

# The **STANDARD BEARER**

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

The risen Christ is exalted to God's right hand where He receives the Spirit without measure, and that Spirit He pours out in the church and in the hearts of all them who are ordained to eternal life. And they do not need to see Him with their natural eye, for He takes up His abode in them. And they believe what they do not see. Blessed are they, indeed!

See "Believing in the Resurrection" — page 818.

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## THE STANDARD BEARER

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## MEDITATION

## Believing In The Resurrection

Rev. M. Schipper

*"Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."*

John 20:29

This conversation between Jesus and Thomas took place eight days after the Lord had risen from the dead.

On the evening of the resurrection day Jesus met with His disciples behind closed doors, but Thomas

was not with them. That the disciples were gathered together behind closed doors, we are told, was because of fear of the Jews. Why they feared the Jews we are not told. We can only surmise that they had concluded that what had happened to Jesus at the hand of the Jews, would also happen to them. That



they were gathered together that resurrection evening was, no doubt, to discuss the events of the day. Some had reported that they had seen the risen Lord, others heard rumors that He was risen from the dead. With the crucifixion of Christ their hope had turned to despair; but now that He was reported to be alive, their hope was rekindled. That Thomas was not with them, was due to the fact that he would not believe what he had heard with his ears until he had seen it with his eyes, and handled it with his hands. The other disciples had reported to him: "We have seen the Lord." But he said unto them: "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe."

Because he so expressed himself, he has acquired the name Thomas, the Doubter, or, Doubting Thomas.

But why make this harsh judgement of Him? Was it not true that the rest of the disciple group should also be called doubters? Do we not read of them that when the women had reported to them that they had seen the risen Lord, their words seemed to them as idle tales? Was it not also true that, when they heard from faithful witnesses that the Lord was risen, and when he suddenly appeared to them behind closed doors, they had great difficulty in believing that He was indeed the risen Lord? Does not Luke's gospel inform us (24:37-43) that when He appeared unto them and said "Peace be unto you," they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed they had seen a spirit? And did not the Lord find it necessary to eat before them, and show them His hands and feet, before they would believe? Indeed, they also doubted, and would not believe until they had seen with their eyes what the Lord was pleased to show them in His appearance. Surely, if Thomas must be called the Doubter, then consistency would demand that all the other disciples should also be given this appellation.

Thomas is not a doubter, an unbeliever, but he is one who will believe only what he can see with his eyes, and handle with his hands. But such an one, so long as he remains such, can never taste the blessedness of seeing the unseen.

That he might become an eye-witness of the resurrection, as the rest, the Lord appears unto him eight days later as he is now assembled with the rest of the disciples.

Directly the Lord goes to Thomas and exhorts him to "reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and not be faithless, but believing." We do not read that Thomas responded by touching Him, and we suppose that he did not. Immediately he exclaims "My Lord, and my God." Thomas believed what he

saw very plainly, namely, the appearance of the resurrected Lord.

"Then Jesus saith unto him, Thomas because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are those not seeing, and believing."

Concerning Thomas we know very little. When the names of the apostles are mentioned, his name appears among them. He was also called Didymus. That was his Greek name, which along with his Hebrew name Thomas means "little." But that tells us very little about him. Perhaps from birth he was small in stature. From those instances when the Scriptures speak of him in particular, we gather that he was one of so many who always looked on the dark side of things. Perhaps we could say that he was also of a stubborn disposition, one who would defend his point of view until he knew that he could not any longer maintain it. But at the same time he reflected a certain warmth in his character, and certainly he must have loved Jesus with a very deep love. He, too, along with the others of the apostle group evidently misunderstood the Lord and His mission, believing that He had come to set up an earthly kingdom.

We become a little acquainted with him for the first time in Perea where Jesus had gone with His disciples because the Jews had lately threatened to kill Him (John 11). There Jesus had received word that Lazarus, His friend, was sick. He did not respond immediately to the message, waiting two days until He knew Lazarus had died. Then Jesus announced to His disciples that He must go to Bethany. His disciples warned Him that He had left the area because the Jews had threatened to kill Him. But Jesus insists that He must go because Lazarus sleepeth, yea, was dead. It is at this point that Thomas says: "Let us also go that we may die with Him." Two things are to be noted here: not only the profound love of Jesus which he showed in his willingness to die with Him, but also the gloomy aspect which this disciple had for the future. Evidently he meant to say this: If Jesus dies and is killed, everything which we had hoped for will also be finished, that is, the hope of an earthly Kingdom. If Jesus dies, this hope will perish with Him; and therefore we might as well be dead also. There is no hope for anything beyond Jesus' death.

A little later we read of Thomas again (John 14). After the Lord had instituted the Lord's Supper and then announced that He was about to leave them to return unto the Father, He seeks to quiet and comfort their sad hearts by saying, "Let not your hearts be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you, and whither I go ye know, and the way ye know." But Thomas said unto him, "Lord, we know not whither Thou goest, and how can we



know the way?" Jesus said unto him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Here also it appears that Thomas could see no farther than an earthly Jesus. If Jesus would go, that would be the end as far as the disciples and Thomas were concerned.

Now we find him again, a week after the resurrection. Jesus had suffered and died. He had gone the way of the cross. He had suffered, and died, and was buried. With that death and burial of Jesus, as far as Thomas was concerned, everything else was buried. True, that was the thinking of all the disciples, but of Thomas it was especially true.

For Thomas the resurrection was an impossibility. O, Thomas was not a Sadducee. Like Martha, the sister of Lazarus, he believed in the resurrection in the last day. Nor could he deny that Jesus had the power of the resurrection, for he evidently was also a witness of the miracle of the resurrection in the case of Lazarus. But that Jesus would rise from the dead, that was farthest from his thoughts and understanding. For him the cause of Jesus was lost with His death. And this explains why he was not gathered with the rest on the evening of the resurrection. This also explains why he answered as he did when the disciples announced to him that the Lord was risen from the dead. It made no impression on him except to push him down further in his state of gloom, for he would not believe until he had seen for himself.

Thomas, you have seen Me, and therefore you have believed!

Your faith, wherein you now rejoice, has come up in your soul and has overwhelmed your heart because you have seen Me with your natural, earthly eyes.

Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed!

What the disciples could not do when the women brought them the message that they had seen the Lord, what Thomas hesitated to do when the disciples informed him that Jesus was indeed risen from the dead — that thousands upon thousands would indeed do, namely, believe what they had not seen.

Presently the apostles would go into all the world bearing the good tidings that they were eyewitnesses of the fact that Christ was truly risen from the dead. And upon their testimony an innumerable host would believe and be saved.

Yea more, long after their decease, through their word empowered by the Holy Spirit and inscribed in the Holy Gospel, the truth would echo and re-echo in all the world through the lively preaching of the gospel by the faithful church. And many will rejoice with joy unspeakable in the resurrected and glorified Redeemer.

And that faith shall give greater joy and richer

blessing than that which Thomas experienced when he saw with his natural eye the appearance of the risen Saviour.

Greater blessedness it is, because of its deeper and spiritual cause!

This faith, which has no need of seeing the risen Lord with the physical eye to be convinced of the truth of the resurrection, has a much deeper cause, and much richer content. This faith which embraces the testimony given by eyewitnesses and incorporated in the Holy Scriptures is wrought in the heart by the testimony of the Spirit of the risen Christ. For, you see, the risen Christ is exalted to God's right hand where He receives the Spirit without measure, and that Spirit He pours out in the church and in the hearts of all them who are ordained to eternal life. And they do not need to see Him with their natural eye, for He takes up His abode in them. And they believe what they do not see. Blessed are they, indeed!

But there is more!

Thomas could not believe in the resurrection, because he did not understand and believe in the cross. To him the cross was the end of all his hope.

But blessed are they who see in the resurrection the efficacy of the cross! Christ is risen from the dead as a signal of their justification through His humiliation and descent into hell. As Paul later expressed it: "Who was delivered because of our offences, and raised again because of our justification." Not was He raised to justify us, but because we were justified in His deliverance for our offences. This is what faith believes, that which can not be seen with the natural eye. And that is blessed, indeed!

