions, the first of which is as follows: "How do you reconcile God's commanding us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44, 45, 48) in order that we may show the attitude He does with your view that He has *nothing but* hatred for them?"

Reply

There is a fallacy in this question with respect to our view. The fallacy is not stated, but implied. And that fallacy is this: that God has nothing but hatred for *all* His enemies. This is really the same fallacy, but from the opposite point of view, which is implied in the Christian Reformed use of Matthew 5:44-48 and Luke 6:35, 36 in support of the First Point of 1924. The implied fallacy in that regard is that God loves *all* His enemies. And this really proves too much with respect to the First Point. For the First Point seeks to make a distinction in the favor of God between His favor toward the elect and His favor toward the reprobate. But Matthew 5 makes no such distinction in the love of God, but speaks of only one, perfect love of God. This one, perfect love of God is not revealed to *all* His enemies, is not revealed to the reprobate. But God's love, as a love that is capable of being merciful and kind to His enemies, is revealed only to the elect. He loved us when we were yet enemies. The point, therefore, of this passage with respect to the love of God is not the *scope* of that

love, but the *nature* of that love: it is a love that is capable of being merciful and kind to His enemies.

To sum up, this is our position with respect to Matthew 5:44-48:

1. God revealed His love and caused His people to know and to taste that love as a love that is capable of being merciful and kind to His enemies. And this is the only love of God that is mentioned in the context of both passages (Luke 6:35, 36 included).
2. The children of God, in whose hearts this love of God is poured out, and who experienced and tasted this love of God to His enemies, must manifest this same love in their life and walk in the world. Hence, they must love not only those that love them, but also their enemies, that revile and persecute them. They must do good to them, pray for them, and bless them. In doing this they manifest the image of their Father which is in heaven.
3. As a most general example of this they must look at God's work in nature, where He causes His sun to rise on the veil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. The point of this example is not the *commonness of God's love*, but the *commonness of rain and sunshine*, and that, too, as an example of the fact that *we* must manifest *our* love without distinction.

If I have missed the point of my questioner, he is certainly welcome to write again.

[Note: I have a few more questions on hand, both in connection with my lecture and of a general scope. I will try to furnish some more answers in the next issue. HCH]

TAKING HEED TO THE DOCTRINE

"Hyper-Calvinism" and the Call of the Gospel (7)

by Rev. David Engelsma

The two preceding articles in this series attempted to demonstrate that the ground for rejection of the notion of the well-meant offer of the gospel is not

hyper-Calvinism, but the Reformed faith itself. They contended that the doctrine of the offer makes the grace of God universal, thus contradicting the

Reformed doctrine of particular, sovereign grace, and that the doctrine of the offer necessarily implies the heresy of free will. This article will conclude the effort begun in the two preceding articles: showing that we oppose the offer in the name of Calvinism.

In future articles, I intend to point out that denial of the offer does not destroy the serious call of the gospel or the personal "addressability" of the preaching; to consider the position of the Reformed faith in history on the call of the gospel; and to give a warning against permitting opposition to the offer to degenerate into neglect of the call of the gospel itself, that is, a warning against hyper-Calvinism.

The offer of the gospel leaves tracks wherever it goes that plainly identify it as Arminianism, not Calvinism. One of these is the denial of reprobation. Invariably, the defense and practice of the offer is attended by a silencing or corrupting of the Reformed doctrine of reprobation. A striking example of the perversion of the doctrine of reprobation in the interests of the offer of the gospel is A. C. De Jong's *The Well-Meant Gospel Offer*. De Jong was concerned to defend the well-meant offer. But he had to face Hoeksema's objection that the doctrine of reprobation exactly denies that God is gracious to all, desires the salvation of all, and well-meaningly offers Christ to all in the preaching. De Jong's solution was to oppose "Hoeksema's doctrine of reprobation." "Hoeksema's doctrine of reprobation renders the reliability of God's unsimulated call to salvation disputable" (p. 122). "Our chief objection to Hoeksema's view of reprobation is that it transforms the gospel into a message which renders suspect the reliability of God's will to save as this is revealed in the call to faith, in the conditional offer of salvation" (p. 123).

It soon becomes evident, however, that De Jong is not opposed to some private view of Herman Hoeksema, but to the historic, creedal doctrine of reprobation of the Reformed faith. According to De Jong, reprobation has to do with the fact that God "will surely condemn those who wilfully and persistently oppose his word which is given and spoken for the purpose of salvation" (p. 122). De Jong's departure from the Reformed doctrine of reprobation and his subscription to the classic Arminian view of reprobation become apparent when he describes reprobation thus: "No one disbelieves because he is a reprobate. He is a reprobate because he does not want to believe, because he wills to live without God, and because he resists the redemptive will of God revealed in the gospel call" (p. 130). Reprobation, on this view, is God's decree that those men who persistently reject the offer of the gospel shall be damned. The decree of reprobation is a conditional decree, a decree dependent upon the

unbelief of men in the face of God's desire and attempt to save them.¹

This was the view of reprobation which the Arminians attempted to introduce into the Reformed Churches in the 17th century. Reprobation conditioned by unbelief was the counterpart of an election conditioned by faith in the first article of the Arminian "Remonstrance of 1610": "(reprobation is God's decree) to leave the incorrigible and unbelieving in sin and under wrath and condemn them. . ." In the "Opinions" which they submitted to the Synod of Dordt, the Arminians described reprobation in this way: "Rejection from eternal life is made on the basis of a consideration of antecedent unbelief and perseverance in unbelief; not, however, apart from a consideration of antecedent unbelief and perseverance in unbelief."²

The Synod of Dordt rejected as heretical the view that reprobation is merely God's indefinite decree to damn whoever happens to reject the offer of the gospel and the view that reprobation is God's decree to damn certain men because of foreseen unbelief. In article VIII of the rejection of errors under the first head of doctrine, the Synod rejected the errors of those "Who teach: That God simply by virtue of his righteous will, did not decide either to leave anyone in the fall of Adam and in the common state of sin and condemnation, or to pass anyone by in the communication of grace which is necessary for faith and conversion. . ." In support of reprobation "simply by virtue of His righteous will" and against a doctrine of conditional reprobation, the Synod quoted Rom. 9:18; Matt. 13:11; and Matt. 11:25, 26.

The Reformed doctrine of reprobation is that God has eternally decreed, "out of His sovereign, most just, irreprehensible and unchangeable good pleasure," that certain, definite members of the human race will not be saved by Him, but that they shall perish in their unbelief and other sins.³ Reprobation is God's eternal decree that the destiny of certain men shall be everlasting death, whether one views it as God's passing those men by with the grace of election or as the determination to damn. The cause of this decree is not the unbelief and disobedience of the reprobated, but the sovereign

¹This view of reprobation is by this time widespread in Reformed churches. The influential Berkouwer advanced it in his *Divine Election*. James Daane gives expression to it in his recent *The Freedom of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973): "any doctrine of reprobation is illegitimate by biblical standards except that which biblical teaching sanctions: that he who rejects God, God rejects" (p. 200). This view of reprobation brings these men into irreconcilable conflict with the Canons, as they well know.

²The 8th of the Remonstrant, or Arminian, opinions regarding the decree of predestination. For these "Opinions," cf. *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, Peter Y. De Jong, editor (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 1968), pp. 221ff.

³Canons of Dordt, I, 15.

good pleasure of the decreeing God. Reprobation is not a conditional but an unconditional decree. That this is so is evident from the Canons. According to the Canons, reprobation is the decree “not to bestow upon them saving faith and the grace of conversion” (I, 15). If reprobation is the decree not to give a man faith, it is patently false to say that unbelief is the cause of reprobation. That would be the same as to say that my decision not to give a beggar a quarter is due to the beggar’s not having a quarter. That reprobation is an unconditional decree is also plain from the fact that if unbelief were the cause of reprobation, all men would have been reprobated, and none would have been elected, for all men are equally unbelieving and disobedient. Scripture teaches that reprobation is God’s sovereign, unconditional decree to damn some sinners. This is the inescapable implication of the Biblical doctrine that God has unconditionally chosen some men, not all, unto eternal life. This is also the explicit teaching of Scripture. In Romans 9, Paul ascribes God’s hardening of some unto damnation simply to God’s will (vs. 18) and finds in the sovereignty of the Potter the authority both to make a vessel unto honor and to make a vessel unto dishonor — from the same lump of clay (vss. 21-23).

