

The STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

It is not, therefore, a question of the lack of clarity in Scripture itself. Scripture is clear. It is not a lack of ability to understand the Scriptures. The child of God possesses the Spirit of truth. And this is why there can really be no such thing as tolerance in the sense in which it is used today. Concerning the truth of the Scriptures, the believer must be, before God, very intolerant. He must insist that the truth of Scripture be maintained. He does not do this out of a spirit of haughty pride. He does not claim that all men must see it his way simply because he thinks that he has the last word on all matters of doctrine. He is rather concerned about the truth as it is in Christ. For it is this truth which is God's glory. Any denial of this truth is a slander of the glory of God revealed in Christ and recorded infallibly in Scripture. He must be, as Elijah was, very jealous for the Lord God of Israel. He must be willing to say with Paul: "If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." Galatians 1:9

[See: *All Around Us*, page 130]

MEDITATION

The Rejected Christ Child

Rev. H. Veldman

"Because there was no room for them in the inn."

Luke 2:7c

Do we believe and embrace this sign of Jesus' birth, that there was no room for them in the inn? We surely have a sign here, a divine sign. This is obvious from the entire history of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The world, too, embraces this sign. Do we not hear it sung today wherever we go? Does not the world, in this Christmas season, speak and sing of the Christ Child, of His birth in an animal stall, that they wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn?

And yet the question persists: do we understand this sign, embrace it, carry it in our hearts? It is only if we do this that we can rejoice in this season of the commemoration of our Saviour's birth.

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No room for them in the inn — a divine sign! Apparently, we have no sign here. With the history of our Saviour's birth we are all more or less familiar. The emperor, Caesar Augustus, had issued the command that all the world must be registered for the purpose of taxation. This taxation was necessary for the maintaining of the Roman empire. Inasmuch as this empire of Rome was a world-empire (the last, incidentally, until now), this command also involved the nation of the Jews. In obedience to this command, Joseph and Mary had travelled to Bethlehem, the city of David. Amid the most wonderful circumstances they had lived for several months, awaiting this Wonder Child from the Lord. Completing their difficult journey of some three days, they arrive in Bethlehem at a late hour and learn that there is no room for them in the inn. A stall is provided for them outside the city; and here Jesus is born, laid in a manger, and wrapped in swaddling clothes.

Apparently, there is nothing here out of the ordinary. What we have here, it seems, is a very natural course of events. Augustus is surely unaware of the imminent birth of the Messiah. And there is nothing unusual about the attitude of the world. There is no manifestation here of any antipathy

toward Joseph and Mary. Apparently, we have no sign here at all.

However, this merely emphasizes the fact that we *do* have a sign here. The very ordinary character of these events should make this self-evident. It must be obvious that God willed this ordinary course of events. All the miracles of God, in the Old and New Testaments, are always extraordinary and sensational. . . . The birth of Christ is of all wonders *the* Wonder. The fact that there is nothing extraordinary here surely serves to emphasize that this simplicity is of God and rich in symbolical significance. Besides, did not the angel of the Lord tell the shepherds: 'And this shall be a *sign* unto you'?"

And what a sign this is: there is no room for them in the inn! Of course, the emperor must issue his command that all the world be taxed. Others must also go to Bethlehem at this time. There must be no room for them in the inn. To be sure, there is nothing here of man — just a manger and some swaddling clothes. There must be nothing here of man, and this for the simple reason that it is all of God. There is no earthy glory here; this King is heavenly, and His kingdom is heavenly. Why, then, should His birth be marked by earthy power and glory?

Specifically, however, there is now no room for them, for Jesus in the inn. Why should there be room for Him in the inn? Is it not a fact that there is never room for this Jesus? There is no room for this Jesus in the hearts of men. There is not a single heart in all the world, from the beginning until the end of time, that has a place for Him, desires Him; every human heart is closed to Jesus. And, remember, our heart is not a vacuum; it is not merely empty, but full. There is no room for Jesus because it is full of sin and darkness and corruption. What an awful indictment we have here against the world, against us! One would almost believe, in this Christmas season of cheer and good will, that this Jesus has a rather prominent place in the hearts of men. They sing of Him everywhere. However, be not deceived. This is the Word of God, also today.

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What a shame! Imagine, if you please: no room for Jesus in the hearts of men, in the heart of any man!

The world would deny this truth. They seem to embrace this sign. That the Christ Child was born in a stall, laid in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes appeals to the world. They think this is wonderful; everywhere one may see this scene of the Nativity; everywhere one can hear these songs sung of our Lord Jesus Christ as He was laid in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes. How glad men seem to be that Jesus was born as He was born.

What, I ask you, motivates the world?

It is said that the story of Abraham Lincoln, who was born in a log cabin, and "made it all the way" to the White House, is the typical American story. It proves what every normal American boy can do if he only sets himself to the task. This is also spiritually true. That Jesus was born in a stable simply emphasizes His tremendous prowess and accomplishments: to arise out of such great depths of poverty and attain unto such great heights of success, becoming the Great Example whom all men would follow. All this surely speaks of the greatness of Man, what we are able to do if only we apply ourselves. This also applies to the teachings of our so-called Fundamentalist circles. The sinner does not mind hearing that he is a sinner if only he be also told that he can do something about it. He does not mind hearing that all salvation is in Jesus, if only the gospel be preached as an offer which the sinner must and can accept.

What a shameless denial this presentation is of this Word of God!

O, it may appear that man is rather receptive for the Christ. Did they not offer Him a crown, while He was among us, desire to make Him king, as did the Galileans of John 6? Did they not shout, as late as the last Sunday before His death: "Hosanna to the son of David; blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord"? And, does not the same apply today? Today people are eager to acclaim Him as their great Example or Teacher or Reformer. They will give Him the place of honor in their peace councils, fervently embrace His Sermon on the Mount, enthusiastically declare that if men would only walk in His footsteps and adopt His principles, this world would be a much better place in which to live.

All this, of course, is merely a dream, an illusion. It is merely a dream because the Christ they would follow is not the real Christ, does not exist except in their dreams. As soon as this Jesus reveals Himself, things change drastically. As soon as He reveals Himself to the Galileans, they all forsake Him. If Christ be preached as He truly is, as the Christ of the Scriptures, His true followers will dwindle to a

handful. It is simply a fact that the sign of this text does not speak of man's prowess, but of his unspeakable misery: there is no room anywhere for Christ; no man is able to make room for Him, inasmuch as the Scriptures declare: "No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him."

What a shame!

What a shame that there is no room in us for Him because we are full of sin and darkness! O, the world may like this sign, but the people of God are ashamed of it. Is it not a terrible thing that we are what we are? Is there anything filthier than sin? Is not God great, incomprehensibly great, and worthy to be praised? Are we not His creatures, the products of His hands, who live and move and have our being in the Lord? Is anything more abominable than when man, who is less than nothing, less than a drop of water on the bucket and a particle of dust on the balance, thinks himself to be something, refuses to give God all honor and glory? Can we conceive of anything more abominable than when clay rises in revolt against the potter, when the looking glass appropriates to itself the glory reflected in it? Mind you, there is no room in us for Him, and this because we are full of sin and iniquity!

This is not all. What a shame this is, also because there is in us no room *for Him*! Mind you, He is the only One Who can possibly save us. This was His testimony in the synagogue at Nazareth. There He read from the prophecy of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . ." (Luke 4:17-19); and He added these words: "Today is this prophecy fulfilled in your ears." This was His testimony throughout His ministry: "I am the Good Shepherd; I am the Door . . ." We can never save ourselves; He alone can save us. Yet, there is no room for Him in our hearts. To the one and only Great Physician we reply: "Physician, heal thyself," and we would cast Him down to destruction from the edge of the cliff. In reply to His testimony concerning Himself that He is sent of the Father, we pick up stones to throw at Him. How desperately wicked is man! He cannot save himself and rejects the only Way of Salvation; he is lost in sin and tramples under foot the only possible Deliverer! What does this mean? It surely means that we love our sin and iniquity to such an extent that we resent anyone who presents himself as a deliverer; it means that we have not the slightest desire to be saved; we are slaves of sin and love it with all our hearts.

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Indeed, there is no room in us for Jesus. How soon this becomes manifest! Not long after His birth, the attempt is made by Herod the Great to kill Him when

he kills all the baby boys in Bethlehem. How He was hated throughout His earthly ministry! Men spied on Him, sought to catch Him in His words, counselled together to destroy Him. And finally He is forsaken by all, including His disciples, and killed upon the cross of Calvary. They even remove from Him the manger and the swaddling clothes. Having engaged the services of one of the twelve, they lay their filthy hands upon Him, lead Him outside of the Holy City, and make Him an object of public and universal shame and scorn.

Yet, this is really the wonder of this sign. Here all we can do is stand and marvel. This is the wonder of it, that that Sign, no room for Him is our hearts, is exactly our salvation. This is the wonder of it: He saves us, not merely in spite of the fact that there is no room for Him, but exactly through it! This is the

wonder of it, that that cross, the symbol of our hatred, of our rejection of Him, becomes and is the way whereby He saves, makes room in our hearts through the power of that cross and presently by His Spirit as the exalted King of kings and Lord of lords and of glory. His death is our life, and that in everlasting and heavenly immortality. This is the Christmas story. This is the significance of Bethlehem. Do we see it and grasp it?

He alone is our salvation.

How ashamed we are of ourselves because of what we are!

How glad we are that *He* became poor, because otherwise we could never have become rich.

To God alone be all the glory, now and forever.

EDITORIALS

Editor's Notes

Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

Note of Thanks. I take this means of saying "thanks to all who remembered me in various ways in connection with my recent ear surgery. It was good to experience concretely the communion of saints in this way. I may report that the surgery was apparently successful, that I am well on the way to recovery, and that I am getting back in the "harness" — at least partly.

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Anniversary News. Some of you know already that plans are under way in connection with next year's Fiftieth Anniversary of our denomination to have a denominational celebration at which, as much as possible, our people from throughout the country will gather at the time of our annual Young People's Convention. In this connection, I was recently informed that the convention is scheduled next summer, the Lord willing, for the week of August 4. It was suggested to me that perhaps some of our people who must plan their vacation dates far in advance would be interested in this information. The secretary of the Fiftieth Anniversary Committee, Rev. J. Kortering, has also promised an informative article in the near future.