Still more! As Peter also later expressed it in these words: "Who having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." This is the blessedness of which the Lord speaks in the text.

Marvelous indeed! We see Him not, for He is in heaven; yet we love Him. Though now we see Him not, yet believing, we joy with joy unspeakable.

Wonderful faith!

Faith which believes that in Jesus we have the very God of our salvation. Which believes that the resurrected Lord by the power of His Spirit and Word has given unto us the power of a new life, implanted in our hearts by regeneration which is resurrection life that cannot perish. Which also believes that the good work He has begun in us He will also finish, so that even our bodies which must presently be laid in the grave, shall also rise again. Which believes that in the regeneration of all things we shall see Him, Whom



now we cannot see — face to face. And we shall abide with Him forever.

What shall we say then?

Thomas, when for a small moment he was privileged to behold an appearance of the risen Lord, exclaimed, My Lord, and my God!

When we shall see Him, Whom now we cannot see, but then face to face, we shall glorify and praise Him forever!

In the meantime, we walk by faith, not by sight.

And this is blessedness, par excellence!

## EDITORIALS

*Prof. H.C. Hoeksema*

### Editor's Notes

*Bound Volumes.* Our Business Manager informs me that bound copies of Volume 51 are now available. Because of the great increase in demand for bound volumes, 150 copies of Volume 51 have been prepared. Those with a standing order for bound volumes have been supplied with their copies; if, by mistake, you have not received your copy, be sure to contact the Business Office. If you wish to place a standing order, beginning with Volume 51, send in \$7.00 and place your order with the Business Office. In addition, many past volumes (black binding only) have been bound and are available at \$7.00 each. The Business Manager adds the following note: "Thanks to several of our seminarians, these bound volumes are made available. It takes quite a bit of time and effort to collect the loose issues and get them in order for binding. These young men have been most cooperative in assembling the loose copies. Thanks a

lot, men!" For *your* bound volume write: The Standard Bearer, P.O. Box 6064, Grand Rapids, MI 49506.

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*R.F.P.A. Catalogue.* The new RFPA Catalogue of publications is now available. Postal regulations do not permit us to staple these in the *Standard Bearer*, as formerly. But many have been distributed among our churches. And if you want a copy, write to: Reformed Free Publishing Association, P.O. Box 2006, Grand Rapids, MI 49501. Do you know that there are no less than 14 books listed in the new catalogue? That's a good beginning for a library of Reformed literature! And besides, all our pamphlets, catechism materials, and periodicals are listed. Check your library shelf to see whether you have everything!

### Our Australasian Tour (12)

For the first time in our lives we had the experience of participating in a service which we did not at all understand. And what is more, Rev. Hanko and I both had the experience of preaching through an interpreter. At 6:30 on Sunday morning our chauffeur, Cornelius Kuswanto, was at the hotel to pick us up for the first service of the day, which began at 7 o'clock. The services are conducted early in the morning because of the heat and humidity. Before the services began, we were treated to some weak tea and rice cakes: for our hosts at this church gave every evidence of outdoing themselves in an effort to be kind and hospitable. All three of us were present at the prayer before the service (which we did not understand); and then we went to the auditorium, where there was a congregation numbering about 150

present. It was my turn to preach at this first service, and I went to the pulpit accompanied by my interpreter, Evangelist Cornelius Kuswanto. I preached in the English language on John 14:6, "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." I had to deliver my sermon in simple and deliberate English, waiting after each sentence for my interpreter to translate into the Indonesian language. That was indeed a new experience! After the service we had the opportunity to meet all the people of the congregation as they left the building. As I mentioned earlier, we had no idea how well we were communicating with the congregation; we were told, however, that the messages were greatly enjoyed and gladly received.

Between services we were again treated to refresh-



ments, and we also had the opportunity to visit the homes of Mrs. Mangindaan and of Mr. and Mrs. Sudargo and to get some idea of the way these people lived.

Rev. Hanko was scheduled to preach at the 10 o'clock service. But he had been informed on Saturday evening, shortly after our arrival, that the elder who would serve as his translator was more at home in the Dutch language than in the English language. The result was that Rev. Hanko spent a long time on Saturday night preparing to preach in the Dutch language — something which he had not done in about twenty years. Talk about a catholic church service! Rev. Hanko was preaching in Dutch on Psalm 91:1,2. His interpreter was translating into the Indonesian language. My wife and I followed the Scripture reading in our English Bibles. There were others with Bibles in the Indonesian language. But in the pew in which we sat there was also a young lady following in her Bible in the Chinese language. English, Dutch, Indonesian, and Chinese — all in the same church service! Incidentally, we sang from Indonesian hymn books, with many of the American hymn tunes familiar to us being used. Although we did not know what we were singing, Rev. Hanko and Mrs. Hoeksema and I sang along in Indonesian, because the language is very phonetic.

After the service we were treated to an Indonesian dinner in the courtyard of the church, a dinner which was shared with the various leading people of the congregation. But soon after dinner we went back to our hotel for some rest and some relief from the stifling heat and humidity.

At 5:30 in the afternoon Mr. Kuswanto again called for us and brought us to the church for a meeting of various of the leaders of the congregation for Bible study. Again, this entire meeting was conducted by us in the English language, with Mr. Kuswanto translating our remarks into the Indonesian language; besides, except for a few questions from the people which were asked in broken English, our interpreter also had to translate the Indonesian questions into English for us. The reader can well understand that this served to make a meeting rather tedious. On one occasion I forgot about the language problem and about my interpreter, until several in the audience began to laugh and to point to Cornelius standing at my side. Fortunately, he was able to catch up on the several sentences which I had spoken without a pause. This was a very interesting meeting from the point of view of the fact that the questions from the audience served to reveal their thinking, and also served to show that my remarks were getting across even through the process of translation. I took this occasion to tell this gathering something about our Protestant Reformed Churches, and, in connection with

Ephesians 2, gave them a simple lesson about the Five Points of Calvinism. There were several intelligent questions about predestination and about free will, as well as questions which arose concerning the denial of the authority of Scripture. The subject of the Five Points of Calvinism seemed new to these people. For after the meeting, during some of the informal discussion which followed, there were those who expressed that they would like to know more about the subject of the Five Points of Calvinism; and Evangelist Kuswanto asked if I would be able to send him a book about this subject, which I promised to do.

Thus ended a Sunday full of new and strange experiences, but also a day at the end of which it behooved us to give thanks to our God for this opportunity to make known His Word in that distant land.

Monday, July 21, was a day partly devoted to work and partly devoted to a whirlwind shopping and sight seeing tour. Even in Indonesia we could not escape the influence of Mr. van Rij; and this was a good thing. He had made arrangements for one of his business associates in Jakarta, Mr. Cornelius Marinus, to help us find our way in those foreign circumstances and to show us some of the sights. Our first item of business was to confirm our air reservations for that evening. We had been unable to succeed in this on Saturday when we arrived; and it seems as though even a little routine item such as this is quite an accomplishment in Indonesia. At any rate, we were somewhat relieved to have that taken care of. Next, we had to find the Emmanuel "Toko Buku (Book Store)", the headquarters of the mission which distributes our literature in Indonesia for the Foreign Mission Committee. All we had was the name and a postoffice box number. But Mr. Marinus knew where to go, and also knew how to get us through the tangled morning traffic of Jakarta. At the mission we inquired for Mr. Sam Daniels, who, we had been informed, was in charge of the work. Incidentally, the people in charge of this mission are of Indian nationality, not Indonesian. This mission is engaged in translating, printing, and distributing some of the Bible Lessons prepared by Rev. Woudenberg. Our mandate was to find out about this work and its progress. I will not weary you with the details of what we learned, except to report that we found out that the response to these lessons is rather small. This, however, is not due to the lessons themselves, but rather due to the fact that in this land of inefficiency and poverty you can hardly expect to find many who will complete a correspondence course. However, we have made our report on this matter to the Foreign Mission Committee, and they will undoubtedly have recommendations concerning future action to our next synod. I may add that at this mission we were asked concerning the possibility of sending other



tracts and pamphlets which might be translated and printed. They also requested samples of our books that might be placed in their bookstore.