It is not at all surprising that advocates of the free offer oppose the Reformed doctrine of reprobation, for reprobation is the exact, explicit denial that God loves all men, desires to save all men, and conditionally offers them salvation. Reprobation asserts that God eternally hates some men; has immutably decreed their damnation; and has determined to withhold from them Christ, grace, faith, and salvation. The Reformed doctrine of reprobation and the theology of the well-meant offer are diametrical opposites.⁴ To affirm the offer is to deny reprobation.

But a denial of reprobation is necessarily also a denial of election. If reprobation is made a conditional decree, the decree to condemn whoever rejects the offer, election becomes a conditional decree also, the decree to save whoever accepts the offer. This is the goal that Arminian theology and the proud heart of man singlemindedly pursue, for this is the blasphemous claim that we save ourselves. The attack on election is out in the open today in the Reformed sphere. When a Reformed theologian of vast erudition can write a 330 page book on election without ever once saying that God elected certain, particular men in distinction from others, as G. C. Berkouwer did in *Divine Election*, the cat is out of the bag. When, in addition, Reformed theologians warn against thinking of any reprobation in connection with election, it is apparent to him with even the least sensitive of “Reformed antennae” that

a rampaging universalism is destroying the Reformed doctrine of election.⁵

Other zealous defenders of the offer handle the problem of the opposition between the doctrine of the offer and reprobation by studiously ignoring reprobation. The silence on reprobation in many Reformed pulpits and in the writings of many Calvinistic Baptists is deafening. It must be very difficult to read the Bible without seeing reprobation. How does one manage it as he reads the Old Testament with its message of God’s choice of one nation unto life out of many nations left to perish in their sin? How can one remain ignorant of reprobation when he reads freely in the New Testament — Matthew 11:25-27, John 10, Romans 9, I Peter 2:8, Jude 4? One could only conclude from the silence of many on reprobation that there is no reprobation. But if there is no reprobation, neither is there any election.

The recourse of some to “the mystery” to solve the problem of the contradiction between the free offer and the Reformed doctrine of reprobation is both desperate and erroneous. Such like to speak of the paradox of God’s two wills: His will to save and His will not to save the same man. For God to love and to hate the same man, to desire to save and to reprobate the same man, to be gracious in the preaching of the gospel towards and to harden the same man, is sheer contradiction. The reality of the two-fold will of God is quite different. It has to do with the fact that God at the same time decrees that a man shall not be saved (the will of God’s decree) and commands that man to repent and believe (the will of God’s precept). The serious, external call of the gospel does justice to both of these aspects of God’s will, but the offer of the gospel places a contradiction in God.

Another Arminian footprint of the well-meant offer is the teaching of universal atonement. Almost thirty years ago, Herman Hoeksema prophesied that “those that preach a well-meaning offer of God to all

⁴Men like to throw up the smokescreen that it is only the supralapsarian view of reprobation that rules out the well-meant offer, just as they like to disguise their opposition to reprobation as opposition to supralapsarianism (“Hoeksema’s doctrine of reprobation”). The last word has not been spoken in the brotherly debate within the Reformed camp over infra- and supralapsarianism. But this difference has absolutely no bearing on the issue of the offer. It is the Reformed doctrine of reprobation, whether viewed in an infra- or in a supralapsarian manner, that condemns the offer and that must give place where the offer is found.

⁵cf. Lewis B. Smedes, *All Things Made New* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970): “We will never think of election as a grace-less, love-less decree to select some individuals for heaven and to reject other individuals for hell. The election in Christ is not a matter of numbers” (pp. 123, 124). His description of the Reformed doctrine of election is a caricature, but his point is clear: there is no reprobation, and election is election of every man. cf. also James Daane’s *The Freedom of God*: “The gracious elective . . . act of God . . . has no corresponding negative power that posits a reprobative counterpart . . . Election . . . has no counterpart, not even a negative reprobative counterpart” (p. 200).

men, must and will ultimately embrace the doctrine of universal atonement also.”⁶ The ground for this confident prophesy was: “God’s well-meaning ‘offer’ of salvation cannot possibly be wider in scope than the objective satisfaction and justification of the cross of Christ.” In the 1960’s, through the writings of Harold Dekker, professor of missions in its seminary, the Christian Reformed Church approved, if it did not adopt, the doctrine of universal atonement. What made this so significant was the fact that Dekker grounded his doctrine of universal atonement in the doctrine of the well-meant offer. Arguing for a universal love of God and a universal atonement, he wrote:

The universal love of God is also revealed in His invitation of the gospel, sincerely extended to all without reservation or limitation.

Moreover, God’s sincere invitation of the gospel to all involves His desire that it be accepted by all.

... is the salvation which the atonement provides available to all men? Indeed it is. Otherwise the well-meant offer of the gospel is a farce, for it then offers sincerely to all men what cannot be sincerely said to be available to all.⁷

When his teaching of universal atonement was challenged, Dekker defended it with an appeal to the doctrine of the offer of the gospel adopted by the Christian Reformed Church in the first point of common grace of 1924. In an article entitled, “Redemptive Love and the Gospel Offer,” he wrote: “This article intends to set forth the universal factors inherent in the well-meant offer of the gospel. It carries one main thrust: *that the love of God expressed in the gospel and its universal invitation is truly a redemptive love and that the presentation of the gospel must express this principle.*”⁸ Replying to critics who objected that he taught an atonement which failed to save all those for whom it was made, Dekker showed them that this was no different than their teaching that God desired to save all but failed to do so, that is, that universal atonement is really no different than the well-meant offer of the gospel:

Why are my critics unwilling to recognize a paradox between a universal atonement and a limited redemption when this is so plainly taught in the Bible? Why are they unwilling to recognize a paradox of a redemptive love which does not always redeem when this is so clearly the presentation of Scripture? Do they suppose that such paradoxes as these are any greater or any more difficult to accept than the paradox which they affirm of a God who sincerely desires the salvation of all men and yet does not save them all?⁹

Dekker proved conclusively that the doctrine of the offer implies universal atonement and universal election (for a universal redemptive love is really

universal election), and the Christian Reformed Church, having said “A” in 1924, and “B” in the 1960’s.

Our opposition to the offer of the gospel is not academic. Through the teaching and practice of the offer, Arminianism has flooded the Reformed churches. Today, a Reformed man cries out: “O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance; thy holy temple have they defiled; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps” (Psalm 79:1).

The revivalistic, “soul-winning” mentality of free will has taken over among many Reformed people. The alter-call, that johnny-come-lately innovation of Finney, an abomination before God and man, is widely practiced in Reformed churches. The theology of Billy Graham is revered, so that if one dares to call the message of Graham “the doctrine of Pelagius out of hell,” as the Canons of Dordt do indeed call it, he is likely to be stoned as a blasphemer in the streets of Jerusalem. The children of the covenant are more and more viewed, not as covenant children to be reared in the truth, but as potential converts who must make the decision for Christ. Reformed churches are wide open to the most blatant Arminian, “free – willist,” “evangelistic” societies, e.g., Campus Crusade for Christ. They are ravaged by ecumenical endeavors based on Arminian universalism, e.g., Key ’73. Loosened from their moorings by Arminianism, they are swept by every wind of doctrine that finds salvation in man’s feeling and experience, e.g., neo-Pentecostalism.

Reformed churches gladly receive, eagerly use, and enthusiastically distribute as a Bible a book that is nothing more than a man’s revision of Scripture along the lines of Arminian theology. Kenneth Taylor’s *The Living Bible* in all its versions and forms is the bible of Arminianism. If a Reformed man had done to the sacred Scriptures in the interest of the Reformed faith only one tenth of that which *The Living Bible* has done in the interest of Arminianism, he would be drawn and quartered in every pulpit and religious paper in the land. But concerning *The Living Bible*, nary a peep. Why not? Because the leaders have deluded Reformed people, or connived at their delusion, so that they no longer know that salvation is not of him that willeth or of him that runneth, but of God Who showeth mercy; and the people have loved their delusion.

⁶*The Death of the Son of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1946), p. 113.

⁷“God So Loved — All Men!,” *The Reformed Journal*, December, 1962, p. 5.

⁸*The Reformed Journal*, January, 1964, p. 8

⁹*The Reformed Journal*, September, 1964, p. 22 (reply to a letter).