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Unfinished Business. In response to my last article on the subject of a possible CRC-PRC conference, I have received a letter from the Board of Reformed Fellowship (publishers of *The Outlook*). However, this letter requires some clarification; and until that clarification is received, I will not divulge its contents.

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Lecture. Your editor has received and accepted an invitation from Calvin Seminary (via Dr. Henry Stob) to deliver a lecture at 10 A.M. on Thursday, December 19, on the subject, "After Fifty Years." For any of our readers who might be able to attend and who receive this issue of the *Standard Bearer* before that time, the lecture is open to the public. For those unable to attend, I do plan to publish a transcript of my lecture in a future issue.

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Question Box. There are a couple of questions on the waiting list. Due to being sidelined for a couple of weeks I have had to put the Question Box chore aside for a while. Please be longsuffering, and I will try to answer.

The EPC and Common Grace

In our last issue I promised to carry on our discussion with the brethren of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church concerning the doctrine of common grace. The brethren of that denomination have expressed themselves as being willing to have such discussion and as being open for instruction in this matter. We greatly appreciate both this willingness and this openness. We want to make it plain, however, that our approach to the brethren of the EPC of Australia is not that of haughty superiority, but of humility. For we have nothing which we have not received, and what we are and have as Protestant Reformed Churches is all of grace. For that reason, too, our appeal in this discussion is to the Word of God and to our Reformed standards. And we expect that our brethren down under will accept only such instruction as meets this test.

The occasion of this discussion is my comment in the *Standard Bearer* of January 1, 1974 concerning a brochure published by the EPC and entitled "Universalism and The Reformed Churches: A Defense of Calvin's Calvinism." My comment was as follows:

"We have earlier referred to an excellent treatise on the subject of the 'free offer' published by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia. This brochure is entitled 'Universalism and the Reformed Churches.' It refers to the offer theology as 'modern modified Calvinism'. This brochure has many fine arguments; and we agree with its main thrust of opposition to the offer-theory. However, we find inconsistent – and ultimately impossible to maintain – its insistence upon common grace in the following paragraph on page 8: 'Lest we be misunderstood when we deny the universality of the love of God, let it be clearly understood that we are not controverting the fact that God is good to all, for "He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and unjust." (Mat. 5:45). Rather, we are concerned with refuting the doctrine which teaches that God's goodness in sending temporal blessings upon all is indicative of His love and long-suffering in redemption toward the non-elect, and a desire in Him that they might be saved. We maintain that the gospel is given for the purpose of separating the elect from the reprobate, and in the providence of God, in the case of the latter who hear it, for their greater condemnation.'

"To the brethren of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia we suggest:

1. That apart from this question of the 'offer' they should give confessional and Biblical account of this whole idea of temporal blessings – the traditional

'common grace' theory. We believe they will discover it to be incorrect.

2. That they should consider the fact that the theory of 'common grace' itself – apart from the offer-theory – has implications for life which are not acceptable. This is evident from the devastating results of the theory both in the Netherlands and in the U.S. The theory of 'common grace' necessarily involves one in the denial of the antithesis and of the antithetical calling of the Christian.

3. That they should also consider the close historical and doctrinal connection between 'common grace' and the very offer-theory which they combat. I am afraid that if they concede 'common grace' they will be helpless to combat the offer-theory.

"We invite further discussion of this from the Evangelical Presbyterian brethren."

Thus I wrote last January. When the Rev. Charles Rodman visited last August, we had some opportunity to discuss these matters face to face. Now, however, we may carry on this discussion in writing and for our mutual edification.

In connection with the comment just quoted and also quoted in an article in *The Evangelical Presbyterian* of May, 1974, the Rev. Rodman writes the following introductory comment:

"The comment in the *Standard Bearer* affirms that the publication by the Literature Committee at the particular point to which it refers is inconsistent with respect to the doctrine of common grace, which it seeks to refute.

"When criticized, we should not show too great a readiness to hasten to our own defense. Often under criticism we can learn of the deficiencies of our own position. This is in fact the way many of us have progressed in the knowledge of the truth from that of outright Arminianism and mysticism to the Reformed Faith."

At this point the Rev. Rodman quotes the critical remarks which I quoted above and which first appeared in the *Standard Bearer* of January 1, 1974.

After quoting my comments, the Rev. Rodman continues as follows:

"The background to the writing of the 'Defense of Calvin's Calvinism' was our controversy with the Free Church in Australia. We found that those who maintained the theory of common grace, make it a foundation of their system, that God must desire the salvation of all men because He 'maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good' etc.

"We believe that there is no such thing as common grace, because the word grace implies an unmerited mercy, love, and favor which in the Word of God is never common at all. There can be no division of purpose in God's providence, one temporal and the other spiritual. If God in His administration of the Covenant of Grace sends temporal blessings in the preaching of the gospel to men as He pleases, He has but one purpose in respect of His own glory, namely the redemption of the Church and the greater condemnation of the reprobate. Any other concept concerning God's providence falls into the gross error of ascribing complexity and confusion to the will of God.

"We acknowledge God's providence in terms of Question No. 11 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism which states, 'God's works of providence are, His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing of all His creatures and all their actions.' Being holy and wise, God's works of providence are good and include the making of His sun to shine and the rain to fall on all men alike. Though nature, because of the fall of man has been cursed in the bringing forth of briars and thorns, God's providence as He governs it according to His eternal purposes, is the means of manifesting His goodness both in the time of plenty and even in His severity in the day of calamity.

"In Psalm 145:9 we read, 'The Lord is good to all: and His tender mercies are over all His works.' Here the word mercies must be understood to be restricted in its extent for it can only refer to the works of God's providence in respect of time, and cannot include grace and favor, nor can it refer to God's eternal purposes concerning angels and men. This interpretation is consistent with Psalm 103:17 which states, 'But the mercy of God is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him.' The idea of a mercy inclusive of grace and favor in the context of a supposed common grace makes nonsense of Scripture for the following reasons:

"God's goodness in respect of the physical creation which will pass away is not from everlasting to everlasting. His mercy is not upon the reprobate angels and men who are reserved for everlasting destruction. Rather God's mercy and grace govern all that content of His providence, both temporal and spiritual, which belongs only to the elect who fear Him and keep His commandments. Again, there is no division of purpose and no such thing as common grace.

"John Calvin makes the position clear in his commentary on Psalm 145:9. 'God is good to all,' etc. 'The truth here stated is of wider application than the former, for the declaration of David is to the effect, that not only does God, with fatherly

indulgence and clemency forgive sin, but is good to all without discrimination, as He makes the sun to rise upon the good and the wicked. (Mat. 5:45) Forgiveness of sin is a treasure from which the wicked are excluded, for their sin and depravity does not prevent God from showering down His goodness upon them, which they appropriate without being sensible of it. Meanwhile believers, and they only, know what it is to enjoy a reconciled God, as elsewhere it is said – "Come ye to Him and be ye enlightened, and your faces shall not be ashamed; taste and see that the Lord is good." (Psalm 64:5, 8). When it is added that "the mercy of God extends to all His works" this ought not to be considered contrary to reason, or obscure. Our sins having involved the whole world and the curse of God, there is everywhere an opportunity for the exercise of God's mercy, even in helping the brute creation.'

"It is on the basis of such commentary as given by Calvin, that the 'defense of Calvin's Calvinism' has been written. Unless we have misinterpreted Calvin, we do not see where we differ from him in the statement of the 'Defense' page 8 in respect of the goodness of God to all men.

"We believe that when Calvin's principle of simplicity concerning the will of God is comprehended, he is seen to be entirely consistent in this area of his theological system. If the position is otherwise, we would cease to be Calvinists and take company with those who modify his system.

"We are in entire agreement with the suggestions No. 2 and 3 above which are directed to us by Prof. Hoeksema.

"With respect, the first suggestion, relative to the position which we hold, appears to bring into question whether it may be said that God in His providence is good to all men as it is clearly stated by John Calvin, whose Calvinism we have sought to defend. This is perhaps the area in which clarification should be made.

"We realize that the theory of common grace has a wider context than its implications concerning the 'free offer' and admit that our studies apart from those implications have not been in the same depth as has been the case with the brethren of the Protestant Reformed Church. Our response to the invitation for further discussion is that we are open for instruction in the matter."

First of all, let me express appreciation and joy over the fact that the brethren of the EPC want nothing of common grace. When they assert that there is no such thing as common grace and that God's mercy, love, and favor are in the Word of God never common to all, this is language after our hearts. When, further, they insist that there can be no

division of purpose in God's providence, one temporal and the other spiritual, this also is soundly Reformed language. And when, further, they insist on the simplicity of the will of God, as they do both in their brochure and in the quotation just made, this also is sound theology. For this we are thankful. And it is plain to me from these remarks of the brethren that we are fundamentally agreed on these matters.

In the second place, it is plain to me that there is a certain area of misunderstanding here. On the one hand, this misunderstanding was on my part. The brethren "down under" did not understand — in fact, did not even dream — when they wrote their brochure, that the statement which I criticized would be read by us of the Protestant Reformed Churches from the viewpoint of and with the background of all of the common grace controversy through which we passed in our history. The fact is that already when I read this statement for the first time, I felt that it was not in harmony with the thrust of the whole pamphlet. I felt — if I may use an expression of the Rev. Rodman — that it was as incongruous as "a pig with feathers." And while I now understand a little better what the brethren have in mind, and certainly understand and accept the fact that they do not want common grace, I still find the statement inconsistent. On the other hand, I believe that there is some misunderstanding on the part of the brethren "down under" with respect to such ideas as "temporal blessings" and God's being "good to all" and God's mercies not being inclusive of grace and favor. About this I shall write a bit more presently.

In the third place, I can appreciate the allegiance of the brethren of the EPC to John Calvin and their desire to defend Calvin's Calvinism. In this respect also we are in agreement. To me, however, this does not imply agreement with everything which Calvin wrote, nor with his exegesis of every passage of Scripture, but with the fundamentals of John Calvin's theology and with all that he wrote which is consistent with his "Calvinism," according to the test of Scripture itself. John Calvin himself would not want it differently, but would certainly want his disciples to put his writings to the test of Holy Scripture. Parenthetically, let me recommend the writings of Calvin published under the title *Calvin's Calvinism*. This volume, one of the least known and least quoted works of Calvin contains his writings on two subjects: "The Eternal Predestination of God" and "The Secret Providence of God." Perhaps the brethren of the EPC are acquainted with this volume; but if they are not, they ought to get acquainted with it.