After this business was taken care of, we all had some shopping to do in Jakarta; and in this, too, we were assisted by Mr. Marinus, who knew the best places to shop and who took care that we were not cheated. In the course of our shopping tour, we also had the opportunity to see some of the sights of Jakarta. Just to furnish another glimpse of the social and economic conditions, I may mention that we visited a batik factory, where Indonesian workers were busy in a dark and dingy cellar stamping designs on and dyeing the beautiful batik fabric. We were told that the women who were working there earned the equivalent of 35 ¢ per day. It was a relief to get out of the city of Jakarta for awhile and into the countryside of the Island of Java. We had been told that a lack of food and agricultural productivity is not one of the problems of Indonesia; and when we traveled through the lush, tropical countryside, we could believe this. Everything grows luxuriantly and abundantly. None of the land is wasted. And although our trip was somewhat spoiled by torrential downpours, we enjoyed traveling through the country

and seeing the rice paddies, the banana groves, and later, at the higher elevation, acre after acre of tea. We passed through the city of Bogor, where, we were told, the Dutch government officials formerly lived; and we went on as far as a low mountain pass, called Puncak Pass, where we had noon lunch rather belatedly. However, we had really extended our tour too long. And although our guide was virtually certain that our flight would not leave the airport on time (for it seems to be proverbial that no one is on time in Indonesia), we could not depend on this. The result was that we had a breakneck trip back through the traffic of Jakarta to the airport, with our chauffeur playing "chicken" all the way. And sure enough, though we got back to the airport just in time to check in for our scheduled departure, our plane was delayed for an hour, and we could have made our return trip at a more leisurely pace. Our friends from the church were at the airport to bid us good-bye, and at 6 P.M. we left by Thai International Airlines for Singapore, more than 500 miles to the north. When we reached Singapore, we were back in the Northern Hemisphere, just a little north of the equator.

## Clasping A Viper To The Bosom

(2)

On February 23, 1975, Dr. S. Woudstra preached a sermon on Ephesians 1: 3, 4 in the Reformed Church of Geelong. For some time prior to last year's visit to Geelong I had had a tape recording of this sermon; and later I received a typewritten transcript of the same sermon which I checked very carefully for accuracy by comparing it with the recording. The date of this sermon is significant, because it was after Woudstra's dismissal from Geelong, but before his going to the Reformed Church of Hobart, Tasmania. The text of the sermon is important: for it meant that Dr. Woudstra was bound to preach on the subject of election.

This was a very bold move.

It was a bold move, in the first place, because Dr. Woudstra had just been dismissed from the Reformed Theological College because of errant views concerning predestination, especially reprobation. It could, of course, have been a very good move: Dr. Woudstra could have purged himself of every suspicion of heresy by preaching a thoroughly Reformed sermon on this text. Then this would have been a bold move

which would have been to his credit. This, however, he exactly did not do, as we shall see.

But it was a bold move, in the second place, because this very text (Ephesians 1:4) is referred to no less than four times in the First Head of Doctrine of the Canons of Dordrecht. Article 7, where election is defined, quotes this passage for proof. Article 9 quotes this passage as proof that holiness is not a condition of election, but the fruit and effect of election, which is "the fountain of every saving good." Article 1 of the Rejection of Errors quotes this text again as proof that God "has from eternity chosen certain particular persons to whom above others he in time will grant both faith in Christ and perseverance." And Article 5 of the Rejection of Errors cites this passage once more over against the Arminian error of conditional election and in favor of eternal and unconditional election.

However, it was a bold move, in the third place, because Dr. Woudstra took this opportunity to preach a very *bad* sermon. No, I do not mean a *poor* sermon: for even a professor can preach a sermon



that is homiletically and exegetically poor. I mean a *bad* sermon. It is a sermon which no Reformed man should get in his head or in his heart to preach. The whole sermon is bad. It is not Reformed. There is not a Reformed note in it — though one might expect a ringing Reformed sermon on a text like this. It casts aspersions on the Reformed truth of election by caricaturing that truth and then criticizing the caricature, that is, criticizing things which no one believes, but which Reformed people have often been wrongly accused of believing. And it positively teaches a wrong view of election, and that, too, in more than one respect.

I wish that space permitted quoting the entire sermon: for any discerning Reformed believer would be compelled to agree with my characterization of the sermon. But I will limit myself to some specifics.

Before I point out these specifics, however, I must make two more remarks. In the first place, let me prevent in advance any counter-argument by emphasizing that what I write has nothing to do with the difference between supra- and infralapsarianism. I prefer the former, but I can shake hands with a true infra- any day. Our Canons are infra-, too. And Woudstra's sermon stands condemned in the light of the Canons. In the second place, let me point out that we are talking about a sermon, about *preaching*. This sermon illustrates a very real, practical, spiritual danger to the church, therefore. And the danger is two-fold: this kind of preaching robs God's people of their comfort, and it robs God of His honor. For, mind you, the text of Woudstra's sermon speaks of these two items. The text puts the language of praise, of doxology, to the electing God in the mouth of God's people. And it attributes "every spiritual blessing" of God's people to their being elect in Christ from before the foundation of the world. Here is the text in the version which Dr. Woudstra was using: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him."

Let us ask and answer some pertinent questions with respect to this sermon, especially in the light of the Canons of Dordrecht, which every Reformed minister vows to uphold, teach, and defend.

*1. Does the Reformed doctrine of an eternal and unchangeable election come to expression in this sermon?*

**Answer:**

No. This doctrine is plainly taught in Canons I, and the text on which Dr. Woudstra preached is cited as Scriptural proof, the reference being, of course, to the well-known expression "before the foundation of

the world." But nowhere in the sermon is this taught.

On the contrary, the sermon teaches a strange doctrine of election in time. With respect to Abraham, Dr. Woudstra says: "Of all the people who were in the world at that time, God came down and picked just one lone individual, Abraham." With respect to Israel he says: "Many years later, in fact, many generations later, God was doing the same thing. But this time God entered into this kind of relationship with one people that had sprung from the loins of Abraham . . . . But of all the people who could look back to Abraham as their father, God chose only one people, Israel." And with respect to Christ he says: "And then history rolls on, hundreds of years pass by. But after hundreds of years, the Lord God did the same thing. And this time God elected again an individual, Jesus of Nazareth."

When he comes to the crucial expression "before the foundation of the world," one would expect that here, at last, he would somewhat set matters straight and that the idea of election from eternity would be preached. But he lightly tosses that idea off as follows: "Paul also says here, 'Chosen in him before the foundation of the world.' What does Paul mean? I don't think that Paul was here interested in giving an exact date or time when God did something, when election took place. Or Paul does not say here that election somehow can be dated, whether it be in our own calendar or, say, a heavenly calendar. What do we know about these things anyway? With this phrase the Apostle Paul manages to say that our election has nothing to do with anything that is in me, anything that I have been able to accomplish or perhaps in the future will accomplish. It means that God's choice of me and many others is purely His sovereign love decision. It also expresses, I believe, that election is not an arbitrary kind of thing, a decision by which God, so to speak, simply arbitrarily elects some and rejects others."

Know the standard

and follow it.



Read the

**STANDARD BEARER!**



2. *Does the Reformed doctrine, taught in Canons I 10, that God "was pleased out of the common mass of sinners to adopt some certain persons as a peculiar people to himself" come to expression in this sermon?*

**Answer:**

No. In the entire sermon the doctrine of definite, personal election never comes to expression. The sermon speaks of God's choosing a "multitude of people." It speaks of God's choosing a "whole world." More than once that is confused by an expression such as, "in other words, a new heaven and a new earth." And while it is true, of course, that God purposed to save an entire world, a whole creation, this is not in the text. The text speaks of "us." Never once does the sermon define that "us" or limit it in any way. Never does the sermon hint that election is personal, definite, limited.