There is only one hope for Reformed men and Reformed churches, and only the sovereign grace of God can realize it — back to Calvinism, the old

Calvinism of Dordt, of Calvin, of Augustine, of Paul. And this means the rooting out of the well-meant offer of the gospel. *(to be continued)*

FEATURE

The True Church

Rev. Ronald J. Van Overloop

The truth which the Church has developed out of God's Word makes up an organic unity. Each separate, individual doctrine takes its place within that body of truth. This organic body of truth as it is developed in time is always developed and apprehended by the Church as the Body of Christ. For an individual to apprehend that body of truth he must be a member of the Church as it manifests itself on earth in institutional form. That institutional form of the Body of Christ is the object of our attention in this article. In our examination of the True Church let us consider four things: First, What is the Church? What are the marks of the true Church? How is the true Church easily discernible from the false? And finally, what is our calling with respect to the true Church?

In order to understand the meaning of the true Church it is necessary that we make the distinction which the Belgic Confession makes, in articles 27 - 29, between the Church as an organism and the Church as an institute. (Because we cannot quote those articles here due to their length, please read them and keep them before you as you read this article.)

The organic Church is not a society of people, nor is it a mass mob. Rather it is a spiritual body of which Christ is the Head and the elect are the members. The fundamental idea of the Church in Scripture is that it is one living organism in Christ, made up of elect individuals who form a harmonious unity and entity in Christ. That Church as an organism is realized principally before the creation of the world, when God elected His people in His counsel. After the Judgment Day that Church will be completely realized in its glorified state. That Church is the gathering of the elect into the spiritual Body of Christ out of the whole human race and throughout the ages. But in time that living organism cannot be seen or perceived with our human senses. Although the Church is gathered in the world, it is not of the world. It is not physical, but spiritual. This organic Church possesses the attributes of catholicity, unity,

holiness and apostolicity. As such, this Church is an object of faith, not of our experience or of human perception.

But this Church does become manifest physically in institutional form as the gathering of believers and their seed. Therefore, we have the distinction between the Church visible and invisible, between the Church institute and organism. The organic Church, which consists of the elect, as the spiritual, heavenly Body of Christ, is essentially invisible. But wherever a group of believers and their seed are gathered in the name of Christ and confess their faith in Him and seal their confession with a godly walk, there the Church invisible and organic becomes visible in institutional form. The visible Church is then the gathering of believers and their seed organized into an individual congregation, functioning through the offices of elder, deacon, and minister. Article 28 of the Belgic Confession speaks of our duty to join this church as she manifests herself historically. That this admonition refers to joining the Church as institute is plain from the fact that it is impossible for man to join the organism of the Church, for that is the work exclusively of God. Also, when the Confession speaks of the marks of the true Church, then it refers to the Church as it is instituted by Christ in a local congregation.

There is at the basis of our subject the truth that it is the sacred duty of all to join themselves to the true Church. It is the will of Christ that the believer submit himself to the Church of Christ as it is instituted in the world, wherever that may be. The true member of the pure, organic Body of Christ seeks the Church in this world because he knows that he is not saved as a mere individual, but as a member of Christ's Body and that therefore he cannot live apart from it, in separation from the rest of the body of the elect. The new life of Christ within him seeks the fellowship of the other members of the Body.

On the other hand, those who cut themselves off from the pure proclamation of the Word of God

suffer a lack and commit spiritual suicide. When an arm is cut off from the human body, it dies. He who cuts himself off from the body of believers will die spiritually in his generations. That individual may be a believer, but when he separates from the true Church, he inevitably leads his children to spiritual death.

It would be very easy to obey the command to join the true Church, if all that there was upon this earth was the true Church. But the mandate and the calling to join the true Church is complicated by the presence of the false church. This development of the false church is due to the imperfection of the Church while she exists in this world. That imperfection is twofold. First, it is the presence of the carnal seed within the Church. Secondly, that imperfection arises from the fact that the believers themselves are not perfect, but have only a small beginning of the new obedience. Therefore the Church is open to all kinds of evil influences from within and from without. As a result, as the true Church manifests herself in the midst of the world, there is always at the same time a movement away from the truth. This movement away from the truth gives rise to the false church. Therefore there are today many different denominations and congregations. Though Christ prays for the unity of the Church in John 17, such unity hardly seems present. Yet each child of God has the clear calling to belong to the manifestation of the true Church on this earth. But to which church must one belong? Is it a matter of little or no concern to which church one belongs on this earth? Does not each church simply represent just another path to the same destination: heaven? Does one not have a certain obligation to remain in that church to which his fathers belonged, no matter in what spiritual direction it is headed? The answer to each of these questions is an unequivocal "NO". It does make a difference. It is the calling of the child of God to worship his God in the best possible way. God can require nothing less. God is not pleased when one is willing to compromise His Word for the sake of a marriage, a job, or for one's own convenience. It is then the calling of the Christian to worship God in that Church where God is most highly esteemed.

So that the child of God can judge in which Church God is best worshipped, there are certain marks which belong to the true Church and which therefore distinguish it from the false church. "The marks by which the true Church is known are these: if the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing sin: in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ

acknowledged as the only Head of the Church. Hereby the true Church may certainly be known, from which no man has a right to separate himself." (Belgic Conf., art. 29) These marks are not in denominations as such, but in individual congregations. The Body of Christ as the organism is not manifested in denominations, but in individual congregations. The autonomous congregation is the manifestation of the Body of Christ. It is in the congregation, not the denomination, that the Word is preached, the sacraments are administered, and discipline is exercised. However, unless a congregation is independent, it stands as part of a denomination. Therefore any decision made on a denominational level must and always does apply to the individual congregation which willingly makes itself a member of that denomination.

To find where the true Church is, the child of God must examine the preaching and the dogmas or doctrines which that congregation holds. Because of constant deformation which results from the presence of sin in the world, there are all sorts of congregations that assume the name "Church". Within these many different congregations there are differences in the way in which God is hallowed and worshipped. All of these congregations to different degrees either manifest or fail to manifest the three marks of the true Church. Therefore the marks are the distinguishing characteristics of the Church institute by which the true Church may be recognized in the midst of and in distinction from all aberrations and deformations.

However, there are some who would deny this. The ecumenicist wants to forget all ecclesiastical and denominational differences. The traditionalist, on the other hand, holds to the church or congregation in which he was born and raised. To cling to "my church — right or wrong" is idolatry. Personal and social ties may never obscure our loyalty to Christ and His Word. cf. Matt. 10:33-38, especially vs. 37. The fathers in the Belgic Confession give the correct answer when they say, "Hereby the true Church may be known, from which no man has a right to separate himself." It is a question whether members today will wholeheartedly subscribe to those words of the fathers. Many insist today that they cannot make out which is the true Church. Do they earnestly and eagerly submit themselves and their congregation to the scrutiny of God's Word? It is so much easier and comfortable to follow the line of least resistance. But every child of God has the obligation to discern "diligently and circumspectly" in the light of the Scriptures which is the true Church.

Scripture's requirement to come out of the dead or dying church is not a matter of minor importance. First, the sovereign God requires that He be

worshipped in Spirit and in truth. Can or dare mere creatures of the dust say to the Sovereign, "It does not matter how I worship, I can worship any way I want." God justly demands whole-hearted, holy worship of His name. Those concerned with their calling will worship their God in the best possible way. Secondly, such proper worship of Jehovah is more easily possible in the Church which is faithful to God's Word, for God's Word is the food essential for the spiritual welfare of the child of God. The Word of God purely preached is the food which feeds the spiritual soul of the child of God. It nourishes it and causes its growth. To eat poisoned, adulterated, or watered-down food does not feed the soul. Rather, such spiritual food either kills the soul or leaves it malnourished. As man worries about his physical body, making sure to have three square meals a day, so must he care for his spiritual soul. Thirdly, this is a matter of no little importance because of one's children. An individual may be able to live and exist spiritually outside of that Church which purely preaches the Word of God. But what about his children? They grow up not knowing any better. They hear the adulterated Word preached and it effects their spiritual life. Finally, this calling becomes more serious as we near the end of time. This Paul brings out in II Timothy 3:1, 5; 4:3, 4. We want, therefore, to join ourselves to that Church, which faithfully adheres to God's Word, with no carnal consideration prohibiting us from joining it, nor causing us to separate from it.