But now let us get at this matter of terminology. Twice — once in the quotation which I originally criticized, and once in their reply to my criticism —

the brethren of the EPC speak of "temporal blessings" upon the reprobate as well as the elect. At the same time the brethren assert that they want no such thing as common grace. In fact, in their reply to my criticism they even make the point that God with these "temporal blessings" has in view but one purpose in respect of His own glory, "namely the redemption of the Church and the greater condemnation of the reprobate." The difficulty lies, of course, in the fact that the very term "temporal blessings" suggests the idea of an attitude of favor and grace. In other words, to us this language is contradictory. We hold that God's favor is always upon His people, and that in that favor God always blesses them. On the other hand, God's hatred and wrath are always against the wicked reprobate, and in that wrath He always curses them. Let me call attention to the fact that if this distinction is kept in view, then the danger of positing a "division of purpose in God's providence, one temporal and the other spiritual" is also avoided. It would seem to me that while the brethren wish to avoid that danger and to insist that there can be no division of purpose in God's providence, they run the risk of implying such a division by speaking of "temporal blessings upon all." In this connection, it must be kept in mind that the work of God's providence is always motivated by His predestinating love toward His elect, but also by His purpose of reprobation toward the non-elect.

In this same connection I would criticize the statement of the EPC brethren that "God is good to all." This statement, of course, can be defended, provided the word "good" is properly interpreted. Do the brethren merely mean to say that God is good in all His works? Whether He blesses the righteous or whether He curses the ungodly, whether He sends rain and sunshine and fruitful seasons, or whether He sends drought and floods and famine, whether He saves some or whether He damns others, He always does good? Is this their meaning? Then, of course, we are in perfect agreement. Or do the brethren mean to say that God's gifts, which in His providence He bestows upon all men, are in themselves good gifts? God's sunshine is good sunshine, and God's rain is good rain. You understand, in that case we still do not say that God's sunshine is a blessing upon all men alike or that God's rain is a blessing upon all men alike, no more than we say that drought from God is a curse upon all men alike or that floods and storms from God are a curse upon all men alike. But His gifts, bestowed in His providence, are in themselves good gifts. If this is the meaning of the brethren, then also we are in agreement. But there is at least the suggestion in what they write that they mean that God is benevolent, or beneficent, to all alike. And then, it seems to me, the brethren cannot avoid the

implication of an attitude of favor (even though it be temporal and non-saving) on the part of God to elect and reprobate alike. And if this is the implication, then I cannot understand how this can be consistent

with their assertion that there is no such thing as common grace.

That brings us to the matter of Psalm 145:9.

But this will have to wait until our next issue, D.V.

The Birth of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (2)

Rev. Charles Rodman

Now during this time the members of this group — they had no conception of the doctrine of the church, but realized that this work of an interdenominational nature had no future — some of them decided to commence fellowships, little groups of people in certain areas. And I ministered to them. Others went into the Baptist denomination. There was a general concern among the so-called evangelicals in that denomination about modernism and about the fact that it made inroads into the pulpits. This was manifested in various ways in the studies for the training of the ministry, as well as their policy for evangelism; and also the ambition of that church was to join the World Council of Churches. So in that denomination there was formed what was known as the Baptist Alliance. It was an unofficial movement, but just a few statements from it. It says that there is therefore an evangelism that is humanistic and producing a baseless faith with no change of heart, thus improperly acknowledging articles so and so of the doctrinal basis. And this drift, their statement says, is being accelerated by the apostate educational system being forced upon our prospective ministers in contravention of the declared doctrinal basis, and so on. And this was the aim of the society. It was to combat an encroaching apostasy, modernistic beliefs and practices, worldliness, dishonesty, Free Masonry, unchristian ideals within the denomination, and wherever found, as disloyalty to Christ, the true Head of the church. It was going to promote evangelism of the kind that strictly honors the Word of God, the sovereignty of our Lord Jesus, and produces a true repentance from worldly and selfish sins and a true faith which can be seen in its obedience to God. Those are just some parts of their statement.

But this never got off the ground because the leaders of that movement were afraid of the leaders of the denomination. The leaders in the denomination put tremendous pressure on them. And unfortunately, the leaders of this alliance were afraid to launch out to do what they knew they should do. But owing to the ineffectiveness of this Baptist Alliance, a group of people, mostly of Baptist persuasion, gathered under the leadership of a Mr. Ian Morgan. He was then a deacon in the Baptist Church

in Launceston, in the north of this island. Strangely enough, Mr. Morgan was only a Christian for a few years. He was converted during a mission when we had ceased to make any public appeals. And under the preaching of the Word of God, as he was sitting one night, he said, "If this is the kingdom of God, I'm not within bull's roar of it." And it pleased God to cause him to seek the things of God, and eventually he was apprehended by the grace of God and brought to a saving knowledge of Christ. He had not very much to unlearn, and that was a tremendous help to him. But in 1958 he produced a paper, with the assistance of another fellow-elder. And the name of this paper was "The Effect of Humanism and Evolutionary Thought in the Teachings of the Church," that is, the Baptist Church. Well, it deals with several things. It deals with modernism, the liberal and modern theologian, his history and background, humanism that invades the fundamental church and pulpit, the doctrine of decisions and decisionism, the power of man to choose, the reasons for calling for decisions, the product of fundamentalized humanism, and the positive gospel of phariseeism. Now that was published, as I said, in the year 1958. It was sent to all the Baptist Churches, and to all those who were interested in evangelical things, as we termed it then.

Now this created a real stir. In fact, it was published at the same time as the Russians put up their first Sputnik. But this created more concern in the Church than the Russian Sputnik did over here. The reaction to it was that there was not only a stir in the Baptist denomination; but both Mr. Morgan and his companion, who was a fellow deacon, were removed from the diaconate of that church. And they were removed without having been charged with any particular thing. When they were removed from the diaconate, they could see that on account of the attitudes of the people there who wanted really to get rid of him, that there was no alternative but to resign. They established what was known as the Evangelical Society. They accepted the Westminster Confession of Faith as their standard, with the exception of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper.

Now by this time the great doctrines of the Reformation commenced to dawn on the souls of

several people in this island. The first thing that was discovered was the doctrine of sovereign election, that man never chooses God; or, as our Lord says, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." That was the first thing. You might ask how did they come to discover this? Well, they had a copy of the Westminster Confession, as stated before. The man who started the Baptist Alliance also had a copy of this first. He used to use it when he went to certain campaigns, or perhaps, I suppose, you would say they were conventions. And he used to copy the statements out of the Westminster Confession and put them on the board. And he would take the Scripture proofs, and he would make a Bible study of them. One day a certain person caught him with this, and they said, "Where are you getting that from?" And he said, "I'm taking it out of the Westminster Confession." The person said, "That's Roman Catholicism," and never turned up again to hear the Bible lecture after that day. So he said to us, "Whenever you use this, never let on where you get it from. Just take the statements, use the Scripture references of the statements, but don't let anybody know where you get it from. If you do, they'll say, 'We believe in the Bible,' and they won't listen to it even though you say that this is what the Bible teaches."

Well, at first this group started to grapple with this great fact of sovereign election. When they had discovered it, or God had revealed it to them through His Word, then they put out articles, making use of the works of some old divines; and they sent them around to the other smaller group, and the smaller group sent them on to other places. And people commenced to buy the Westminster Confession. I never had a copy, but I bought a copy; and I'll never forget the copy that I bought. I bought it from Mr. Morgan. And we were really at that particular time in the throes of what might be called, perhaps, an unholy war. But when I went to buy the Confession from him, we were so taken up with what was happening that he gave me the change of a pound; and I kept the change and the pound note and the Westminster Confession, and went home. I thought I had a tremendous deal, but never knew that I'd done it. And he returned inside laughing. And it was only when one of the members told me what I had done that I eventually, of course, made restitution.

The next right doctrine was that of man's inability to do spiritual good. Really, normally we start with man's inability to do spiritual good and then come to the doctrine of election. But this is how it came to us. First of all, election; then, of course, man's inability to do spiritual good. Well, they sent out 120 copies each week on whatever subject they were doing. And they sent them out to the churches and to a

missionary college here, known as the World Evangelization Crusade, and to other places which were interested. Now when it pleased God to give this revelation of Himself in His Word, it was a soul-shattering experience. In fact, the only way I can describe it is that it was like pulling the plug out of the bath. And just as the water goes out of the bath, all the religious sentiment went out of us. In fact, it let all the mysticism that was in us go. I believe the truth is the axe to all heresy. And this is what happened. We discovered that we had to unlearn all that we had learned, and had to admit that we were wrong. In the light of this revelation, we saw God upon His throne. We saw Him as Sovereign. We had used the term "sovereign" before, but we never understood what it meant. And in the light of this revelation, those people were humbled before God. They confessed of the little knowledge that they had of the truth; and because of the little knowledge, those who had to teach and preach almost despaired. And I want to say that there was no wild fire, or strange fire, when this came. If there is anything that will humble you, it is the doctrine of sovereign election, the sovereignty of God! And when one understands it, it's the means which God uses to humble you before Himself.