Further, the sermon teaches a national election of Israel, but it fails completely even to suggest that "all are not Israel that are of Israel." Moreover, this election of Israel is not presented as an election unto salvation, but as a sort of election unto service. Notice: "Israel was chosen by God in order that she might make known to the world, the true character of God. God wished to make it known to the world, through Israel, that He is a God who freely gives Himself to man in covenantal union. God chose Israel so that through Israel He might elect the world. And then, of course, from Israel we turn to Israel's greatest son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And in His election we see most clearly what the purpose of election is and what election is. For in and through the election of the Lord Jesus Christ, God achieved His purposes for the world, as we saw already, in His election of Abraham and in His election of Israel. God's election of the Lord Jesus Christ meant the salvation of the world. And through His cross, through His resurrection, Jesus achieved what God intended to do through Israel. He achieved what Israel's election was all about." [The reader may wonder how in a sermon on this text this whole subject of Israel and Abraham can even arise; and I marvel, too, that it can be injected into the sermon. But that is not the point. The point is that this is a twisting of the Scriptural and Reformed doctrine of election.] But in close connection with this matter of definite, personal election stands the next question.

3. *Does the Reformed doctrine that election is selection, that it implies reprobation, come to its own in this sermon, in harmony with the teaching of the Canons in I, 6 and I, 15, as well as other articles?*

**Answer:**

By no means. On the contrary it is contradicted by many expressions. Note the following: "You and I

have a tendency to make of election a limiting concept. Somehow we tend to think, and there is a reason for it — and I will come back to it — somehow we tend to think that the election of one implies of necessity the rejection of the others. But this cannot be quite so. The Bible does not quite put it that way." He then goes on to twist the fact that in Abraham all the nations of the earth would be blessed into the idea that Abraham's election does not imply the rejection of the rest of the world. The same is done with Israel. Even though he quotes the prophecy of Amos, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth," — and what could be more exclusive than "only"? — he later states: "That (Israel) was the nation that God chose, but it should be quite clear that Israel's election did not mean the rejection of the rest of the world. Israel's election was never meant to be a narrow restricted privilege for a single isolated people." I ask: what else was Israel's election through all the ages of the old dispensation, when God dealt exclusively with the nation of Israel? Did not God know *only* Israel of all the families of the earth? Were not the Gentiles excluded? This is not only falsehood, but nonsensical falsehood!

But there is more.

As we have already quoted in another connection, Dr. Woudstra says: "It also expresses, I believe, that election is not an arbitrary kind of thing, a decision by which God, so to speak, simply arbitrarily elects some and rejects others." Now it is surely true that neither election nor reprobation is arbitrary. But this idea of arbitrariness has been used wrongly as a stick to whip the doctrine that God predestinates solely according to His good pleasure. And Woudstra is not careful to define what he means by arbitrariness; nor is he careful to state that although God is not arbitrary, He does indeed sovereignly elect some and reject others.

Later in the sermon he puts what has always been an Arminian argument against sovereign predestination in the mouths of his audience. "We are inclined to think that if we are elect, we are going to make it anyway . . . But if, on the other hand, I am not elect, there is no force in heaven or on earth that can possibly change it. In other words, it would lead to utter passivity." He merely calls this an irrelevant remark. He fails to point out that both election and reprobation are, indeed, eternal and unchangeable and sovereign, and that the flaw in this remark is that this doctrine "does not make men careless and profane."

A bit later he again brings up the matter of arbitrariness in such a way as to cast aspersions on the Reformed truth of predestination: "We also tend to ask many wrong questions; and one of the most popular questions always is, 'Why the one, why not



the others?" But the very answers we come up with are an indication that there is something wrong with the questions. Then our answer will always be either God is arbitrary, as the proverbial flip of the coin, or God is not quite powerful enough to save the whole world." The whole tendency of a discussion like this is against the Reformed truth of sovereign election and reprobation by an eternal and unchangeable decree. There is nothing wrong, you see, with this question. It is perfectly legitimate. And there is a Scriptural and Reformed answer: God's eternal and sovereign good pleasure. "He hath mercy on whom he will, and whom he will he hardeneth."

Finally, he applies his sermon as follows: "Election means that there is salvation not for a few, but means that there is salvation for the whole world . . . No one need be lost." That is a statement which no Reformed man would ever make. It is principally universalism! It is the blatant denial of sovereign reprobation, which excludes all but the elect from salvation and destines them to be lost.

The conclusion? Dr. Woudstra either teaches or leaves room in this sermon for the very same errors he was reported to have taught at the Theological College and for which he was dismissed.

And while he was dismissed from the college, he is left completely free to teach these errors in the churches which support the college. The Reformed Church of Australia has clasped the viper to its bosom, the venomous viper of the denial of sovereign predestination. And now it is reported that at the Synod in May there will be overtures and an appeal for the reinstatement of Woudstra in the Reformed Theological College! That will only compound the evil. What should be done? He should be kept from the college. He should be deposed from the ministry. And Classis Victoria should acknowledge the error of approving his admission to the ministry. If the Reformed Church of Australia ever hopes to retain anything at all of a Reformed character, this is the only way. Return to the truth, or perish as a Reformed church!

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## VOICE OF OUR FATHERS

# Eternal Election

*Prof. Robert D. Decker*

"We believe that all the posterity of Adam being thus fallen into perdition and ruin, by the sin of our first parents, God did then manifest himself such as he is; that is to say, merciful and just: Merciful, since he delivers and preserves from this perdition all, whom he, in his eternal and unchangeable counsel of mere goodness, hath elected in Christ Jesus our Lord, without any respect to their works: Just, in leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves."

*Article XVI, The Belgic Confession*

Very carefully and very firmly the Creed has shut the door to any possibility of man's saving himself. The truth of God's Word concerning man's creation, fall, original sin, and incapacity to perform what is truly good is set forth in the clearest of terms in Articles fourteen and fifteen. Scripture teaches that God created man good: in His image and after His likeness. God made man able to will "agreeably to the will of God." And man was righteous and holy. Thus man mirrored, though in a creaturely way, something of the glory of God, His Maker. But from this excellent honor man fell into the shame of sin. He willfully subjected himself to sin and consequently to death by

giving ear to the lie of the devil. The tragic effect was that man became wicked, perverse, and corrupt in all his ways. His light was changed into darkness. Man lost all his excellent gifts and retained just a few remains of them, and even these are sufficient only to leave him without excuse. Man has become liable to corporal and spiritual death. Man is a slave to sin, incapable of doing the good, and even incapable of willing the good. In a word, man has nothing of himself. What is more, this original sin, both from the point of view of its guilt and from the point of view of its corruption, has passed to all men because Adam stood as the representative head, the first father, and



the root of the entire human race. There is, therefore, but one and only one possibility of salvation for man. God! God must save or man remains forever lost. God's mercy is our only hope of salvation. This is the thrust of the teaching of our *Confession* at this point. "We believe that all the posterity of Adam being thus fallen into perdition and ruin, by the sin of our first parents, God did then manifest himself such as he is; that is to say, merciful and just."

This knowledge has profound effects upon the believer. It humbles the child of God. He knows the terrible power of sin and his sinful nature against which he must strive every day. He knows his incapacity to perform what is truly good from daily experience. Out of this knowledge he is ever ready to pray: "God be merciful to me, the sinner." The knowledge of his depravity and of God's mercy causes the believer to wonder. In the consciousness of God's mercy he exclaims with the prophet: "How wondrous are the ways of God and how marvelous are his doings." (Isaiah 55:8,9) Those ways of the Lord are certainly not our ways! How tremendously great is God's grace and merciful His kindness. This knowledge also comforts the believer. Exactly because man lacks the ability to save himself or even to contribute toward his own salvation, and exactly because God saves, the believer may be and is assured of his salvation. God surely performs to the finish what He begins. Not only that but no one and nothing can frustrate the work of Almighty God. If God saves and God alone, and He does, then nothing can be against us but all things are for us. This beautiful truth is taught in that classic passage, Romans 8:28-39: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Why is this true and how is it that we know this? "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" Sovereign predestination in Jesus Christ is the deepest ground of the believer's comfort. For this reason too the Scriptures exhort God's people to: "...give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." (II Peter 1:10, 11)

While the article is very brief it does capture the Bible's teaching on election and reprobation.\* Notice that the *Confession* speaks of predestination as a manifestation of God as merciful and just. God is

merciful: "...since he delivers and preserves from this perdition all, whom he, in his eternal and unchangeable counsel of mere goodness, hath elected in Christ Jesus our Lord, without any respect to their works." This is the decree of election. God is just: "...in leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves." This is the decree of reprobation.