Let us now examine very carefully the three individual marks of the true Church. First of all, there is the pure preaching of God's Word. The preaching is the proclamation of the gospel, authorized by Christ, according to Scripture, performed by a minister and standing in the service of Christ. The Church alone can and may preach. It fulfills this calling through the ministry of the Word. The preacher as he is called and sent by the Church is strictly bound to the Word of Christ as it is contained in the Scriptures. The pure proclamation of God's Word is wholly dependent upon and subservient to the Word which Christ speaks. Therefore the preaching is powerful and efficacious only because it is God through Christ who speaks to the children of God, so that when they sit under the pure preaching, they do not hear a minister, but they hear Christ speaking to them. Therefore, it is only when, and in as far as the Church proclaims the Word of God, and only the Word of God, that Christ will use the preaching to bring His own Word to His people.

The second mark is the pure administration of the sacraments. In the administration of the sacraments; also, Christ is the chief subject. Therefore for them also to be purely administered they must be in

harmony with and subservient to the Word of God. They must be observed by the Church according to that Word of God and according to the institution of Christ. Only then and in as far as the Church is obedient to the Word of Christ, will Christ speak His Word through the signs of the sacraments.

This same idea comes to the fore in the third mark of the true Church: the exercise of Christian discipline. The keys of the kingdom are the power bestowed on the Church by Christ to open and to shut the kingdom of heaven. The keys represent actual power over the consciences of men. It is an opening and shutting of the kingdom of heaven within the consciences of men, so that they either rejoice to be within or are convinced of their being outside the kingdom of Christ. This power is possible only when Christ Himself speaks and employs the keys of the kingdom. Therefore, also with this mark of the true Church, it is only when and in as far as the Church applies those keys of the kingdom according to the Word of Christ in Scripture, that Christ Himself will work through the action of the Church and speak His own Word of power.

Essentially, the preaching is the chief distinguishing mark for the other two marks which depend upon and derive their power and efficaciousness from the Word of Christ, which He speaks to His people. Therefore, although all three are distinguishing marks of the true Church, it is safe to say that where there is pure preaching, there must also be proper administration of the sacraments and the correct exercise of discipline. Where the Word is not preached, there Christ is not present and where Christ is not present there is no Church. Therefore the pure preaching of the Word is an infallible distinguishing mark of the true Church. Where the preaching of the Word is corrupted, there the Church is corrupted and is moving in the direction of the false Church. The child of God must seek that Church where the heart of the preaching is the cross of Christ. For where there is cross-preaching, there will be an emphasis on total depravity, on the complete deliverance in Christ, on the sanctified walk which is the fruit of Christ's work within His people, etc. How do we determine where among the gatherings of this world Christ is? Christ is where the truth of His Word is proclaimed. Christ speaks where that pure Word is preached. The pure preaching is the all-important mark whereby we may distinguish the true church in the world.

The fathers in the Belgic Confession say that this true Church is easily known and distinguished from the false church. There are some who say that a Church is either completely true or it is completely false. This is not true. We must remember that in the many Church institutes there are varying degrees of the manifestation of the three marks. An individual

congregation does not become false suddenly, overnight, but only by stages in a process. We do not mean to minimize the sinfulness of the first departure, however insignificant it may seem, for a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. This is especially true today as we near the end of time when any deformation is accentuated greatly. Gradually the Holy Spirit withdraws from the erring congregation, taking with Him all the benefits of the true Church, so that in the end all of the truth is gone and all that is left is false. That a congregation is not completely false or completely true is seen from the fact that in the evaluation of the various churches of their time the fathers in the Belgic Confession did not apply the verdict of sect to the churches existent at that time, eg. Lutheranism. Even though the language of the article of faith indicates a strong aversion to Roman Catholic congregations, yet the baptism of those congregations has been and still is recognized as valid by Reformed congregations. Look at what John Calvin said of Rome under the leadership of the pope. "Hence it appears that we by no means deny that Churches may exist, even under his (the pope's — RVO) tyranny; but he has profaned them by sacrilegious impiety, afflicted them by cruel despotism, corrupted and almost terminated their existence by false and pernicious doctrines, like poisonous potions; in such Churches, Christ lies half buried, the gospel is suppressed, piety exterminated and the worship of God almost abolished; in a word, they are altogether in such a state of confusion, that they exhibit a picture of Babylon, rather than of the holy city of God. To conclude, I affirm that they are Churches, in as much as God has wonderfully preserved among them a remnant of His people, though miserably despised and dejected, and as there still remain some marks of the Church, especially those, the efficacy of which neither the craft of the devil, nor the malice of men can ever destroy." (Institutes, IV, 2)

Would it then be better to speak of one true Church and all kinds of false churches, i.e., to the extent that they have forsaken the marks of the true Church? The manifestation of the Body of Christ, in this world, in institutional form, cannot be equated with any ONE congregation or denomination. Nor can it be equated with ALL congregations or ALL denominations. From the beginning of time until the end, there is a line which runs through history: the line of the true Church. Always in history there is the true Church, which bears the three marks. A congregation which exists on that line upholds the three marks, and has for its doctrine all the truth of God's Word which has been developed up to that time. But that congregation, though it be on the line of the true Church, is not a perfect Church as far as its members are concerned. There are sinners, as well as

hypocrites, within that true congregation. But yet, that congregation stands four-square on the truth of God's Word. At the same time that there is the line of the true Church, historically there is another line: a line which runs parallel with it, representing the false church. Always historically this false church, as it is manifested in individual congregations, has been present right along with the true Church. The false church has her own marks or distinguishing characteristics, cf. Belgic Confession, art. 29. A false congregation does not have the word of Christ there, and therefore because Christ is not there, it has no believer within it. In a false congregation it can justly be said that there are NO believers, but it canNOT be said that in a true Church there are no UNbelievers.

Now then, between the two lines of the true and false church, as they exist historically, there are many other congregations and denominations. Those congregations which are neither completely true nor completely false are on the road of apostasy, for once they stood in the line of the true Church, but as soon as they adopted one single doctrine apart from the Word of God, they left the line of that true Church. And once they leave that line, they are on an inevitable road which leads down to the false. It is always a down-hill road because of the presence of sin. It may take a long time to reach the end of the road of apostasy, which is the false church, but nevertheless it is inevitable. It is always a down-hill road because the leaven of false doctrine permeates the whole lump of the truth slowly, but surely. Those drifting to the false church are true only in so far as they manifest the three marks of the true Church.* In the light of Scripture, we cannot say that there is one true Church and all kinds of false churches. First of all, we have the word of Christ in Revelation 2 and 3, where Christ is speaking to the seven congregations in Asia-Minor. Christ calls them Churches, true Churches, which have defects from which they must repent or die. Thus Christ shows that those true Churches which have defects are on the road of apostasy to destruction because they have those defects within them. Secondly, consider also the nation of Israel during the time of the reign of Ahab. Several times in the Scriptural narrative of the history of that nation from Jeroboam until Ahab, we read that each succeeding king did that which was evil in the sight of God, more than all that were before him. Therefore things steadily progressed downhill for Israel from a spiritual viewpoint. But yet, when Elijah was ready to throw up his hands in despair, God tells him that there is a remnant of 7,000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal. That remnant to which God referred was in the nation of Israel, not in Judah.

Because of this constant downhill road from the true to the false the command for continual

reformation is always in order. Even he who says that he is a member of the best manifestation of the pure marks has the calling continually to examine the truth and compare his congregation with that truth.

Now then, how can the fathers in the Belgic Confession say that the true Church is easily known and distinguished from the false? First, because God has given us a clear and infallible standard by which the true Church can be known and distinguished. That standard is His holy Word. Secondly, every believer, as a member of the body of Christ, has the Spirit as the Spirit of *truth* abiding within his heart. Thus he can discern what is true and what is false.

What is our calling with respect to the true Church? The Church in its organized form, both congregational and denominational, must always engage in testing its doctrine and life in the light of the marks of the true Church. There is always the command to continual reformation, which must be obeyed.