It was during this time that a minister came to the island from another Reformed church. After he returned from the island, he wrote in a Reformed magazine the following comments:

"Recent movements in Tasmania toward the Reformed faith have gladdened the hearts of all to whom the faith of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin is precious. The writer is able to give firsthand information on the quality and manifestation of the work. That it is the work of God there is no doubt. There has been a tremendous outburst of intellectual activity in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. It has stimulated and elevated their lives. Christians who have never read a book for years now have moderate-size libraries with which they appear to be very familiar. Young ladies, as well as housewives, are conversant with the Confession of Faith, Berkhof's *Systematic Theology*, and the works of the British Puritans. This especially amazed the writer. For the interest of ladies is usually centered in the realms of fashion and food, babies and household furnishings. In addition to this outburst of sacred study, there is a spirit of love, an openmindedness that is rarely met with in Christian fellowship. Although under pressure from former friends and associates — for Calvinism is an offense to many — they exhibit no bitterness, only the desire to win them and interest them in the way of God more perfectly. Amongst themselves they are tenderhearted and share a concern for the welfare of each other. This latter attitude, so sorely lacking in

our churches today, was a characteristic feature of primitive Christianity. Behold how these Christians love one another was the verdict of the wondering pagans. One is also impressed by the consecrated lives that these dear brethren live. And we out of the older Reformed movements might take a leaf out of their book. They spend their time, energies, and talents in seeking to know the will of God and the truth of the Scriptures. If you join their company, you will find their conversation is on a very high level. The Person of Christ, the sovereignty of God, the work of the Holy Spirit, the doctrines of the church they discuss with earnestness and relish. Their time and money is not frittered away in frivolous and harmful amusements. They are in earnest. The revelation of God's sovereign majesty has come as a glorious light. The Bible is a new book. One of the saddest features of the movement has been their disappointment with the worldliness of the brethren of the Reformed churches. They cannot understand how Christians, especially those who profess the truth which God gave to His church at the Reformation, can waste

money on tobacco, on the pursuit of worldly amusements, such as the patronage of the cinema, where a godless way of life is portrayed and encouraged. They wonder why Christians have an appetite for these things. In consequence they have been repelled by those who have so much to teach them. Let me say, in conclusion, that these brethren were a challenge and an inspiration to the writer as he moved among them. They have all the enthusiasm of those who have discovered a wonderful treasure. Their zeal in spreading the truth is a reflection of this. Some have criticized them for being aggressive; and so, no doubt, there has been a lack of wisdom on some occasions. But maturity comes with time and reflection. And there are signs already that their zeal is being tempered with discretion, although it is by no means abating. May God grant to us all such an insight in His holiness and majesty and such an insight into the grace that receiveth sinners that we with awe and devotion shall carry our faith to every creature in this land." This is a quote from Rev. Edwin Lee.

(to be continued)

ALL AROUND US

Tolerance

Prof. H. Hanko

Tolerance has become a fashionable word in ecclesiastical circles these days. It is hailed as being one of the essential Christian virtues without which a Christian's claim to Christianity becomes a hollow mockery. Intolerance and Christianity are mutually exclusive — so it is said.

Tolerance has also become the password of ecumenicism. It is the foundation upon which can be built imposing ecclesiastical structures which house various denominations of widely divergent doctrinal beliefs. The leaders of ecumenical movements appeal to the need for tolerance in support of the position that, though denominations may disagree, disagreement in doctrine is not good and sufficient reason to remain separate ecclesiastically. In more liberal circles, tolerance is a sufficiently strong force to bring Roman Catholics and Protestants nearer to each other in an effort to heal the breach struck at the time of the Reformation. Tolerance becomes such a powerful force that it is not at all uncommon to find that Protestants can worship with Jews, Buddhists, Hindus and adherents of other pagan religions.

A large number of the ecclesiastical papers which cross my desk have articles dealing directly or obliquely with the question of tolerance. Recently a paper which professes to be Reformed contained one such article. The author cited the appeals made to Scripture in support of Pentecostalism and in opposition to Pentecostalism as being an example of the need for tolerance. He appealed also to the difficult struggle going on among the Missouri Lutherans to bolster his position. There, too, the author said, both sides appeal to Scripture; both sides appeal to genuine Lutheranism; and both sides do little more than make a sorry spectacle of themselves.

Tolerance is the answer to these problems. In fact, tolerance will do away with the folly of innumerable sects and denominations bitterly warring against each other over questions of doctrine. Tolerance will dispel the arrogance of theologians who claim that God is on their side exclusively and opposed to all others who disagree.

It seems as if tolerance will solve a lot of problems in the ecclesiastical world.

One ought, I think, to take the time to analyze a bit what tolerance is all about. Anyone who thinks about the matter at all will soon come to the conclusion that, while tolerance is a nice word, and while tolerance seems indeed to be a desirable Christian virtue, there are presuppositions lurking in the background which ought to be carefully scrutinized. That is, if it is true that the plea for tolerance finds many ready ears today, what precisely is presupposed when one adopts a "tolerant" attitude towards others? What is he getting into? What is he committing himself to? What baggage is being packed along when he carries a tolerant attitude towards others?

There are a number of presuppositions involved in this matter of tolerance. I do not say that everyone who pleads for tolerance will admit to them all. Some imply one thing when they speak of tolerance; some imply something quite different. But the presuppositions are there. And we ought to know what they are.

Sometimes, perhaps in more liberal circles, tolerance simply means that all truth is relative; i.e., that we possess no sure standard of what truth is because no such thing as absolute truth exists. This is a kind of spiritual agnosticism which claims that in all matters which have to do with religion, the only real standard of truth is what a man believes himself. A man must come to his own conclusions with respect to religion because he must find those religious beliefs which will be of the most help to him in the difficult business of living. Whatever he can lean on in times of stress, whatever brings him some measure of solace in times of sorrow, whatever kind of crutch he can find to help him walk when life's pathway becomes too difficult — this is the religion which is good for him; and, because it is good for him, this is the religion which is true.

Others, not quite so ready to speak of all truth as being relative, speak merely of the fact that God is the incomprehensible One. And, because He is the incomprehensible One, He is also essentially unknowable. We never can be very sure what the truth concerning God is. And, if we cannot be sure, then we ought not to criticize those who have views differing from ours.

Still others concentrate their attention on the Scriptures themselves, or, perhaps, on our ability to understand the Scriptures. The calling to be tolerant flows forth rather naturally from the position that the Scriptures are not very clear. Taken as a whole, the Scriptures are clear enough; but there is sufficient doubt as to Scripture's meaning in the specifics of Christian doctrine to leave room for a variety of different interpretations. Thus, because different interpretations lead to different doctrinal positions,

we must not be overly hasty in judging critically the opinions of others. Or, if emphasis is placed upon our ability to understand the Scriptures, the position is taken that human beings are fallible and limited in powers of intellect. The result of this is that human beings fail rather miserably both in apprehending the truth as it objectively exists in Scripture and in communicating that truth accurately to others. We must all recognize our limitations. If we recognize our limitations, we will also recognize our proneness to error. And if we are sufficiently aware of our proneness to error, we will admit, in doctrinal disagreements, that we could very well be wrong while our opponent could very well be right. Tolerance then becomes a matter of proper humility.

These are the positions to which one commits himself when he adopts an attitude of tolerance to others who disagree with him in questions of doctrine.

There is, of course, a certain amount of truth in the above assertions. I recall that while I was attending Seminary there were times when we would get into disputes with our professor of Old Testament. After arguing a bit, he would say to us, sometimes with resignation, "You might just as well maintain your position; you are all prophets anyway." What he meant to say was: there is certainly room for disagreement and differences of opinion within the Church of Christ on certain matters of interpretation of Scripture. This is true, and the result is a certain need for "tolerance" within the Church between members. Without it the Church cannot continue. There can never be rigid conformity on every single question of exegesis among the saints. To expect it is to expect too much. To insist upon it is out of keeping with the nature of the Church of Christ here upon earth.

But while we grant that this may be true, there are other considerations which enter into the picture. The question quite naturally arises: How far must this tolerance extend? The answer is not hard to find. Every Protestant denomination which at one time or another has maintained the truth of Scripture, has always also maintained that the limits of such tolerance are the Confessions which the Church has adopted. On matters of the Confessions, there must be agreement. On all matters on which the Confessions do not speak, there must be room for differences of opinion.

This is not merely an arbitrary line which is drawn at some point. The Confessions are not simply chosen as the line beyond which tolerance cannot go because they happen to be a convenient "last ditch stand" against the inroads of doctrinal relativism. The truth of the matter is quite different. The Church has taken the stand that the Confessions mark the limits of

tolerance because the Confessions constitute a *gift* of the Spirit of Christ to the Church. They are not, as such, mere human productions. It is true that they are not on a par with Scripture. They are not infallibly inspired. They are not authoritative in the way that Scripture is authoritative. The authority of the Confessions is *derivative*. The Confessions derive their authority from the Scriptures. But, because and insofar as they agree with the Scriptures, they are authoritative. And the authority they possess is the authority of Scripture itself. This is possible only because they are the fruit of the operation of the Spirit of Christ within the Church. Christ promised this Spirit to the Church on the eve of His passion. There is more than one passage in John's gospel which speaks of this. But we read in John 16:12, 13: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come." The Church recognizes that these Confessions are the fruit of the Spirit of truth. By this recognition, the Church receives these Confessions as statements of the truth as it is in Christ, and as it is revealed in Scripture.

And this brings us to the next point which needs to be made. At the time of the Reformation, the Reformers insisted that exegesis must be free. This stood in direct opposition to what Rome had always taught. Rome had insisted through the years and centuries that exegesis could not be free. It had to be under the control and direction of the *magisterium*, i.e., of the teaching Church which was composed of the clerical hierarchy with the pope at its head. The Roman Catholic Church insisted that, only in this way, could uniformity of doctrine be preserved in the Church. When the Reformers insisted on free exegesis, Rome warned the Reformers that this would lead to a splintering of the Reformation movement into innumerable sects and denominations each with its own pet doctrines. When the Reformation did break up into various denominations, Rome shouted: "We told you so." It seemed as if Rome was correct while the Reformers had broken the unity of the body of Christ.

The Reformers were obligated to take up the charge of Rome. They had to answer Rome's accusations. They did this in various ways. Luther, e.g., wrestled with this problem, but would not admit that the charge of Roman Catholicism was correct. He insisted, and rightly, that there were various principles which contradicted what Rome claimed. The chief principle was this: God alone is the interpreter of Scripture. Luther emphasized this when he said: "God alone can interpret the Scriptures. If

God does not open and explain Holy Writ, no one can understand it; it will remain a closed book, enveloped in darkness."

What did Luther mean by this? He meant, on the one hand, that God interprets the Scriptures objectively through the Scriptures themselves. Scripture interprets Scripture. This is the great principle of the Reformation. Luther wrote often of this. "Such is the way of the whole Scripture: it wants to be interpreted by a comparison of passages from everywhere, and understood under its own direction. The safest of all methods for discerning the meaning of Scripture is to work for it by drawing together and scrutinizing passages." In another place, he writes: "The abominable sophists . . . support themselves with Scripture because they would look laughable if they tried to force only their own dreams on men; but they do not quote Scripture in its entirety. They always snatch up what appears to favour them; but what is against them they either cleverly conceal or corrupt with their cunning glosses."

But, on the other hand, God interprets the Scriptures by means of the subjective operation of the Holy Spirit. This is the Spirit of truth of which the Lord Himself spoke on the night of His betrayal. When the believer has both, the objective Scriptures which he carefully studies in their entirety and the subjective operation of the Spirit, then he will surely learn what the truth of the Scriptures is. When he bows before the Scriptures in humility, then the Scriptures will speak to him. And when God's people do this together, they will learn the truth as it is in Christ. There may be disagreement about the interpretation of some passages, but there will be agreement on Scriptures' teachings. And this truth will be so clear that anyone who wishes to understand the Scriptures will be able to see clearly that this truth is what the Scriptures teach.