In its brief statement on election, our Creed mentions several of the characteristics of this decree. Notice that the *Confession* emphasizes that election is "in Christ Jesus our Lord." Never may the decree of election be conceived of apart from Jesus Christ. The decree of election is not some arbitrary determination on the part of God. Election always has to do with Christ. Election is the choosing of the organism of the Body of which Jesus Christ is the Head and of which the individual, chosen saints are the members. Election is *in* Christ and it is realized in the cross of Christ. The Scriptures make this abundantly plain. The holy Apostle breaks forth in the beautiful doxology: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:" (Eph. 1:3) God has done this, Paul continues; "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world. . . ." (vs. 4) We are predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ according to the good pleasure of God's will and to the praise of the glory of His grace. (Eph. 1:5,6) It is in Christ that we have obtained the inheritance: "...being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." (Eph. 1:11) In chapter two of this same epistle the Scripture speaks of the elect as the workmanship of God, who are created in Christ Jesus unto the good works which God has before ordained that they should walk in them. (vs. 10) One finds the same emphasis in Romans 8:29 and 30 where Scripture teaches that God predestinated His own "to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." Thus it is that the purpose and grace according to which God has saved us and called us with an holy calling was given us *in Christ Jesus* before the world began." (II Timothy 1:9) Election according to the Word of God is in Christ. In fact, it may be said that Christ is THE Elect. Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone, elect and precious, Whom God has laid in Zion. (I Peter 2:6; Isaiah 28:16) The One Who is the Servant of Jehovah, in Whom Jehovah delights and upon Whom Jehovah has put His Spirit, God's Elect is Christ. (Isaiah 42:1-4) He is the Lamb of God by Whose precious blood the saints have been redeemed and, "Who was verily foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you."



(I Peter 1:19,20) Still more, Christ is the firstborn of every creature, the image of the invisible God. He is that because all things were created by Christ; all things in heaven and in earth, visible and invisible, thrones, dominions, principalities, powers, all things were created by Him and for Him. Thus Christ is before all things and all things consist by Him. He is the Head of the body which is the Church. Christ is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead in order that in all things He might have the preeminence. The reason for this is simply that it pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell in Christ and that all things be reconciled to Him through the blood of His cross. (Colossians 1:15-20) From all these passages and more it is evident that God's eternal purpose, of which election is a part, is to manifest His glory in Jesus Christ. Christ is first in God's counsel. All things find their meaning and their significance in relationship to Jesus Christ.

The decree of election is confessed to be of God's "mere goodness." Election is a sovereign decree. No one and nothing outside of God prompted the Almighty to elect His Church. God elected us: "...according to the good pleasure of His will." (Eph. 1:4,5) Furthermore, this decree of election is "eternal and unchangeable" according to our *Confession*. One must never imagine that God first determined to create the worlds and all things in them and then when mankind fell decided to elect some to eternal life. Election is not some desperate attempt on God's part to repair what man had spoiled through his sin. God has chosen His own in Christ "before the foundation of the world." From all eternity God out of mere goodness chose His people in Christ. And that decree is unchangeable. Nothing can frustrate God's saving purpose in Christ. God has not merely provided the possibility of salvation to a fallen humanity. Neither is it the case that this decree

depends upon the faith and obedience of men. They believe, and only they, whom God has eternally and unchangeably ordained to eternal life in Christ. God "delivers and preserves from this perdition all, whom he, in his eternal and unchangeable counsel of mere goodness, hath elected in Christ Jesus our Lord." Of this blessed truth the Savior Himself assured us when He said: "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." (John 6:37-39)

Finally, the Creed characterizes election as being "without any respect to their works." God's elective choosing is not conditioned by works. Election is not even conditioned by the work of faith or man's act of conversion. Listen to the powerful testimony of the Word of God: "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of him that calleth; It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. . . So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." (Romans 9:11-13, 16) Always salvation is "not of works lest any man should boast." Always salvation is "by grace through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." (Eph. 2:8,9)

\*It is my intention to devote four articles to this subject. This first article will concentrate on the subject of election. In our next installment we shall consider the decree of reprobation. The last two articles will be a study of John Calvin's views on Divine Predestination and our Reformed Confessions' presentation (especially the *Canons of Dordt* and the *Westminster Confession*) of this truth.

## GUEST ARTICLE

# The Holy Spirit. God's Downpayment.

Rev. Mark Hoeksema

An evaluation of the theological trends of the 20th century will reveal that in the early part of this century the Fatherhood of God was given prominence, especially under the influence of men like Harnack; the middle portion of the century was devoted primarily to the doctrine of the person of

Christ, especially under the influence of neo-Reformational (and often heretical) theologians, of whom Barth was perhaps chief. In more recent times the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has received more attention, perhaps most obviously through the rise of Pentecostalism and neo-Pentecostalism, as well as the



reaction of orthodox theologians to these movements. As could be expected, the Scriptural truths regarding the Holy Spirit received more scrutiny and development also in the Reformed community.

The Protestant Reformed Churches have been no exception to this. Though many issues raised and discussed by the theologians and churches of the world do not touch us directly or concern us greatly, mostly because the majority of the views expressed are patently non-Scriptural and heterodox, the emphasis upon the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has affected us. For some time I have heard comments from our people to the effect that their knowledge concerning the Holy Spirit and His work is lacking. While it is by no means true that our people are ignorant regarding this aspect of the Scriptural doctrine of salvation, such comments do indicate that there is a need to increase our knowledge in this area.

This fact was recently brought home pointedly to me. At a recent meeting of the Reformed Ministers Association of the Dakotas, an organization of Reformed ministers which meets monthly for the purpose of informal discussion of various aspects of the Reformed faith, one of the members presented a paper on the subject of the Holy Spirit as guarantee. The thoughts presented in this article are the fruit of the discussion which followed, as well as of personal study. It is my hope that the ideas set forth here will in a small way contribute to our understanding of this aspect of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and thus of the Holy Spirit Himself.

The concept of the Holy Spirit as guarantee or downpayment is found only three times in Scripture, in all instances in the epistles of Paul. II Corinthians 1:21-22 says: "Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God, who hath sealed us, and given us the earnest (downpayment, guarantee) of the Spirit in our hearts." In II Corinthians 5:5 we read, "Now he that hath wrought for us the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit." (The selfsame thing refers to the bodily resurrection). And Ephesians 1:13b and 14: "In whom (Christ) also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory."

As far as the idea of the term is concerned, it is rooted in a Hebrew word which means "to become surety, to pledge." In this sense it is often used in the Old Testament. And its basic meaning carries over into the New Testament; in fact, so closely are the Old Testament and New Testament ideas connected that the word used by Paul in these Greek passages is a transliteration of the Hebrew word. The word in the

original means earnest money, pledge, guarantee, downpayment. The figure conjured up by this word is certainly familiar to us who live in the age of credit. When we make a purchase for which we cannot immediately pay, we charge it, deferring the whole of the balance due until some later date; however, we must make a downpayment, i.e., give the seller a fraction of the purchase price immediately. This is not only a pledge to the seller that he will receive the balance due him, but also a guarantee to the buyer of immediate ownership and possession of what he has bought.