Our calling as individuals is to join that congregation which is the best manifestation of the body of Christ. Let no one say that it is not important; that it is only a difference of degree. To depart from the truth to any degree is a sin that, unless repented of, will be visited by punishment. This punishment in time is the gradual withdrawal of the Holy Spirit. Each individual child of God must be able to say that the Church of which he is a member best manifests the three marks of the true Church. This is exactly the meaning of the first question

which is asked of those who make public confession of their faith. Everyone must be, in his own consciousness, convinced that he belongs to the best manifestation of the pure marks of the true Church. If he is able to join a better manifestation of those marks, he must do so or become guilty of cooperating in evil and helping the false church.

Nor does he who is a member of the Church which he believes to be the best manifestation of the marks imagine that no one will be saved outside of the particular church or congregation in which he has his membership. Heaven is larger than any congregation or denomination. Nevertheless he abhors all departures from the truth and refuses to go along with any individual congregation or denomination that is moving in the direction of apostasy and falsehood. We all have the calling to bind ourselves to that Church in which we “diligently and circumspectly discern from the Word of God” to be the true Church, i.e., that congregation which best manifests the pure marks of the true Church.

*I do not think that it is really correct to speak of the true Church as the PUREST manifestation of the marks. If something is pure, it is pure. There is no comparative or superlative for the word “pure”. Notice that the Belgic Confession does not use the term “pure” in application to the manifestation of the three marks of the true Church. It speaks of the Church as being either true or false. But the confession does speak of the marks of the preaching of the Word and of the administration of the sacraments as being pure. Then, to distinguish between the various congregations which exist it would be more correct to speak of them as manifestations or revelations, better or worse, more or less, of the pure marks. There are, then, different degrees of the manifestation of the pure marks of the true Church.

ALL AROUND US

Prof. H. Hanko

Women Officebearers- A Response

A few issues ago, I commented in this column on a news item concerning the fact that Mrs. M. Rienstra, a student at Calvin Seminary, was available for preaching during the summer months. The news item said that additional information was available from Rev. Geleynse, who was in charge of student preaching at the Seminary. I concluded that this indicated that the preaching of Mrs. Rienstra had Seminary approval. Apparently this was not true.

Rev. W. Haverkamp has commented on this matter in *De Wachter*, and I spoke with Rev. Haverkamp personally during intermission at Calvin's annual rendition of “The Messiah” in the Civic Auditorium.

He told me in our personal conversation and wrote in *De Wachter* that there was misunderstanding on this point. He conveyed the following information. Women seminary students must take part in summer field work as well as other students, but this is with the exception of “speaking an edifying word”. Mrs. Rienstra made herself available for preaching on her own without the knowledge and consent of the Seminary. In fact, the Seminary does not make it a policy to give consent to preach. Further, Rev. Geleynse had, on his own and without the knowledge of the Seminary, offered information concerning Mrs. Rienstra to those who were interested in her

preaching, and this action was disapproved of by the Curatorium.

Hence, Rev. Haverkamp assures his readers that this is *not* a first step in the ordination of women ministers in the Christian Reformed Church.

We are glad to correct this and set the record straight on the matter. However, whether this is the end of the matter remains to be seen. In the Report of the Board of Trustees of Calvin Seminary, Synod

was asked "to charge its study committee on Women in Ecclesiastical Office to give specific consideration to the distinction between licensure and ordination, and exhorting and preaching, as this distinction may bear on the place of women in the seminary's field education." (Acts of Synod, pp. 28, 29.) This recommendation was adopted by Synod. What this committee will finally recommend and what the Synod will finally do remains to be seen.

Growth Of Private Schools

There is evidence that the growth of private schools continues unabated in this country. New private schools are constantly being built and existing private schools are increasing their enrollment.

The reason for this is not necessarily a growing interest in *religious* education; it is more an evidence of disillusionment with existing public schools. There are many reasons why people are no longer satisfied with public schools. Some of these reasons are the following. Most public schools are very careful in administering any type of corporal punishment, and many schools do not use such punishment at all. The courts of the land have sharply curtailed actions which once were taken for granted in the public school systems. Traditional public prayers and Bible reading have been banned. Students are not required to participate in the pledge of allegiance to the flag. Schools are limited in their right to suspend or expel students who have flagrantly disobeyed the rules of the school or made themselves obnoxious by their conduct. The control of the administration is sharply curtailed in matters of student dress. Racially integrated schools have created serious problems of discipline in many cases, and schools sometimes border on anarchy in the halls.

In several respects, this is an interesting development. This is especially true from the viewpoint of the development of a nation of absolute conformity. The public school system has become a mighty instrument in the hands of the government to promote the views of those who are in power. It has become an instrument for the establishment of an atheistic religion based on evolutionism. It has become a vehicle to bring about in this country a

kind of mass conformity in which the citizenry act more like puppets or robots than individuals who do their own thinking and who weigh government policy intelligently. And all this is a necessary step in the direction of the establishment of a government which is absolutely supreme in the lives of its citizens.

Private schools stand in the way of all this. In private schools education can still be given which is different from the education in public schools in important respects. It can be education where the bland and colorless "religion" of the public schools is counteracted. It can be education where children are taught to think for themselves and not to allow others in high office to think for them. It can be education where discipline is preserved in greater measure than in the public school systems. All these things are desirable in this land which is supposed to recognize the rights of minorities and which has guaranteed freedom in important areas of life.

The difficulty is that it takes a lot of money to operate private schools, and the government is increasingly placing the total burden for their support on the parents who send their children there. It is difficult, to say the least, for parents in our affluent age to pay money for education when free education is readily available to them. Whether people are sufficiently disillusioned with public schools to continue to pay such large sums of money as costs continue to soar remains a question. We are inclined to think that, in the final analysis, it will take deep principles to keep these schools operating in the face of rising costs. And finally, only those who are committed to covenantal education in the truth of the Scriptures will continue to support such schools.

Persecution In Russia

A recent issue of *Christianity Today* carried a rather lengthy article on persecution within Russia. It spoke of a number of actual cases of persecution which have come to the attention of people and organizations in the West. But it also made mention

of rather wholesale persecution of all churches and believers who will not permit themselves or their churches to be mere stooges of the government. The article spoke of the many forms this persecution takes. Sometimes leaders of the churches are jailed,

sentenced to hard labor, tortured and killed. It told of forced injections of drugs, of searches, of heavy fines and confiscation. It told of authorities who confiscate all the possessions of those who are unable immediately to pay fines levied against them, and of how these possessions are sold to passersby. It told of the confiscation of children who are then shipped off to state institutions for atheistic indoctrination. It told of believers who are incarcerated in psychiatric wards and treated as insane. It told of efforts put forth to confiscate printing plants which are used to print Bibles, Psalters, Hymnbooks, religious pamphlets and the like. The article speaks at length of one religious leader who has been twice imprisoned and whose health is completely destroyed. His four children have signed a statement which asserts that their mother was fired from her job because of her religious beliefs, that one daughter was fired from a hospital job because religion and medicine are incompatible, and closes with a statement; "If our father is not released and if measures are taken in prison which threaten his life, then know you that our entire family is filled with resolve to die alongside him. This we make known to you and believers around the world."

Many of those who are persecuted have brought their plight to the attention of leaders in the Kremlin; but they have gone further and informed leaders and organizations in the West of their suffering. Some appeals have been addressed to the World Council of Churches, but this organization has refused to act out of fear of offending the Russians who are members of it. Some appeals have gone to the United Nations, but this organization has yet to do anything about it.

It is well for us who still enjoy a great measure of freedom of religion to remember these saints in other lands who suffer persecution for the name of Christ. Their suffering is acute, and they know far better than we what it means to be faithful unto death. We must remember them in our prayers daily.

* * * * *

In other articles in this same issue, *Christianity Today* informs us that this same persecution is being carried on in some African Countries. One article which speaks of this persecution reads:

Another African nation has imposed a reign of terror on its citizens and, as in the case of Chad currently and Burundi earlier, suffering is especially intense among Christian believers. One-fourth of the 308,000 citizens of the tiny West African Republic of Equatorial Africa are in exile, tens of thousands have been murdered, most of the parliament members elected in 1968 have disappeared, and the prisons are overflowing according to an investigative report in *One World* . . .

The country is 98 per cent nominally Christian, mainly Roman Catholic, with strong Methodist and Presbyterian churches (the latter has about 10,000 communicants). Since 1968 most of the foreign missionaries have been expelled, and "the local clergy have been put under increasing pressure, including imprisonment and torture," says the report.