Why is it, then, that there is disagreement? It is because the rule of Scriptural interpretation is transgressed. It is characteristic of heretics, Luther says, that they always appeal to individual texts, jerking them out of context and refusing to take the teaching of Scripture as a whole. They "do not quote Scripture in its entirety. They always snatch up what appears to favour them; but what is against them they either cleverly conceal or corrupt with their cunning glosses." And, lacking the subjective operation of the Spirit, they nevertheless make appeal to Scripture because if they did not, "they would look laughable."

This is the beauty of the Confessions. These Confessions teach the truth of the whole Scripture. They give us the *analogia fidei*, the "analogy of faith". And they give this to us as the fruit of the Spirit.

Hence, Luther writes in another place, "God's Word has to be the most marvelous thing in heaven and on earth. That is why it must at one and the same time do two opposite things, namely, give perfect light and glory to those who believe it, and bring utter blindness and shame upon those who believe it not. To the former it must be the most certain and best known of all things; to the latter it must be the most unknown and obscure of all things. The former must extol and praise it above all things; the latter must blaspheme and slander it above all things. So does it operate to perfection and achieve in the hearts of men no insignificant works, but strange and terrible works."

It is not, therefore, a question of the lack of clarity in Scripture itself. Scripture is clear. It is not a lack of ability to understand the Scriptures. The child of God possesses the Spirit of truth. And this is why there can really be no such thing as tolerance in the sense in which it is used today. Concerning the truth of the Scriptures, the believer must be, before God, very intolerant. He must insist that the truth of Scripture be maintained. He does not do this out of a spirit of haughty pride. He does not claim that all men must see it his way simply because he thinks that he has the last word on all matters of doctrine. He is rather concerned about the truth as it is in Christ. For it is

this truth which is God's glory. Any denial of this truth is a slander of the glory of God revealed in Christ and recorded infallibly in Scripture. He must be, as Elijah was, very jealous for the Lord God of Israel. He must be willing to say with Paul: "If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." Galatians 1:9.

Tolerance is a rather strange thing. Tolerant people can be most intolerant. If you talk to a tolerant person sometimes, notice that he will be very, very tolerant of every conceivable heresy under the face of the heavens. But he will be very intolerant of the truth. This is also characteristic of heretics. They can be the most tolerant of men when heresy is rampant. But they will not tolerate the truth. The truth will make them exceedingly angry and upset. And they will strike out against the truth with viciousness. Denominations can also do this when they have begun to shelter heretics under their ecclesiastical wings. This is why the Belgic Confession points out that one of the marks of the false Church is the failure to discipline heretics and ungodly, while persecuting those who confess and love the truth.

But tolerance is a devil's ploy. It is used to deceive the unwary. It is a trap to snare many. It is a means to protect heresy and to destroy the truth as it is in Christ.

THE VOICE OF OUR FATHERS

God, The Overflowing Fountain Of All Good

Prof. Robert D. Decker

"We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God; and that he is eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good."

Article I, Belgic Confession

That the Belgic Confession is true to the Scriptures is obvious from its opening words, "We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth. . ." These words are taken almost literally from Romans 10:9, which reads: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Thus the inspired Apostle states the content of the ". . . word of faith, which we preach," (verse 8). The significance of this opening statement is rich: for it emphasizes that what is contained in the

entire Confession of Faith is the object of the living faith of the children of God. This means, in the first place, that natural understanding and a corrupt heart can never believe what is contained in this creed. This fact is not because there is something defective about the revelation of God, but rather because the ungodly and unrighteous always "... hold the truth in unrighteousness." (Romans 1:18-32) The fool always says in heart that there is no God, and this is precisely why he is a fool! (cf. Psalm 53) Only he who has been conquered by the almighty grace of God in Jesus

Christ can receive by faith what is contained in the Confession of Faith. Apart from faith, the gift of God's grace, man rejects the plain truth of the Word of God set forth in this creed. In the second place, the significance of these opening words lies in this: they emphasize that what the child of God believes in his heart he also confesses with his mouth. Those two can never be separated. There can be no believing in the heart without confessing with the mouth, and there can be no confessing with the mouth apart from believing in the heart. In other words, a true faith always or inevitably results in an oral confession. The fruit of a true faith in the hearts of God's people is that together with God and with one another they confess the Lordship of Jesus in the darkness of the world of sin. Finally, this statement makes clear that what is contained in the creed is not a set of dogmas arranged in strict, cold, logical order. Rather the contents of the creed is the object of the vibrant faith of the Church. The child of God knows these truths and, knowing them, is assured in his heart that the God of Whom they speak is the God of his salvation through Jesus Christ.

Notice, too, that the confession proceeds theocentrically. It begins with God, continues and ends with God. This is characteristic of the Reformed faith. Lutheranism, by contrast, was always rather soteriological (doctrine of salvation) and anthropological (doctrine of man). The Calvinistic branch of the Reformation always emphasized God. This is characteristic of our Belgic Confession. Before anything else is confessed, our creed expresses faith in God, the overflowing fountain of all good. This is more than an interesting observation of which we may take leave having once made it. That the Confession begins with faith in God is of principal importance. To begin with God means: 1) To find in God that beginning of all truth; 2) To speak essentially of nothing else than God in the entire confession; and, 3) To end with the glory of God which is the goal of all things. In God is the principle of all the riches of the truth revealed in the Scriptures and set forth in the creed. God is the God of truth, and the whole truth of the Word is the revelation of God. That is very obvious from the first words of the Bible; "In the beginning God. . ." (Gen. 1:1) The Word of God is not merely a collection of narratives, prophecies, letters, etc. The whole Scripture in its constituent parts is the revelation of God. So it is with the Belgic Confession. The creed begins with God. In this light it is of crucial importance that we understand the truth concerning God: for how we say "God" will profoundly influence how we say "Man," "Salvation," "Christ," "Church," and "Last Things." And contrary to those who are saying that we cannot say anything about Who and What God is, the Belgic Confession begins with the truth concerning God.

The Being of God is the subject of Article I. Concerning the Being of God the Reformed believer confesses that God is one, simple, and spiritual. That God is one means that He is the only God. God is not the greatest of many gods. There is no god beside or under God in heaven or on the earth. God says this of Himself in that beautiful passage, Isaiah 45:5-7: "I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things." That God is one also means, however, that He is the absolutely Self-sufficient One. God is wholly complete and perfect in Himself, and He has no need of anyone or anything outside of Himself to make Him perfect or to enhance His glory. Hence the confession of the Church is always: "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen," (I Timothy 1:17). With this confession of the oneness of God the Church has maintained from her earliest history the truth concerning God overagainst the two errors; Deism and Pantheism. The former heresy denies the immanence of God while Pantheism denies the transcendence of God. While God's whole Being fills the entire creation, He always remains above all that is called creature.

God is a simple Being, i.e., God is not divisible, but remains One in all His attributes and works. There is never any division in God nor any essential difference between any of God's attributes. God's attributes are not only one in Him but these are His Being. Think of how plainly this is emphasized throughout the Word of God! God is: "love" (I John 4:8), "light" (I John 1:5), "the God of all grace" (I Peter 5:10), "the true God, and the living God" (Jeremiah 10:10) etc.

God's Being is also a spiritual Being. This means that God's Being or Essence is essentially different from man's or any other creature's. There is no similarity between the being of the creation and the Being of God. This is true of the world of spirits, too. God is not like the angels in that they are spiritual beings; He is also infinitely different from those ministering spirits. This is true simply because God is always the Creator and every being outside of Him must be created. Jesus made this truth plain to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well when in answer to her question concerning the proper place of worship He said: "God is Spirit: (note, not "a" Spirit as the K.J.V. has it — R.D.D.) and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth," (John 4:24). It is this truth which precludes man's ever knowing God by himself. By the powers of his

intellect and the reasonableness of his logic man will never attain to a knowledge of God. No mystical experience and no emotional "inner light" will ever cause him to know God. If man is to know God, God must come to man in His love and grace and *reveal* Himself.

Some of the attributes of God are also mentioned in this article. Five of the incommunicable attributes (those which belong to God alone) are listed. The article speaks of God's eternity. Eternity is not time infinitely extended as the common misconception has it. The eternity of God is His transcendence above time. The idea is that God is not bound or limited by time. In all His Being and in all His counsel God is above time. This is why "... one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day," (II Peter 3:8). Thus the Church confesses: "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God." (Psalm 90:2) This is what God revealed of Himself to Moses in the flame of fire out of the midst of the bush: "I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you," (Exodus 3:14).

Although God can certainly be known, the Church confesses He can never be comprehended. If the creature could comprehend Him, God would not be God any more. Comprehension implies setting the limits of something or someone. God cannot be limited or defined by man. He is infinitely above and beyond man's knowledge of Him. Even behind that which He reveals of Himself there remains a depth of glory of God which no man will ever plumb. The real reason for this incomprehensibility of God is His invisibility. This does not merely mean that God cannot be seen, but that He cannot be known apart from His own revelation. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him," (John 1:18). The inspired Apostle teaches the same in that profound verse, the 16th, of his first Letter of Timothy: "Who only hath immortality, dwelling in a light which no man can approach unto; whom no

man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen." Note well that this passage teaches emphatically that no man is able to approach the light in which God dwells, and no man is able to see Him. God can only be seen by grace in the face of Jesus Christ. (cf. also; I Tim. 1:17, Romans 1:20, Col. 1:15)

The Church believes and confesses the Immutability of God. This quite naturally follows from God's eternity. Time necessarily means change, but God is above all time. God, therefore, is also unchangeable. This is a most comforting truth, for God declares through His prophet: "For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed," (Malachi 3:6). Not only is this true but God's immutability is also the reason why He is the giver of every good and perfect gift according to James 1:17.

Finally, in this connection the Reformed Churches confess the infinity of God. This is certainly implied in those attributes the article has already mentioned. Let it be understood that God cannot be limited in any sense. He is absolutely without boundary. Notice, too, that when we speak thus on the basis of the Word of God about our Sovereign and Maker, we must needs speak in negative terms; God is *not* visible, He is *not* comprehensible, etc.