According to Paul, the Holy Spirit is exactly such a downpayment. In Ephesians 1:14 the Holy Spirit and the downpayment are identified, while in the two passages in II Corinthians Paul speaks of the guarantee, the content of which is the Holy Spirit. While at first glance it may seem crass to speak of the Holy Spirit in such pecuniary terms, yet this is exactly what Paul does, taking a well-understood figure from our daily lives, as Scripture often does. The meaning of the figure is, therefore, that the Holy Spirit is God's downpayment to us, His people.

All of this is in harmony with the context in the passages cited. All of them have an eschatological emphasis, i.e., they deal with the future realization and fulfillment of the salvation of God's elect. In II Corinthians 1:22 the context is the certainty of the promises of God in Christ from the viewpoint of their ultimate fulfillment; in II Corinthians 5:5 the context is the certainty of the future bodily resurrection and our hope in it; and Ephesians 1:14 speaks about our inheritance in the final sense. Yet the implication is that we already possess the promises of God in Christ, though not in the fulness of perfection; we have now the certainty of the resurrection of the body, we are the recipients of the benefits of Christ. Nor is this surprising, for the Holy Spirit as He works in believers always operates as the Spirit of Christ, applying to them the benefits of Christ's finished work. Yet the emphasis in this downpayment idea is definitely future and regards the full and perfect possession of salvation.

When we put all of these ideas together a clear picture of the Holy Spirit as downpayment emerges. We have immediate possession of God's salvation in Christ. Of that fact the Holy Spirit is the guarantee as He is poured out into the church on Pentecost and dwells in the hearts of believers. This means that the Holy Spirit is God's pledge to us that He will give us the whole of our salvation in the day of Christ. Then we shall receive the balance of our inheritance, which we now possess in part. God has assured us by giving us the Holy Spirit in our hearts that He will pay the balance.

Moreover, the downpayment is the Spirit of



Christ as He dwells in believers subjectively. Though all of the work of the Holy Spirit is in a sense subjective, this needs stress. The point is that although we must avoid being engulfed in the morass of subjectivism, we may not ignore the fact that there is a rightful place for Christian experience. And this is exactly what the Holy Spirit as downpayment is all about — experiential assurance and certainty. We *know* because the Holy Spirit is our guarantee that the good work which our sovereign God has begun in us he will surely perfect and realize in the day of Christ. And when we recognize that God witnesses this Himself in the Person of His Holy Spirit in our very hearts, then our assurance can only increase.

This does not mean, however, that the possession of the Holy Spirit as guarantee is purely subjective in character. It is also objective, for this aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit is inseparably connected with the other aspects of His work mentioned in the Scriptures. Perhaps the question might arise, "How do I know that I have the Holy Spirit as God's downpayment?" In answer I would point to the truth that this same Spirit Who is the guarantee is also the author of other works of grace. His work, after all, is principally one, though it has several aspects. For example, the Holy Spirit is our Paraclete or Intercessor with the Father in heaven. That is, He pleads on our behalf on the basis of the finished work of Christ, appealing to the justice of God regarding our right to the final inheritance of glory. Immediately the connection is evident. Not only does the Holy Spirit guarantee us

that He is our Paraclete, but He also pledges to us that the same inheritance for which He pleads as our Intercessor is in reality ours. The functions of the Holy Spirit as Paraclete and downpayment both concern the final inheritance, the former from an objective viewpoint, the latter from the subjective. Certainly we believe the one; is it harder to believe the other? Besides, this same Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ is also the giver of the gifts of the Spirit (I Corinthians 12), which are objective proofs of His presence within the believer. The possession of the Holy Spirit as guarantee cannot be denied any more than can the presence of the Spirit in believers as manifested in the gifts and fruits of the Spirit.

All of this has a very practical significance for the child of God. Most or all of us are at one time or another plagued by doubts about the certainty of our salvation. We wonder if we really do possess the Holy Spirit as God's downpayment. Perhaps we even go a step further and question whether, although we have the Spirit of Christ, He is active as God's guarantee. The answer of God's Word is that He must be, whether or not we are always equally conscious of His operation as such. When we possess the Spirit of Christ, we have God's downpayment. In the words of I John 4:13, "Hereby know we that we dwell in him and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit." And then, too, we have the firm and unshakeable assurance of our final inheritance in all its perfection and glory.

## ALL AROUND US:

### Biblical Zoology Chiang Vs. Chou In Death Trouble Within The LCM Synod Lutheran Merger?

*Rev. H. Veldman*

#### BIBLICAL ZOOLOGY

In the Banner of Jan. 16, 1976, appeared an article by J. D. Eppinga on BIBLICAL ZOOLOGY. This article appears on page 9 of this issue. Writing on the fact that so many animals are mentioned in the Word of God, he writes the following:

Coming home, I reflected on his answer and en-

larged a train of thought. What a lot of animals there are in the Bible! They are mentioned in its first chapter. In the second chapter, they are brought to Adam for naming. In Genesis 3, there is the serpent. The gospel story cannot be told without reference to creatures created a little lower than man. If God hadn't loved them all so much, He wouldn't have given them a boat ride in Genesis 7 . . .



As vice-regents of the earth, let us love and care for all (God's) creatures, great and small. Like Thoreau. Like Francis of Assisi. Meanwhile, don't forget to work toward and pray for the coming of God's kingdom.

Wherein "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them" (Isa. 11:6).

When I read this article, I said to myself, "What kind of language is this when speaking about the flood?" Is it proper to speak of the flood as a "boat ride"? Besides, what is Eppinga's conception of working and praying for the coming of God's kingdom? As did Thoreau? Thoreau, I understand, was not a believer in God and in His Christ. Does Eppinga mean that we work and pray for the coming of the kingdom of God when we love and care for all God's creatures, as did Thoreau? Does Eppinga believe in the kingdom of God in the postmillenarian sense of the word?

#### CHIANG VS. CHOU IN DEATH

This article appeared in *CHRISTIAN BEACON*, Jan. 15, 1976, Vol. 40, No. 49, page 1. We now quote the following from this article:

The death of Chou En-lai can be contrasted with the death of Chiang Kai-shek. Chiang Kai-shek had a Christian funeral. Only 23 nations sent any form of representation. Chou En-lai received eulogies from more than one hundred nations. President Ford and Dr. Kissinger praised his leadership. The newspapers of the United States and the networks also praised him as a great statesman.

Here was a man who was responsible for the murder of millions of human beings. As prime minister he killed more Christians than Hitler ever killed Jews.

His death has revealed two things. First, his body as it lay in state had over it the red flag with the hammer and the sickle. This has been the emblem of the USSR. The Red Chinese have had their own flag, but in death Chou En-lai revealed the real heart of his whole life — the hammer and the sickle. This is the emblem that Communism is using to unite the world in its elimination of U.S. "imperialism," neocolonialism, and capitalism.

Second, the so-called break between Red China and Moscow is only on the surface. . . .

With this we substantially agree. We do not care to comment on the remarks of Carl McIntire in re Communism. This is not Christianity's only enemy. For the rest, however, we must agree. That this murderer of millions was eulogized was undoubtedly politically prompted. We fear that this is sadly true.

#### TROUBLE WITHIN THE LCM SYNOD

*CHRISTIAN NEWS* has the following to report in its issue of Jan. 12, 1976, page 1:

"Moderates" have been praising while conservatives in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod have been criticizing Dr. Jacob Preus, president of the 3 million member church body, for defying a resolution adopted at the church's 1975 convention in Anaheim, California.

The Associated Press reported last month in a story from St. Louis: "The president of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod says he won't follow a synod resolution that required him to oust a district president from office." The December 26 *Denver Post* headlined the story: "Lutheran President Defies Ouster Order." The December 23 *St. Louis Globe Democrat* said: "The Rev. Dr. Jacob A.O. Preus, president of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, will not follow a synod resolution that requires him to oust a district president from office, he said Monday." The St. Louis paper said that "The decision is virtually certain to turn many conservative synod members against the controversial president, who was elected by conservatives seeking doctrinal reform in the 2.8-million member church." A headline in the December 27 *Los Angeles Times* read: "Lutheran Leader Defies Resolution."