Additional information came from the Swiss League for Human Rights, which says Christians are being harassed in an atmosphere of "militant atheism." Church buildings have been confiscated, church leaders prevented from travelling, and special permits required for church meetings, asserts the league.

One World says a recent presidential decree requires priests and ministers to read a message extolling President Macias at every worship service, and every church building in the land to display his portrait.

* * * * *

In Spain, on the other hand, Protestants who have long suffered persecution from Roman Catholics, who constitute 99% of the population, are enjoying greater freedom than ever before. Spain itself is undergoing changes economically and politically, and these changes seem to be reflected in the religious scene. The 1953 Concordat between Spain and the Vatican is still in force, however. The first article of this Concordat reads: "The Catholic Apostolic Roman religion will continue to be the sole religion of the Spanish nation and will enjoy the right and prerogatives which are due it in conformity with the Divine Law and the Canon Law." Nevertheless, there is a growing tendency to leave the Concordat unenforced and to give Protestants the freedom of religion they have long sought.

Know the standard and follow it.

Read the STANDARD BEARER!

FROM HOLY WRIT

Exposition of Hebrews 12:3b,4

Rev. G. Lubbers

Constantly the writer has a practical aim in mind in writing to the Hebrew Christians. The danger is that they will lose heart and courage and give up in the mighty battle against the sin of unbelief which denies Jesus the Messiah. They must, therefore, look away to Jesus, study the Scriptures, give heed to the testimony of God concerning His Son, mark well the intensity of the battle of "sinners" against the Christ of God. He endures the contradiction of sinners *against Himself!*

This is the only antidote against becoming weary, tired, worn down and threadbare in their souls. It is the constant barrage of sinners which these saints have to endure. That is why they are in need of patience, and more strength of patient waiting for the Lord. They may not become despondent in their hearts at all due to labor and weariness. They must lift up their heads. Satan would wear out the saints by wearing them down physically, mentally and spiritually. If only the saints can be so enfeebled that they stumble and fall and succumb to his wiles. They may not faint. (Gal. 6:9; Matt. 15:32) Hence, look away from all else unto Jesus and see his mortal and victorious conflict with contradicting sinners.

THE ULTIMATE OF STRIVING AGAINST SIN NOT YET ENDURED (Hebrews 12:4)

The LORD reminds Jeremiah too that he has not yet endured the extreme of the suffering for the sake of the LORD as prophet. Says He, "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with the horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" This is Divine pedagogy to call a weary and harried warrior to his senses and to give him a heart of courage for the coming battles, after having passed through difficult battles before. Here we have a bit of chastening of the Lord for Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, during the time of Judah's deportation to Babylon, when he must meet the fierce opposition of reprobate sinners, who reject the Word of the LORD. And so it is with the writer as he addresses the Hebrews. They had, indeed, suffered much already for the sake of Christ and the Gospel of free grace and sovereign love. They have been deprived of their goods, thrown into prison, scorned and derided for the sake of Jesus, whom they loved; yet, with all this, they had *not yet* suffered the extreme and ultimate

form of persecution. They had not yet stood where the Lord places us when he says "Fear not those who can kill the body, but fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell." (Matt. 10:28)

In the fear and complaining there is, therefore, flesh and a sinful cleaving to this life which must be pointed out. They are impatient and they do not see their sufferings sufficiently in the light of the pedagogical dealings of the Father of lights. Their striving must be *against sin!* Yes, this is a mighty conflict. It is a battle even unto death. It is the mighty battle of the ages, the enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the Woman. The great cloud of witnesses looks on and the angels behold in rapt attention, and the Father's eye sees us and His ear is attentive to our cry of "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on earth?" (Rev. 6:10)

They had not yet endured unto blood. Things could be much worse. They must not blow up and exaggerate their sufferings either, and have a false persecution-complex or bathe themselves in self-pity. The ultimate price is a striving against sin which is unto blood. Now no one knowingly and willingly courts a martyr's death in sound spiritual life. Such was the sickly attitude of some in Church History. The thought behind such seeking of martyrdom was that this would be a kind of heroic death which would pay for their sins and merit a higher place in glory. The writer here to the Hebrews is not advocating a death "by blood"; he only means to tell the readers that they have not yet paid the ultimate price of striving against sin. When they will see this they will confess to their shame, that they should run their race which God has set before them in patience, and not become faint and weary in their souls. We see here that the Lord's way of correcting us is by telling us the truth as it is, correcting us as the Father of spirits that we may live.

THE CONSOLATION (EXHORTATION) WHICH SPEAKETH TO US AS TO SONS (Hebrews 12:5, 6)

It is for our very life's sake that we must bear in mind the exhortations and consolations of the LORD. Our spiritual bewilderment is never due to a lack of clarity on the part of the Word of God. The Lord does not come to us in the mutterings and peepings of the false prophets. (Isaiah 8:19) The people of God, the true sons should seek unto their

God and to His Word. And that is what the writer to the Hebrews does here. He causes the readers, the Hebrews and us, to listen to what God has spoken; we must heed his "consolation" in all our troubles.

The writer quotes from Prov. 3:11 to point out the Lord's consolation, His exhortation. Now this exhortation is very peculiar in nature; it is one that should be seen as a very particular consolation to God's sons. Wherefore the text adds (*heetis humin hoos hiuois dialegetai*) which (is of such a nature) that it speaks to you as to sons. We are addressed in the qualification as being sons, which stand in a peculiar relationship to the Father who addresses us. When this parent-child relationship is detected in this address then we are consoled as a child of the heavenly Father.

We ought to try to understand this just a bit more in depth. The Father in thus speaking to us meets us on our level as sons, yet he does not lower Himself to our level. This is not a dialogue between equals, but it is the Father speaking to us in such a way that *He* mingles thought with thought; He argues, discourses, warns, teaches us and gives us the truth in propositional form, applying the same by His Spirit to our hearts! He speaks with Fatherly authority and concern to us His sons; it is Fatherly concern for our benefit. And what the heavenly Father says here in Proverbs 3:11 is a word which is "relevant" to our needs. And all the spiritual children acknowledge this too. It is the flesh in us which rebels, and will not acknowledge that this word of the Father fits exactly with our needs, and, of course, the bastard sons in the church will always contradict this word of the Father, as hardened and unconverted sinners. Of the latter the writer will have some more to say.

But the writer is concerned with the sons of God, the Father of spirits, that they may live! Writes the Spirit in Proverbs 3:11, "My son, *despise* not the chastening of the LORD". The term for "despise" in the Hebrew is "*maas*" which means: to reject, as the very opposite of to choose. It is used of men rejecting God and His precepts (I Samuel 15:23; II Kings 17:15; Amos 2:4) To reject the consolation of the LORD is disastrous and fatal. One cannot despise the instructions of the Father with impunity. Here we must not despise the "chastening" of the Lord. This chastening here is not simply some correcting in general, but refers to the peculiar correcting which a father does toward his children. Hence, this is called in the Greek text "*paideias*". It is a correction of *children*, which intends to lead to wisdom, instruction and knowledge. To underscore that this correction of children often is painful for them, the text goes on to say "neither faint when thou art reprov'd of him". Now that was a very good explanation of the chastening on the former sentence. In the Hebrew parallelism of Proverbs 3:11 this is a

further elucidation and explanation of the thought. The correction is in the chastening as the desired effect and fruit. However, we must be able to stand this and not faint. For we faint when we reject the reproof and chastening of the Lord. Here you have the finest bit of spiritual psychiatry possible. It analyzes the matter of spiritual depression and shows up all the monkey-business of would-be advisers in the field of soul-care in the church. We must not listen to these mutterers and peepers, these wizards of deception. We must return to the law and to the prophets. Else there will be no dawn in the soul of the weary saints. For much spiritual depression is down-right sinful and rebellious against the Fatherly dealings of the chastisements of God in His church. The heavenly Father does not spoil His children by sparing the rod of affliction; He causes this to accompany His Word!

And the deepest and purest motive of God, the Father of Spirits is at stake. We must not ascribe evil to the Most High. In his heights of faith Job declares overagainst his wife's evil words "But he said unto her, Thou speaketh as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips". (Job 2:10) For even in this "evil" the LORD is good to us. He was thus to Job. The Lord's ways are in the holy place in His dealings with Job. He will shut the mouth of Satan concerning Job's reason for obeying God. But to do so He sends affliction in the life of this sinful-saint. And the outcome proves that Job loves the Lord, and that the LORD truly dealt with Job in love.