The article also mentions some of the communicable attributes of God (those which are reflected by grace in the elect in Christ). Among these are God's Omnipotence (His absolute power), Wisdom, Righteousness, and Goodness. All these are clearly taught in the Scriptures. We call your attention to I Timothy 6:15, Romans 1:19, 20, Eph. 1:17-21, Romans 16:27, I Cor. 1:18, ff., Deut. 32:4, Psalm 145:17, and I John 2:29.

Indeed, God is the overflowing fountain of all good. He is worthy of praise. One must be convinced, too, that in this brief but profound statement concerning what we all believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths concerning the ever blessed God of our salvation the Belgic Confession breathes the Holy Scriptures.

Read the STANDARD BEARER!

STUDIES IN ISAIAH

The Church's Corrupt Rules

Rev. Robt. C. Harbach

How she is, the faithful city become a harlot! She (was) full of judgment, righteousness was lodging in her; but now murderers! Thy silver is become dross, thy wine cut with water. Thy princes, rebels and companions of thieves, all loving a bribe, and pursue rewards. They judge not the orphan, and the cause of the widow comes not unto them. (Isaiah 1:21-23)

In the immediately foregoing context, the Lord reminds us that obedience is the way of blessing for the child of God. At the same time He issues warning against refusing to obey, marking the dangers of determined unwillingness and the heinousness of wilful rejection of the Lord. We are in need of such warning, lest we continue in a way of destruction, for we are all prone to rebel most bitterly against the mercy of God, and throw ourselves against the thick bosses of His buckler in hostile resistance against Him. For the sentence of the just Judge of all the earth is pronounced with the certainty and finality of the highest tribunal against the unfaithful and disobedient. That sentence is from the very mouth of Jehovah, and He makes no idle threats. Justice shall be executed speedily upon the children of disobedience, the sword of divine retribution cutting them out of Isreal, destroying them utterly. But now, in both figurative and natural terms, the Lord laments the degraded condition of the chosen nation and its capital city.

I. *Their Depraved Character.* "How is she become a harlot, the faithful city!" Emphasis deserves to be placed on the word *how*, for it expresses shocking surprise (How could she! how strange that she should!), and is an exclamation of complaint, pain and grief which God feels for a people who are the exact opposite of their original state of bride of Jehovah. He, the Husband, who rejoices in the presence of His angels over one sinner that repents (Lk. 15:7, 10), laments the degeneracy of Judah and Jerusalem, and the ruin of the whole state and church. For in the time of David and in the early part of Solomon's reign, the city was a holy city, a type of the true church, which is the faithful, chaste virgin of Christ. But now citizenry and rulers are fallen. Then passing from the figure of adultery to adulteration the prophet illustrates from the business life of the times. "Thy silver is become dross." The nobles and princes who had been pure, shining examples are now corrupted. They had departed from righteousness and

separated themselves from justice, proving themselves not silver in the smelting process, but dregs, scum and slag. Once they were the choice silver of the theocratic state. Now they are refuse, fit only for the dunghill. So the Lord complains, "The house of Israel is become dross unto Me" (Ezek. 22:17). "Thy wine is mixed with water." The vintners adulterated their strong drink with water to cheat their customers. In the dairy business, checks are made on the milk to prevent its dilution with water. We also speak of "cut wine", cut or wounded with water! Wine-dealers commenced in mutilated wine and spurious money. They caught their innocent patrons coming and going in their fraudulent traffic in bad wine and counterfeit money given in change. Both dross and water-wine have the appearance of genuine silver and good wine; but neither is worth the corrosion on a counterfeit coin. So the rulers of Jerusalem had denerated to politicians. They had a showing and form of justice and legal ethics, but in actuality nothing of these. How good it is when pastor and people can still turn from the corrupt state and the apostate church to say humbly and truly with Paul, "For we are not as many, who corrupt the Word of God, but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ" (2 Cor. 2:17).

Then the prophet illustrates conditions from married life. "How is the faithful city become an harlot!" Here is a fallen bride, once a chaste virgin espoused to Christ. Jerusalem had heretofore been a faithful city, true to the covenant of the Lord, which covenant is a marriage covenant. The marriage covenant establishes a relationship of intimate friendship and love between husband and wife. But the wife, the beautiful, virtuous woman broke the covenant and became a harlot. She doted upon many lovers, yet was worse than a city prostitute. For she professed the strictness of the Pharisees while living as a harlot. In Jesus' day, the people, as represented by that city, were called by Him an "adulterous generation"; and in John's day, "the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt." So the fallen bride became a depraved wife. "She was (once) full of justice; righteousness was lodging in her; but now murderers." Licentious love hardens the heart, soon turns into hatred, and easily falls into murder. Hardened by sensual lust, she now unfeeling takes murderers (those who dash into pieces) for her

paramours. Righteousness *used* to lodge in her, but now there is a change in her so great that she cannot be recognized from her former self. The just and the right used to remain and dwell in her. But now, antipodal to love and righteousness, harlotry and murder fill her heart. So is this city which represents a people. When the church departs from the true worship of God, she becomes guilty of spiritual adultery. If David and Isaiah could rise from the dead and see Palestine today; if Calvin could thus return to Geneva; if the Puritans could so return to Westminster, and if Warfield to Princeton today, they would all exclaim, "How is the faithful city become an harlot!"

II. *Their Perverted Activity.* By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Isaiah not only delineates their character, but also their wicked activity. It is crooked. For they have deliberately departed from the highway of holiness and righteousness. Having the position of right men, they are actually rebel men. "Thy princes are rebels." They are stubborn and obstinate, even in the administration of perverted justice. Where they have it as their calling to maintain the law of God, they are themselves rebels against it. Rulers of the state are responsible to God to protect the good and to punish the evil (Rom. 13:1-4). But they became thieves, "companions of thieves," so that the innocent man stood a better chance with a band of thieves, a gang of bandits, or a horde of assassins than with a bench of these judges. Where in Jerusalem, in all Judah, may one find a just, impartial judge? They are all associated with thieves, are their accomplices. The expression in the original means "to join together, to *charm*, to bind with a spell." Crooked men have charmed them and bound them with their evil spell. Instead of driving out these thieves, they became the secret heads and master-minds of crime. All this is to be understood spiritually, primarily, and as such, they were moral vultures and jackals.

Their activity is also characterized by a craving, mad, itching lust. They were graft-lovers, setting their hearts on the court salaries, fees and fines, and any extras they could exact. They were "all loving a bride," and sought gifts from the rich. So they became extortioners and thieves. Such do not enter into the kingdom of God (I Cor. 6:10). They follow after, pursue rewards, are gift-seekers. They help only those who can come to them with secret presents. The word *rewards* has as its root the idea of "peace," something they did *not* pursue, but rather that which would *pacify* their greed. Thus is come to pass the saying that "a bribe blindeth the wise (or them that have sight), and perverteth the words (cause) of the righteous" (Ex. 23:8).

III. *Their Evil Fruit.* In their evil-doing they were oppressive. "The orphan they do not judge," but withhold justice. As someone has well said, "proud and rich oppressors are the worst robbers." The fatherless, the bereaved, the lonely they overlook, pretending they do not see their miseries, shutting their ears against their pitiful cries. They are cruel to the small and insignificant. Murders go unpunished. How much like our own day! There used to be certain cities in the U.S.A. especially noted for crime, such as St. Louis and Detroit. Now no one city has such notoriety. All the cities of the land are full of rapists and murderers. True, to the end of time tares shall grow among the wheat, and we may not root them up. But swine are not to be tolerated in the grain-field. Yet law and order are fast becoming a thing of the past. What intensifies this wickedness of the princes is the fact that they came from a generation of righteous and godly people. When the most faithful of men degenerate, they become the most wicked of all. We, therefore, must be warned that if as people of God we decline from righteousness we become monsters of iniquity. That which was originally best, after corruption, becomes worst. "Did not thy father . . . do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him? He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him; was not this to know Me? saith the Lord. But *thine* eyes and *thine* heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it" (Jer. 22:15-17).

We see what these elders of Israel were, what they became, what they did, and now, what they produce. Their product-in-trade is blood and sweat and tears, which they squeeze out of others in abundance. It is customary for them to forget the needy. "The cause of the widow does not come unto them." The widow has no access to them. *She* has no bribe to give. The judge hates the weak. The cause of the defenseless never reaches the chambers of these so-called dispensers of justice. They cannot stoop to their grievances. The term 'cause' has in it the root idea of quarrelling, and is illustrated by the thought of "seizing each other by the hair," as might easily come to pass in the case of jealousy and oppression between a prosperous wife and a poor widow. But the wicked judge will not take up the case, nor look into the contention of the weak. It is *his* purpose and profit to crush God's people, and grind the face of the poor (Isa. 3:15). So there are times when holiness and righteousness are little attended to in the church. But this God orders in His wise providence "that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (I Cor. 11:19). Also He would teach us to leave the unjust and impenitent who persecute us to the Judge of all who shall speedily avenge His own elect.

GUEST ARTICLE

The Prayer That God's Will Be Done (2)

Rev. Richard G. Moore

(The second of two articles treating the third petition as it is explained in the 49th Lord's Day of the Heidelberg Catechism.)

In our first article on the third petition of the "Lord's Prayer" we concerned ourselves with the treatment of the basic idea of the petition, "Thy will be done," and in this connection the treatment of the phrase, "Grant that we and all men may renounce our own will," in the answer to the 124th question of the Heidelberg Catechism. It is the intention at this time to complete the study of the answer to the question, "Which is the third petition?" as set forth in the 49th Lord's Day of the Heidelberg Catechism: "'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven': that is, grant that we and all men may renounce our own will, and without murmuring obey thy will, which is only good; that so everyone may attend to, and perform the duties of his station and calling, as willingly and faithfully as the angels do in heaven." It is the author's desire that you read the first article on this petition before taking up the reading of this present one.

This prayer, taught to us by our Lord Jesus, guides us to pray: "Lord, so submit our wills to thine, that in all of our life, our ways may be submitted to the testimony of Thy Word. And so guide each step we take or decision we make, that we may be certain it is based upon and rooted in the truth of the gospel of Christ." Our prayer, therefore, must be for diligence to walk from the law of God. For our calling is to walk in ways well pleasing to God, to walk in obedience before Him, and to serve Him in love! But naturally we stand in enmity against God, and our natural inclination is not to please Jehovah. Rather, we are concerned with our flesh, and desire naturally to please it. Our desire is not to obey God's law, but to make our own laws!