The LCMS directed its president to take action against any district president who defended the theology of "Seminex" and insisted on ordaining and installing graduates of "Seminex" (5-02A). Most graduates of "Seminex" are defending the theological position of their professors at "Seminex." These professors contend that the Bible contains errors, man may have evolved from some ape-like creature, man does not have an immortal soul, and some of the words and miracles attributed to Jesus in the Bible were not actually said and performed by Jesus. According to some "Seminex" professors, some of these words and miracles may have been fabricated by the early church. Dr. Herman Neunaber, president of the LCMS's Southern Illinois District, is one of the LCMS's district presidents who maintains that LCMS pastors and professors should be allowed to teach that the Bible contains errors and that man does not have an immortal soul. Neunaber has been an ardent defender of the theological position of "Seminex." Preus has defied the LCMS's convention resolution and allowed Neunaber to remain in office even though Neunaber has refused to retract his defense of the theology of "Seminex."

Neunaber said that "To comply with resolution 5-02A would hinder the Christian ministry in the area where I am called as District President." According to Neunaber, "To give 'stated compliance' to resolution 5-02A would mean that I no longer support the students and the protest they have raised against the action of Synodical administrators at Concordia Seminary. It is my personal belief that the students



not only had the right, but even the Christian duty to protest actions which they believed to be wrong."

So, the battle lines are being drawn more sharply in the Lutheran Church. It remains to be seen what will be the outcome of this.

### LUTHERAN MERGER?

LUTHERANS' ALERT-NATIONAL is a magazine to warn all Lutherans everywhere of the growing liberalism in the Lutheran Church. In its January, 1976, issue, pages 2-3, the following appears. This quotation is by Dr. Redal, president of this magazine.

With the recently expanded cooperation between the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church of America at the seminary level it is very apparent that a merger between the two synods is in the offing. Even though Dr. David Preus, President of the ALC, and Dr. Robert Marshall, President of the LCA, have not specifically endorsed an *organic* merger their own statements suggest a move in that direction.

Dr. Preus in an address on October 14th at Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, spoke these words: "The ALC believes that ALC-LCA relations are going well, and we rejoice in that. We believe that Lutheran unity is a present reality. *Unity in faith and doctrine with the LCA is overwhelmingly accepted by the ALC people*".

Dr. Marshall said in an address on September 21, 1975: "Some ALC leaders believe organic union would be a mistake. My view is different." He further stressed that the LCA will press cooperation with the ALC.

What we are trying to do in LUTHERANS ALERT-NATIONAL is to warn all Lutherans every-

where of the growing liberalism in the Lutheran Church. Do you want the merged church of the future to teach without opposition the following:

1. Holy Scripture may contain errors and contradictions?
2. Adam and Eve are not real people?
3. Miracles of the Bible perhaps never happened?
4. The sayings of Jesus were injected in the Bible by the early church?
5. Nothing is of real importance in the Bible that does not deny the Gospel; therefore, extra and pre-marital sex is not necessarily sinful? Homosexuality should be tolerated, and abortion is to be accepted?

This is the theology of the liberal church today. This is the theology that is at present tolerated in both the ALC and the LCA and the "unity in faith and doctrine" about which Dr. Preus speaks. The merger of these two bodies would only solidify the hold on these false teachings.

Again we say with emphasis, unless the grass roots in the ALC and LCA wake up, this is the church for your children. Is that what you want?

To this we add: these terrible heresies are taught so terribly commonly today. Also in the Reformed churches of today. We share the sentiments expressed by the author of the above quotation, and also his fears. Is this what we want? May the Lord give us His grace ever to be on the alert and to warn our children and the Church of God against these distortions of Holy Writ. These teachings purpose the destruction of the Church of God. Incidentally, the mailing address of this magazine is: P. O. Box 7186, Tacoma, Washington 98407.

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## MY SHEEP HEAR MY VOICE

### Letter To Timothy

Dear Timothy,

I have before me your last letter in which you make some inquiries concerning practical preaching. I shall try to discuss the points you bring up, one by one.

You make the observation first of all that you agree with the assertion which is often made that "if doctrine is preached, a proper walk will be obvious, for doctrine and walk are one." I realize that this is

not a question. I think you probably put this in your letter because it is a sort of "stock answer" which you get when you talk to ministers about your problem; but it is a stock answer which, while acknowledged by you to be true, nevertheless does not really satisfy you.

But I want to make a few remarks about this matter nevertheless. I hope you will be sufficiently patient with me not to chaff at my desire to empha-



size this truth once again. It needs emphasis. And the whole matter of practical preaching cannot be understood properly without this emphasis.

In a certain sense of the word, the distinction between doctrinal and practical preaching is a false distinction. It is, if properly understood, not to be condemned; and, indeed, it is a useful distinction which we cannot abandon even if we will. Even the apostle Paul, e.g., has what we usually call a doctrinal part to his epistles and a practical part. And the practical part is the application in a very practical way of the doctrines he has set forth in the early part of the letter. But there is a sense in which the distinction is false. And we should be clear on that.

Let me put the matter this way. We believe that the Scriptures are God's infallible record of His own revelation to us in Jesus Christ. God has revealed Himself. He has revealed Himself in such a way that He has told us about Himself. By means of His revelation we can know Who and What God is. This revelation is always through Jesus Christ, for Jesus Christ is not only the highest possible revelation of God, but Jesus Christ is the revelation of God as the God Who saves His people, and saves them through Christ.

The Scriptures are the infallible record of this revelation. It is important that we see this clearly. This is Scripture. This is its character. This is what Scripture is all about. God is talking in Scripture about Himself. He is telling us Who He is and What He is and what He does.

But the Scriptures are different from any other book because the Scriptures are the record of God's revelatory Word. You may, e.g., read, "Son of My Tears," and by means of this biography of Augustine come to know about Augustine. Or you may even read Augustine's own autobiography, his "Confessions." But all the knowledge you will acquire of Augustine is a certain amount of knowledge *about* him. There is no way, short of face to face contact, in which you can come to know Augustine himself. And face to face contact will have to wait till you meet Augustine in glory.

But this is not merely because Augustine is now dead. Even if he were living this would be true. You can pick up a biography of a living man, or even his own autobiography, and these books will not give you anything more than knowledge *about* that person. This is important. As long as you only know *about* a person, there is nothing you can really say about any contact with that person. You cannot claim to have talked with him. You cannot claim to have had any kind of personal experience with him. You cannot have sufficient knowledge of him that you can confidently say, "I know him." And above all, you cannot love him, have communion with him,

share your life with him and enjoy his fellowship. No book will ever do that.

But the Bible does this. This is not because the Bible has any magical power in itself. But the Bible does this through the operation of the Spirit and in organic connection with the preaching of the Word of God contained in the Scriptures. The Bible does not only tell us *about* God — although it does that too. But when God gives to us the Book in which He tells us *about* Himself, He gives us a Book by means of which we can, in the deepest sense of the word, know Him. Admittedly, this is a miracle which defies description and analysis. But, through the Scriptures, we know God as truly and as intimately as we know our own wives. We know God as truly and as intimately as we know our closest friend. We know Him because He talks to us and makes it possible, through the Word, to talk to Him. We know Him because, through the Word, we have the experience of His presence and nearness as really as we experience the presence and nearness of our own wives.

Thus the knowledge which Scripture gives us of God is the knowledge of *love*. There really is no other knowledge of God than this. In an abstract way we can conceive of a knowledge of God which is a mere intellectual knowledge — a knowledge of the head, though nothing more. But such a knowledge does not really exist in fact. And it does not exist in fact because every man must either love God or hate God. There is no in-between, no middle ground, no neutral position, no evasion of the calling to love. But a person who hates God is also a person who will never allow the knowledge of God as it is in the Scriptures to stand unchallenged and uncontested. Just as the heathen, according to Paul in Romans 1, change the glory of God revealed through the things which are made into images representing corruptible things, so does the unbeliever change the glory of God revealed in the Scriptures into his own images. He hates God, but his hatred can never leave God alone. He has to corrupt God, to destroy Him.