And this dealing with Job on the part of the Lord is not a mere isolated and exceptional case. Thus the LORD deals with every son which he loves. He chastises every son whom he loves. That is not some wishful, sentimental thinking, but it is the grandeur of the dealing of the Father of spirits. And that is divine consolation in its own right. The Lord has a great delight in His children. The Hebrew text emphasizes this and reads "every son in whom He delighteth". This is the divine delight in which the Father accepts the son as His own. And of this son He is going to make a man, fully perfected in holiness.

This is a teaching and a beautiful consideration which the readers in the book of Hebrews need. It is exactly what must gird them up and check their sinking spirits. It is the only tonic which can give them spiritual vigor and power once more to stand in the battle, resisting sin. Thus they can have their head above the storm-clouds that gather about them, and they will go and be placed upon the rock that is higher than they until all the battles are fought, and finally the race is run, and they can receive the crown of life forevermore.

THE VOICE OF OUR FATHERS

The Canon Of The Holy Scriptures

Prof. Robert D. Decker

"We believe that the Holy Scriptures are contained in two books, namely, the Old and New Testament, which are canonical, against which nothing can be alleged. These are thus named in the Church of God. The books of the Old Testament are, the five books of Moses, viz.: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; the books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, the two books of Samuel, the two of the Kings, two books of Chronicles, commonly called Paralipomenon, the first of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, the Psalms of David, the three books of Solomon, namely, the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs; the four great prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel; and the twelve lesser prophets, namely, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Those of the New Testament are the four evangelists, viz.: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John; the Acts of the Apostles; the fourteen epistles of the apostle Paul, viz.: one to the Romans, two to the Corinthians, one to the Galatians, one to the Ephesians, one to the Philippians, one to the Colossians, two to the Thessalonians, two to Timothy, one to Titus, one to Philemon, and one to the Hebrews; the seven epistles of the other apostles, namely, one of James, two of Peter, three of John, one of Jude; and the Revelation of the apostle John."

Article IV, The Belgic Confession

We may note at the outset that this article and Article 5 are closely related. In Article 4 the Reformed Churches state which books they believe to be the content of the Holy Scriptures. The main point of this article is an enumeration of those books which the Reformed Churches accept as constituting the Holy Scriptures. With Article 5 the Reformed Churches state why they accept these books and these only as "holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith." Because of this close relationship it is somewhat difficult to discuss these articles separately. But this we shall attempt, limiting ourselves to the question of "Canonicity" in this article and treating the reasons why the churches receive these books as "holy and canonical" for the next article.

There are several points which ought to be made concerning the books of the Bible as listed in this article. There is and has been not a little criticism of this list especially on the part of those who wish to revise the Reformed Creeds. While we have no sympathy for this wish, we ought to face the criticisms and objections to this article. The reader will note that the books are listed in the order in which they appear in our Authorized King James Version Bibles. The fact that this listing does not follow the order of the Hebrew Old Testament is of no consequence. We may note too that the two books of Chronicles were given the name "Paralipomenon". This term means "a brief passing over," and was probably given to indicate that the books of Chronicles record events which are passed over in the other historical books of the Old Testament.

Noteworthy is the fact that the book of Lamentations was omitted from the list. No doubt the reason is that this book was included under Jeremiah. The Psalms were ascribed to David, while we know that he did not write all of them. This too is of no consequence in the light of the fact that the Church has always referred to the Psalms as the Psalms of David. David after all was the human instrument of the vast majority of the Psalms. Liberal critics have made much of the fact that the creed ascribes Hebrews to the Apostle Paul. It is true that this is highly doubtful. A comparative study of the Greek of Hebrews and the Greek of the Pauline Epistles would lead one to the conclusion that Paul did not write Hebrews. There is the fact, too, that Paul mentions himself as the writer of his epistles but there is no such mention made in the epistle to the Hebrews.

In spite of these objections and criticisms the Reformed believer has no difficulty in subscribing to this article of our confession. There are several rather obvious grounds for this conviction. First, none of these criticisms is of major import. What difference does it make whether one believes Paul to be the human author of Hebrews or someone else? Second, none of these criticisms or objections affects in the least any point of the doctrine of the Word of God. They have nothing to do with points of doctrine. And finally, these objections do not affect the main point or thrust of this article of the confession. The point of this article is that these writings (irrespective of whom the Holy Spirit may have used to record them) make up the two books of the Old and New

Testaments which constitute the Holy Scriptures. It certainly is not the intent of Article 4 to give the believer a detailed course in Biblical Introduction. Hence, while we admit the inaccuracies and omissions, we are not disturbed by them: for the truth remains both clearly stated and unscathed. And the truth which we believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths is that these writings and these writings alone constitute the Holy Scriptures against which nothing can be alleged.

These writings are said to be "canonical". The term "canon" is derived from the Greek and means literally "a straight rod or bar, especially to keep a thing straight." Sometimes the term is used to indicate that the Scriptures are considered to be the Word of God as measured and accepted by the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The term is also used figuratively with reference to the Scriptures. In this sense it expresses the faith of the church that the writings incorporated in the Bible are to be received as authoritative for the faith and life of the child of God. For reasons which will become obvious in our exposition of Article 5 we prefer this latter meaning. All truth is to be found only in the Word of God and all things are to be done and judged according to these holy and canonical Scriptures. Thus the Apostle Paul used the word, "And as many as walk according to this rule, (canon) peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God." (Gal. 6:16) There need be, therefore, no debate or theological discussion concerning the "nature and extent of Biblical authority." Within the context of the Belgic Confession this is not a debatable issue. The writings listed in this article constitute the Holy Scriptures. They are of divine origin, according to Article 3. And for this reason the authority is absolute. It is the rule of God Himself which is expressed in the Scriptures. This is the authority of Him with whom we all have to do. It covers all of that which we believe and it is determinative of our walk of life. This is, as we hope to see, the testimony of the Bible itself which "the very blind are able to perceive." (Art. 5)

There are two significant implications which flow out of this assertion of Article 4. The first is that the Reformed churches consider the Canon to be closed. These, and these books only, make up the Canon of the Word of God. There are no other books which may be added to the Bible. There has been no little discussion among theologians on this point, especially in recent years. This has resulted from recent archaeological discoveries such as the Dead Sea scrolls and the so-called Gospel according to St. Thomas. Others are concerned about what have been called "the lost books of the Bible". When, for example, the apostle Paul writes to Corinth, "I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators:" (I Cor.

5:9) he cannot mean his Second Epistle. There must have been another letter written to Corinth which we do not possess. The same apostle exhorts the Colossians to read the epistle from Laodicea (Col. 4:16), which would indicate that he wrote an epistle to that church which we do not possess. For some this seems to present a problem. Suppose either or both of these should be found? Would they then be included in the Canon? Article 4 provides the answer. By testifying that these books listed in the creed constitute the Holy Scriptures the Reformed believer means that the Canon is closed. Our position is that God in His providence saw fit to preserve these books, and only these, throughout the ages and entrust them to His Church. If others were needed by the church, the Lord certainly would have preserved them. Hence the sacred writings which we have are the whole Word of God, the holy and divine Scriptures "which are able to make thee wise unto salvation." (II Tim. 3:15) We need no others.