There is a conflict within God's children. The elect according to the principle of new life desires God's law and way, but according to his flesh he serves sin. Thus the child of God when convicted in his heart of sin by God, and when aware of his natural depravity,

lifts his voice to God for grace. Jesus teaches him to pray through this petition for grace and the fullness of the Spirit of Christ to walk in ways conformable to the law of God in thanksgiving. It is the prayer for consecration, and above this it is the prayer for grace to be sustained in the battle of faith. For in this life as we pray this prayer, we will never be free of the natural inclination of the flesh. We have but the smallest beginnings of new obedience. And this is what draws the child of God daily in prayer to Father, "Let Thy will be done." Daily our sins rise up against us, and daily they testify we are worthy only of desolation – the law condemns!

Hence, daily we need the testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ – that gospel that testifies that for the sake of His Son God forgives our sin and gives us the Spirit of sanctification. And we pray by this petition, "O God, for Jesus' sake give us more and more and more grace, and more and more obedience, that we may walk in Thy ways. Give us grace to be strangers and pilgrims in the midst of this world, in order that Thy name may be glorified." So our prayer indeed becomes a prayer for grace to cast off our own will, which seeks the wisdom of this world. A wisdom which is concerned with the logic, philosophy, psychology or politics of this life. And we must pray for grace that our eyes may be drawn away from this life, that they may be set upon the kingdom of heaven. For to walk in obedience to God, we must come to know His will, and learn therein to be content.

Hence when we pray this third petition, we pray to know. The prayer of the third petition is the prayer of the child of God, who naturally rebels against the Word, that God may so rule in our hearts by the Spirit of Christ, that we may long for the preaching of the gospel. It becomes manifest upon the lips of the child of God in the following manner: "O Lord, give us grace to love the pure Word preached, give us grace to prepare for the preaching of God's Word. Grant that we may renounce our natural inclination to love this world, which natural desire would keep us from the preaching. Grant that we may above all

things set Thy Word and its proclamation before us.” It is also a prayer for grace to overcome our natural inclination to treat the Bible as any other common book; and instead we must seek strength to love the Word so much, that it becomes the central part of all of our life. Then the Bible will not lie idle on the table or night stand in our homes; and our prayer shall be: “Give us grace to open the Scriptures, to read them, to study the Bible; that we might come to a knowledge of thy will. And, our God, grant that we may live with Thy Word having the central place in all of our activity and life!”

Further, our prayer must be for sanctified wisdom. Thus we pray: “O God, our wisdom naturally is that of the world, which counts the preaching of the cross of Christ foolishness and vanity. Forgive our sinfulness. And, Father, even though we do not have the most fluent tongue, or are not the most educated, pour forth the Spirit of sanctification that by grace we may come to know Thy will. And give us wisdom to apply it to all of our lives. May Thy Word direct our every step.”

According to the Heidelberg Catechism, we then must pray for grace to acknowledge obedience to the will of God as the only good. Understand, our natural inclination is to see good in many things. We would reason that it is good to have certain nice clothes, a fine home, a new car, plenteous food, or the best job. And it must be said that it is not necessarily wrong to have some of these things. However, it is only good to walk, labor, and to seek fellowship in the midst of this world as we make all things subservient to our service of our God. Never must these things become the principal goals of our life. And thus our life must be rooted in and grounded in the Word of God.

Especially is this true of the particular portion and talent that becomes ours! This petition must be a prayer for contentment in the way in which God has placed us. God’s children are called to be content with the talents God has given them. When we pray, “Thy will be done,” Jesus teaches us to pray that God will keep us from being envious of our brothers who may have more talent. Thus the prayer: “Lord, keep us from discontent. Gracious God, keep us from our natural inclinations to tear apart our brethren, that we might gain a portion or honor to which we have no right, and which does not belong to us. Give us grace in our daily life to be content with the way in which Thou hast placed us. And if that portion is sickness, give us grace in this sickness to glorify thee. Our natural inclination is to complain or to fall into despair when Thou hast brought us low. Give us grace to do Thy will, to serve Thee, and to thank Thee for all Thou dost send. Make us by Thy Spirit and Word to become conformable to the life of Christ that dwells within us.”

Such must be the child of God’s prayer!

If you don’t pray this prayer, then you don’t walk as the child of the living God! And if this prayer does not bring you away from the world, and does not separate you from secular goals, and if this prayer does not cause you to flee from sin and to fall on your knees before God in repentance, then it is not a prayer from the heart either. Rather in such case it becomes rank hypocrisy!

But the child of God, who prays unto Jehovah, prays this petition in humility, out of love!

O, all too often we fail to utter the prayer, “Thy will be done,” from the heart. But God’s elect have the assurance as they seek to do the will of the Father, but fail, falling to the side of His law in their seeking, that Christ hath walked in perfect obedience even unto the cross in their behalf. And upon the merits of His cross Christ takes our prayer in perfection unto God. And He will lead His children most assuredly to glory!

This, too, is the end of this petition. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven! It is a prayer for perfection. And it is a prayer for God’s final glory, Thy will be DONE! The angels who dwell in heaven have no sin to pollute or dilute the principle of new life that dwells within them! They walk before God in perfect obedience, rejoicing in and glorifying His Name. Now this prayer of God’s loved ones is, “So, Lord, may Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Understand, this is essentially a prayer for the new heavens and new earth. It is a prayer for the day Christ comes upon the clouds of heaven in glory. It is a prayer for the glorification of the saints everlastingly, and a prayer for the final casting away of the enemies of God and His church. And this for the end that there only remains perfect obedience unto the precious will of Jehovah! In your life and mine!

Hence, the church prays for the grace to set all of our hopes in this life upon the things that are to come. It is therefore a prayer to do that today and every day of our lives. So we pray, “Lord grant that we might so submit our wills unto Thine that our spiritual eyes may be fastened upon Thy heavenly kingdom and its righteousness. And may this give direction to all of our life and activity. May Thy church be faithful, may Thy people be gathered together, and may they be taken to glory. That Thy Name may be all in all!” It is a prayer above all for the glory of God’s Name. And so it shall be as God for Christ’s sake hears this prayer, and brings His elect church into perfection. There shall be only holiness, obedience, righteousness, and that which is good; and God’s name through it all shall be glorified.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

The World Food Crisis

Rev. G. Van Baren

For nation shall rise against nation . . . and there shall be famines and troubles; these are the beginnings of sorrows. — Mark 13:8

Nothing is older to man than his struggle for food. From the time the early hunters stalked the mammoths and the first sedentary “farmers” scratched the soil to coax scrawny grain to grow, man has battled hunger. History is replete with his failures. The Bible chronicles one famine after another; food was in such short supply in ancient Athens that visiting ships had to share their stores with the city; Romans prayed at the threshold of Olympus for food.

Where would you conclude the above quote comes from (including the Scriptural reference)? One might, at first glance, conclude that it came from some religious periodical. Not so. It rather introduced a striking article on famine and food shortages and appeared in *Time* of Nov. 11, 1974.

I have in earlier articles both quoted from *Time* and referred to the growing food shortages and famines. At the risk of appearing repetitious and even boring, I would call your attention to this subject again. I do so because the news media and the secular press has been doing this. And especially striking does their treatment of the subject become when these quote from Scripture the very reference of one of the signs of the end of time! Is the secular and worldly press recognizing the hand of God in all this? Probably not. Likely Scripture, when apparently pertinent, is quoted in the same manner that Shakespeare is. Yet it remains striking when one sees Scripture quoted at the head of an article appearing in a secular and worldly magazine.

Time points out, correctly, that there have been famines throughout the ages of the world. These are recorded in Scripture — we think of Abraham in Egypt because of famine; and mention is made of a later famine in Abraham’s days as well as in the days of Isaac. History is filled with instances of terrible famines in specific localities.

Recently, famines again have been prominently presented in news reports. Who has not seen the shocking pictures of the poor in Bangladesh standing in line to get a pail of watery gruel? Who has not seen

the pathetic pictures of children with distended stomachs — at the point of death? *Time* reports, “Then, in the past two years, this optimism turned to despair as hunger and famine began ravaging hundreds of millions of the poorest citizens in at least 40 nations. Much of the ground gained in the battle for food seemed lost as the world’s harvest in 1972 was roughly 3% short of meeting demands. This year’s harvest has also been disappointing, and experts now question whether man can prevent widespread starvation.” (*Time*, Nov. 11, 1974). *Time* continues by reporting some of the figures of the current problem:

Then came 1972. Bad weather started to plague so much of the world’s crop land that many experts conclude that the climate itself is changing. Harsh winters, droughts, or typhoons cut output in the Soviet Union, Argentina, Australia, the Philippines and India. Off the coast of Peru, a change in ocean currents and overfishing decimated the anchovy catch, a major source of protein for animal feed. In Southeast Asia and parts of Africa, the peanut crop — providing mainly animal feed and cooking oil — fell far below normal. All told, the world’s food output dropped for the first time in 20 years, down 33 million tons, from 1,200 million tons. Merely to meet the added demand of increased population and rising living standards it should have increased by at least 24 million tons.

The *Time* article continues by suggesting that even the experts see little or no reason to hope for improvement of the situation. These see only that the problem will become aggravated.

No economist sees any way that the developing nations will have enough money even for the food. Nor can they rely on aid. Though the U.S. has given away \$25 billion worth of food in the past two decades, the American people will probably not support large aid programs if prices at their neighborhood supermarkets remain high. It is also uncertain whether the world has enough ships, trains and trucks to move such quantities of grain.

This grim prognosis has led to apocalyptic warnings from some of the world’s top food experts. “We will see increasing troubles, not declining troubles,” predicts Dr. John Knowles, president of the Rockefeller Foundation. “We will see increasing famine, pestilence, the extermination of large

numbers of people. Malthus has already been proved correct." The most vulnerable to such disasters: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Sahel nations, Ethiopia, Northeast Brazil, the high regions of the Andes and the poor parts of Mexico and Central America.

The concern about famine conditions represents only a beginning of problems. Many have pointed out that shortages and famines likely result in political instability, loss of "liberty", beginning of dictatorships. One man stated, "You cannot have political stability based on empty stomachs and poverty. When I see food lines in developing countries, I know that those governments are under pressure and are in danger of falling." Recently, too, Secretary of State Kissinger, warned that even in our own country with increasing inflation, concern about food prices, there is a real danger of a change of government and dictatorship. A person is ready for change when problems seem overwhelming. At least in part, this explains the rise of a Hitler in Germany. The same can easily arise in nations today.