When Article 4 states that "the Holy Scriptures are contained in two books, namely, the Old and New Testament, which are canonical, against which nothing can be alleged" it certainly implies that the Old Testament is of equal value and authority with the New. This may seem self-evident, but it does need saying. The authority of the Old Testament is under vicious attack in our time. Liberals say it presents a "low view" of God which the modern man has long since outgrown by his more spiritual insights. The God of the Old Testament is said to be a ruthless, hating tyrant, while the God of the New Testament is said to be a God of love. Besides the attack of the liberals there is the fact that certain strains of fundamentalism and dispensationalism have little to do with the Old Testament. The Old Testament, according to these, concerns the "Kingdom people," the nation of Israel. Apart from wild speculation concerning the fulfilment of prophecy, these find no significance in the Old Testament for the "church" of the new dispensation. On the basis of our creed we confess that both are of equal value and authority. It is true that the Old is fulfilled in the New, and the New marks the end of the age of shadows, types, and promise. Nonetheless, we honor them equally as divine and inspired Scripture. Both are infallible, and against both "nothing can be alleged". Without the New the Old Testament remains incomplete, but without the Old the New Testament becomes largely unintelligible. The church must preach both testaments in order not to "shun to declare . . . the whole counsel of God." (Acts 20:27) Both of these books are essential to the believer's understanding and enjoyment of the grace of God which is in Christ Jesus. They speak of the same salvation "by grace through faith in Christ Jesus". (Eph. 2:8)

This we believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths concerning the Canon of the Holy Scriptures against which nothing can be alleged. May God give us grace, then, to search the treasures of His holy and divine Word daily, for; "All Scripture is given by

inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (II Tim. 3:16, 17)

Book Reviews

Commentaar Op Het Oude Testament, Genesis, Deel I, door Dr. W. H. Gispen; J. H. Kok, Kampen, The Netherlands; 391 pages, \$59,90 (Dutch money). (reviewed by Prof. H. C. Hoeksema)

This is another volume in an extensive series of commentaries on the Old Testament. The value of these commentaries is, of course, very limited in our country, due to the fact that only those who are able to read Dutch can use them. Besides, these are not intended to be popular commentaries. They are highly technical and useful only to those who can follow the Hebrew language.

This first volume covers the first eleven chapters of Genesis in 391 pages. This commentary deals very carefully and technically with the language and translation of the text. It is replete with references to the opinions and comments of many other

commentators. It makes many references to heathen mythology, as, for example, in connection with the flood. Generally speaking, the commentary is conservative. Thus, for example, in connection with Genesis 1:5 Dr. Gispen writes (I translate): "There is no single ground to think of anything else than a day of 24 hours."

My only criticism of a negative nature is that the author does not furnish very much in the way of positive exegesis of the text. There seems to be so much attention paid to matters of language, translation, and the views of others that there is very little room left for any extensive explanation of the sacred narrative.

Nevertheless, for those who are able to read Dutch and to handle the Hebrew language, I recommend this volume as an excellent and helpful addition to your library.

Concise Dictionary of Religious Quotations, by William Neil, Ed.; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Mich. 214 pages, \$7.95, cloth. (Reviewed by Prof. H. C. Hoeksema)

This is a rather attractively printed book, and it is thoroughly indexed both as to sources and subjects. Many speakers and writers like to make use of a choice quotation in connection with their subject, either by way of introduction or by way of support or explanation of some position which they are setting forth. Personally, I do not do this very often. But this is a matter of taste. And, for those who follow such a practice, a kind of dictionary of quotations is, of course, a helpful volume.

This volume, too, could be helpful. However, there are certain things which detract from its usefulness. One of these is the fact that all quotations from Scripture are taken from the *New English Bible*. Worse, however, is the fact that the term "Religious" in the title is taken in the broadest sense of that term: this book does not contain quotations only from Scripture or from Christian writers, but from Jewish, Mohammedan Hindu, Buddhist, and outright secular sources as well. Generally speaking, the choice of quotations, even from Christian writers, would not be mine. As one example of this, I mention the fact that John Calvin is conspicuous by his absence from this book.

This book is of limited usefulness.

News From Our Churches

January 14, 1975

Following Rev. Woudenberg's decline of the call from Kalamazoo, the Consistory there formed a new trio, this one consisting of Revs. C. Hanko, M. Kamps, and H. Veldman.

The time of the evening worship services of our South Holland Church has been changed, as of January 12, to 6:00 P.M. Sunday visitors to that part of Illinois will probably want to bear that in mind.

A rather interesting letter from Covenant Christian High School was distributed in our Grand Rapids' area churches early in January. The letter concerned the possibility of holding adult education classes at Covenant. The purpose of the letter was to determine, by means of a form to be filled out and submitted to the school, the degree of interest in such classes. It was suggested that courses such as Ancient Church History, painting, beginning astronomy, conversational German, etc., could be offered in evening and/or summer daytime classes, which would be taught, presumably, by members of the high school faculty. It will be interesting to learn how all that turns out.

Advance notice was given, in an Isabel, S.D. bulletin, to the public lecture held "on the 27th of December at 8:00 in our sister church in Forbes. Prof. H. C. Hoeksema will be the featured speaker who will speak on the subject of 'God's Sovereign Love for the World' as that truth is based on the

Word of God in John 3:16."

Prof. and Mrs. Hoeksema were in Forbes, N.D. for part of the Christmas vacation period, to visit their son and daughter-in-law, and, of course, their first grandson — Stephen Mark, son of Rev. and Mrs. Mark Hoeksema. The Professor took advantage of his stay there, to preach and deliver that lecture in the Forbes' Protestant Reformed Church on December 27. The little church held on that evening approximately fifty people, several of whom came from as far away as fifty and sixty miles. After the speech, the audience was invited for coffee to the home of one of the members of the congregation. Nearly twenty people took up the invitation and enjoyed the opportunity to question the speaker and discuss matters related to the speech. All in all, we're told, it was a very interesting evening.

On his way back to Grand Rapids, Prof. Hoeksema stopped in Randolph for a short visit, preaching the afternoon service there on December 29. The preceding Sunday, incidentally, Randolph's pastor had the privilege of administering the sacrament of baptism to his son, born December 2, the fifth child in the Bekkering home.

By the way, have you ever seen Randolph's 1974 Church Directory? Its cover pictures their new church building, and the contents include, in addition to the usual listing of names, addresses, and phone numbers, a group picture of the consistory, as well as two full pages devoted to small pictures, taken by a professional photographer, of each of the families

(continued on back page)

ANNOUNCEMENT

An Office-bearers Conference is being planned to be held on March 4, 1975 at the South Holland Protestant Reformed Church. The Conference will begin at 9:00 a.m.

The subject of the Conference will be the work of the deacons, with the emphasis on seeking specific areas for improvements. Two papers are being prepared and will soon be distributed, which will serve as the basis for discussion for both the morning and afternoon sessions.

As many deacons as possible are urged to attend as well as other interested persons. Each one is responsible for his own travel arrangements and expenses, however lodging will be provided during the Conference.

If you are planning to attend, please contact the clerk of the South Holland consistory as soon as possible so that meals and lodging can be arranged.

For the Committee,
Rev. Wayne Bekkering

South Holland's Clerk:

Mr. John Flikkema
2339 184th St.
Lansing, Illinois 60438

NOTICE!!!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet, the Lord willing, in South Holland, Illinois, on March 5, 1975, at 8:30 A.M. Material for the Agenda should be in the hands of the Stated Clerk thirty (30) days before Classis convenes. Delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of the South Holland consistory.

Rev. David Engelsma,
Stated Clerk of Classis West



which make up the Randolph congregation. A very attractive directory!

* * * * *

Several months ago I jotted down a few notes concerning the 1974 Young People's Convention, and since that time I've never been able to find room to include it in this column. It's already too old to be called news, I suppose, but I think I'll slip it in here anyway, so that my previous efforts will not have been for naught.

The 34th Annual Protestant Reformed Young People's Convention was held during the week of August 11, on the campus of Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa. Many of the convention activities were held on the campus; and the campus dorms served as lodging place for the conventioners. The host societies (Doon, Edgerton, and Hull), under the leadership of Revs. Moore, Lanting, and Kortering, respectively, obviously put a considerable amount of time and effort into the planning of the convention activities. The convention theme was, "Serving the Lord with Gladness." The first of the convention speeches was delivered by Rev. Heys, who spoke on "Making a Joyful Noise." The second speaker was Rev. Van Baren, whose topic was, "Serving the Lord." The third speech was Prof. Decker's, on "Coming Before His Presence." There was also time set aside for discussion groups, as well as for the usual business meetings. Recreational activities included a hayride, swimming, and an apparently unscheduled pillow fight which raged throughout the dorm and throughout the night (almost). Members of the three area congregations joined the conventioners at a pork barbecue ("two hogs on an open spit") at the football field across from Dordt.

The Convention Booklet contained a greeting which began as follows: "Welcome to the land of farms and cornfields, and the 1974 convention. We hope that we may experience a true unity of Christian youth and that serving the Lord with gladness may become more and more a part of our lives." In Hull's August 18 bulletin, Rev. Kortering wrote in retrospect concerning the convention, that "we believe it helped unite our Protestant Reformed youth and through the means of serious discussions and practical speeches as well as fun activities, they have been spiritually enriched."

D.D.

THE STANDARD BEARER

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