Though many see little hope of real solutions, some have nevertheless been suggested. Recently, we have heard of a World Food Conference which had been held in Rome. Not much seems to have come from that — except rhetoric. Some solutions suggested were: 1. the stockpiling of grain to prepare for future shortages; 2. an "early food warning system" to give advance warning concerning impending shortages; etc. Other solutions are being suggested, too. Presumably, only half of the world's arable acres are being presently used. That could be increased. It has been suggested that more fertilizers be used (but these fertilizers are already in short supply). More irrigation might help. One must also improve food distribution and storage (25% of the world's food "disappears" between the field and the table). Develop new varieties of crops. Study possibilities of using different kinds of edible foods. Then there is the "stork-farmer" race. The solution proposed is increased population control.

Those are some of the solutions. Man will try many things in order to overcome the disasters which befall him. Sometimes, it seems, man in his inventiveness does for a time find solutions. More often than not, man's cleverness appears to "backfire" when the situation becomes worse for the meddling of man.

But in all of the proposed "solutions", God is left from the picture. That His hand is seen in all of this, is ignored or denied by man. Man blames the "population explosion". He has theories of "changing weather patterns". He suggests "chance" or "accident" as the explanation of what befalls man. And that too, even when he quotes from Scripture pertinent passages which foretell all of these things.

The child of God does see the Word of God being

fulfilled. Famines have always taken place. But before, these were not usually brought to the attention of the peoples of the whole world. And if only by virtue of the larger numbers of people on the earth, there are today many more people affected by famine than ever before in history. The famines which occur are being brought to our attention via television and newspaper and magazine. Now, even while filling our stomachs with the abundance which we still enjoy, we can watch the pathetic multitudes, presented in the news broadcasts, dying before our eyes because of a lack of food.

The result of famines is that another of the prophecies of Scripture is being fulfilled. There is not only the black horse (famine) of Rev. 6, but also the pale green one. The latter represents death in its various forms. For the past few years, it seemed as though man had succeeded in prolonging the life-span of man. The average age of man was increasing. But the past few years, this has changed. *Time* mentions, "Indeed, in parts of Central America, in ten sub-Saharan nations and in some rural areas of India, the 20-year trend of declining death rates and infant mortality is being reversed. Death rates are rising. . . ."

So, God's Word is proving to be so very true. Nor ought the child of God be frightened at beholding this fulfillment. We know that all these things must be — before our Lord returns on the clouds of heaven. Perhaps we will be seeing much of this famine in the days to come. How long all this will last, we do not know.

And what ought the child of God to do? How can he "help" in these times of famine in many lands? One must take care lest he be caught up in the foolish fads of man. There were reports the very day this article is written of college students conducting a day-long fast — to find out how it feels to go hungry and to contribute the money saved to famine relief. Yet we do have a calling. It is difficult, almost impossible, for an individual to do anything that might help; in fact, it is difficult even for a small denomination such as ours to be able to assist in foreign lands. Yet perhaps our diaconate ought to investigate this matter. Like the church at Antioch which took collections for the famine-affected Jerusalem church, so also perhaps we could seek to help the saints in other lands in their need. Our assistance, I think, ought not to be directed promiscuously to famine areas — but specifically toward the saints of Christ who are in need. The church in the early New Testament age did that.

And if there are ways in which we can help, let us not forget that the famines themselves are part of the signs of the end of the age. The time shortly comes when our Lord returns. Let us be sure that we watch.

FEATURE

Doon Church Building Progress



During the summer of 1973, our congregation decided to buy four choice lots in Doon on which to build a new church. This decision was made because our present building is in need of extensive repair and because we have grown in numbers to such an extent that an addition to the old building was needed. Rather than put new wine in an old bottle or a new patch on an old piece of cloth we decided to buy this property and to look into the possibility of building a new edifice.

At the beginning the financial burden this would place on our small congregation seemed insurmountable. How would our thirty-three families come up with even enough to begin such a project? One committee was appointed to study the financial problems and made recommendations and another committee to consider building plans. After hours of hard work, frustration and many disappointments, they presented their recommendations to the consistory. The consistory presented their work to the congregation for approval. The proposal was to build a one hundred thousand dollar structure if and only if the congregation would support this building program with the initial amount of forty thousand dollars in cash and pledges to be paid within six months. It passed and the support of the congregation was overwhelming. The financial committee with a week to work, visited every family

and collected much more than the needed amount. The response of one of the committee members to the drive was "It was fun!" With the full support of the congregation, the contract was signed before the July 1 deadline and thus we were able to purchase material at the old price.

In August the basement was dug and the basement walls were laid. In September the floor joists and subfloor were added. It was, however, in October that the work began in earnest. The sound of hammers, heard half way across Doon, and the snarling table saw were music to the ears of our congregation anxious to see the building progress. Within three weeks, the rough in work was nearly completed. The walls first, then the rafters, roof boards, shingles, trim, windows, and stairs to the basement.

We hope to occupy the new building by the first Sunday in March. This day has been designated by the 1974 Synod as the day all our churches should set aside for our fiftieth anniversary.

As this house of worship nears completion we remind ourselves that "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." It is our earnest prayer that the Lord will continue to bless us in this work and use it to the glorifying of His holy name.

— John Kalsbeek, Jr.

News From Our Churches

November 30, 1974

From a trio consisting of Revs. Miersma, Veldman, and Woudenberg, Kalamazoo elected to extend a call to Rev. Woudenberg.

A recent Hudsonville bulletin included an excerpt from a letter received from Rev. Kuiper. In that letter our missionary in Skowhegan gave a brief account of his activities there. He mentioned having given a Reformation Day speech, a condensed version of which he later presented in the Canaan Christian School. The speech, he said, attracted a "few visitors." He also reported that he has begun preaching a third service near Portland. His plans are "to do that every other week for a while, and encourage the people down there to come up here the alternate weeks."

A number of bulletins have recently included information concerning building projects. The Forbes' congregation, and Faith Church in Jenison, for example, are each concerned with the construction of a parsonage. Southwest planned to consider, at its December 3 Congregational meeting, a proposal "regarding purchase of property for future building." And Doon is in the process of actually

putting up a new church building. Early in August, already, the basement walls were in place, and by the end of October the roof was being shingled. According to a September bulletin from Doon, the congregation decided to install an electric heating system in the new building, and to provide for air conditioning in both the main floor and the basement. It's expected that the building will be ready for use "by about next March."

From several Grand Rapids' bulletins we learn that the Radio Choir has been reorganized. It's replacing First Church's Choral Society, and is under the sponsorship of the Radio Committee which, according to the announcements, "has a real need for more recorded choir music."

South Holland's pastor has apparently had a variety of speaking engagements lately. On October 23 Rev. Engelsma spoke at the chapel exercises of Illiana Christian High School. The following week he spoke at the chapel exercises of our Hope School in Grand Rapids (while there to record sermons for his current series on the Reformed Witness Hour). The following week he spoke at the chapel exercises of

(continued on back page)

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

The Lord willing, on December 21, 1974, our parents, MR. AND MRS. KENNETH A. RIETEMA hope to commemorate their 25th wedding anniversary. We, their grateful children, are thankful to God for the Christian home and instruction they have, by His grace, provided. We pray that God will bless them in their future years together.

Mr. and Mrs. Michael Engelsma
Bonita Rietema
Barbara Rietema
Kenneth Rietema
Ronda Rietema

Grand Rapids, Michigan

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On January 1, 1975, the Lord willing, our parents, MR. AND MRS. SIMON ONDERSMA will celebrate their 35th wedding anniversary.

We, their children are thankful to our covenant God for all He gave us through them. It is our prayer that they may continue to experience the Lord's blessings in their remaining days.

Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Ondersma
Mr. and Mrs. David Ondersma
Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Holstege
Barbara Ondersma
and their 13 grandchildren

Jenison, Michigan

NOTICE!!!

Classis East will meet, the Lord willing, in regular session on January 8, 1975, at the First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Material to be treated at this session must be in the hands of the Stated Clerk no later than ten days prior to the convening of this session.

John Huiskens
Stated Clerk

Know the standard

and follow it.

Read the

STANDARD BEARER!



Rest Haven Christian Convalescent Home. Then, after a couple of weeks' break from his chapel exercising, he was at the Holland Home, for the November 21 chapel exercises there.

* * * * *

And, since we're on the subject anyway, I could refer to another bulletin which announced that chapel exercises for the students of our Doon school would be held in the Doon Church on October 31. The parents were invited to attend, too, and, in addition, according to the announcement, "Edgerton will be coming down." Rev. Moore was the chapel speaker. After the program everyone went over to the school, where refreshments were served.

* * * * *

For the remainder of the news column, I'll have to dip into my reserves. Actually, it's high time I do that, for some of the material in my box, I see, dates back to the middle of 1973! For this time, though, how about a little news (if you'll permit the use of that term in this context) concerning the various Church Picnics held during the summer of 1974.

It appears, from bulletin announcements concerning them, that the picnic dinners are something of a highlight in those affairs. We notice that Southwest's people enjoyed a catered chicken dinner on June 8. First Church's picnic, held on that same date, again featured an ox roast. And on the 4th of July, South Holland's congregation enjoyed a hog roast, held on the school grounds. Several of our western congregations got together, also on July 4, for an inter-church picnic at Hull Park. Candidate James Slopsema spoke at the afternoon program. Canteen service was available for the noon lunch. At Doon's church picnic, held on July 17, there was a "pot luck" dinner, as there was also at the Isabel/Forbes' picnic on July 4. The latter included a short program, with Rev. Mark Hoeksema as the speaker.

Whether fried chicken is brought in, or rounds of juicy beef turn on a spit all day, makes very little difference, of course. It's wonderful that the members of our various congregations can come together on occasion for a day of fun and fellowship. As Rev. Miersma put it, in his June 23 bulletin, "for those who seek and enjoy the fellowship of the saints, this is an excellent opportunity to do so."

D.D.

THE STANDARD BEARER

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CONTENTS:

The Rejected Christ Child	122
Editor's Notes	124
The EPC and Common Grace	125
The Birth of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (2)	128
Tolerance	131
God, The Overflowing Fountain of All Good	133
The Church's Corrupt Rules	136
The Prayer That God's Will Be Done (2)	138
The World Food Crisis	140
Doon Church Building	142
News From Our Churches	143