But to get back to the point I am trying to make: the knowledge of God which comes through the Scriptures is a knowledge of love. I.e., it is a knowledge born out of love; it is a knowledge of the intimacy and fellowship of love; it is a knowledge which results in love.

But you see here the connection. The whole keeping of the whole law of God, and the whole observance of all His will for us is the one great commandment: Love God. All the hundreds of admonitions of Scripture are only detailed explications of that one command: Love God. And here doctrine and life come together in an inseparable way. It is for this reason that the confession of the



truth is not a mere verbal confession of one's conviction concerning certain intellectual beliefs, but it is rather a *way of life*, a *levenswandel*.

It is true, of course, that this has to be made clear to your people. And you must do this again and again. There is always the danger that people in the Church forget this for one reason or another. You see, though it is true what I said above that one either loves God or hates God and that, therefore, one either loves the truth or hates the truth; nevertheless, it also usually happens that within a given congregation, the love for the truth which once burned as a hot light, does not turn into hatred overnight. It can never work this way, nor does it work this way in history. What usually happens is that there is a spiritual lethargy which creeps into the church. There is a sort of "ho-hum" attitude towards the truth of the Scriptures. There is an indifference, a shrug-of-the-shoulders response to the preaching. People do not really take it very seriously any more. There is nothing very important about it, after all. There is nothing to get excited about. There is nothing to stir the soul. One can take it or leave it as he sees fit.

This attitude arises, obviously, when the truth of the Scriptures is no longer preached as the truth of love. The result is an attitude of carelessness and indifference towards the truth which is also followed by a carnal and worldly walk which is at total variance with the love of God. From this springs dead orthodoxy and antinomianism. But the solution to the problem is not to down play doctrine and make a false disjunction between doctrine and practice; the solution to the problem is to get across to the congregation what true doctrine is all about.

I suppose an illustration at this point would perhaps be helpful. Supposing that a young engaged couple separated because the man is called by his government to serve in the armed forces. This service involves his going overseas to live for a time far from his home and far from the girl he loves. As has happened so often in the past, the girl asks in her letters that her fiance tell her all about himself. She wants to know what he does every day. She would like the latest pictures which he has had taken of him. She wants to know the smallest details of his life. This might appear to be puzzling to the young man

who may wonder why in the world his girlfriend wants to know all these meaningless and insignificant details which are of no importance to him and which seem totally boring. If he inquires of her as to the reason for her interest in these things, she could conceivably answer that she wants to learn as much as she can about him because she wants to discover for herself whether or not he will be a husband who can provide her with the good things of life when once they get married. She may answer that she wants to be sure that he will, after their marriage, enable her to live a life of complete leisure in which she can do as she pleases and enjoy life to the full. But if this is the gist of her answer, her fiance will have good reason to doubt her love for him, and will have every reason to conclude that she loves herself only and simply wants to use him for her own selfish purposes. That will be sufficient to break the engagement.

But if on the other hand, she really does love her husband-to-be, she will answer that she wants to know all she can about him for no other reason than that she loves him. Love prompts her to want to know all she can about him. Love is its own reason. Love is sufficient reason. It is in the nature of love to want this. And it is precisely because of that love which expresses itself in that way that she will also keep herself pure for him, waiting anxiously the time of his return.

Do you see the analogy? We are engaged to Christ. We are destined to be His bride. If the love which is stirred up in us by the letters He writes to us in the Scriptures is a genuine love, that love will not only, for its own sake, want to know all that there is to know about Christ, but that desire to know all that there is to know about Christ will also prompt us to keep ourselves unspotted from the world while we anxiously await the coming of our Lover to take us to Himself in the marriage supper of the Lamb.

It is in this way that doctrine and practice are related.

I will have to save your other questions for the next letter.

With Christian greetings,  
H. Hanko

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*IN HIS FEAR*

# An Experience With Asaph

*Rev. Meindert Joostens*

The particular experience of which we want to speak is not a strange one. In fact, it is a very common one. For who of God's children has not, at one time or another, asked himself the question, "why?" We ask ourselves this question as the troubles and cares of this life roll over us as strong and raging billows of the sea. Maybe this question came to mind when we were on the verge of despair and there was no way to turn, or when suffering went beyond all the limits of our expectation. And, yet more often, when the lot of the Christian here below as pilgrim and stranger is less than what our flesh would enjoy. In times such as these we ask ourselves the question, "...is there knowledge in the Most High?" This question is not new or recent, but Christians have raised it throughout the ages. Our Heavenly Father also knew this question to be typical of His children and for that reason He moved one of the saints to enter it into the Infallible Record for our comfort and edification. We are, of course, referring to the 73rd Psalm.

The Psalms are often called a biography of the experiences of the child of God. This depiction is true. At any time we can open the Scriptures to the book of Psalms and find a passage to suit our immediate need. The proof of this can be found in the songs that resound from the lips and in the mind of the saints. Have not the following versifications of the Psalms often filled your souls? In time of fear we sing, "What time I am afraid, I put my trust in thee . . ." (Psalm 56) In time of nigh despair: "O God preserve me for in thee alone my trust has stood . . ." Or when the happiness of a Sabbath morn floods our soul we joyfully sing, "With joy and gladness in my soul, I hear the call to prayer . . ." (Psalm 122) Let us go to the Psalms to experience with Asaph the soul rending question, "Is there knowledge in the Most High?" And in so doing may Asaph lead us to the understanding that, "Truly God is good . . . to such as are of a clean heart."

It is characteristic of the Psalms to begin with an outburst of praise. That which is uppermost in the mind of the poet comes to immediate expression.

This is no less the case in Psalm 73. This is of significance as well as being beautiful. Before Asaph speaks concerning the dreadful experience that had taken hold upon him, he relates to us the outcome of his trial. How wonderful an instruction we find here! For we turn to Psalm 73 when things seem to be all wrong in our eyes. When it seems as if God has forgotten all about us. When we are spiritually down in the valley far removed from the mountain tops of faith. In this type of a situation Asaph confronts us with a very startling truth. The truth which, sometimes, we lose from our spiritual sight. It comes to us with a resounding forcefulness. "Truly God is good to Israel." In effect Asaph tells us this: "Listen, we can speak regarding your problem of distress or whatever, but let us get one thing straight, God is always good to us." That is significant. Oh, my finite and limited understanding may tell me that God's favor has shifted from me upon the ungodly, but that is never the case. God is good to His people, without fail! This is a valuable piece of instruction.

Having established this, Asaph is now ready to discuss with us his experience. We are at once struck by the openness and lack of inhibition on the part of the Psalmist. I think that strikes us because in our circles we are seldom characterized by such openness regarding our spiritual lives. It would be of great benefit to relate to one another, within the communion of the saints, the various struggles that we, as Christians, have in our lives. Not that each and every problem should become general information for the gossip circuit, but it is to the spiritual welfare of Christ's body to discuss the spiritual aspect of our lives. It is good for the saints to relate their joys, so that we may all rejoice, or to speak of their sorrows that we may carry one another's burdens unto the Throne of Grace. Notice how personal the Psalmist becomes: "But as for me . . ." Let it be established that God is always good and a faithful covenant keeping God, but *I* am not always so steadfastly established in the faith. "...my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped." A double figure is implied here. It is important for the people of God to maintain a firm



stance in their lives. This is possible only if they stand upon something firm and solid. It is a sheer impossibility to secure a bearing stance upon the mire of quicksand. Only upon the solid ground can one plant his feet securely. In the light of this figure, Asaph describes what happened to him. His feet were almost gone and his steps nigh slipped. His feet were so insecure that they almost let go, because the ground upon which he was standing was very slippery. We can almost envision Asaph's position in our mind. A man trying to stand upon glare ice just about ready to fall because his feet are taken from under him. I almost lost my foothold, says Asaph.

Why? Because any attempt to stand upon insecure turf must always end in a disastrous fall. This almost happened to Asaph. For a moment he stood upon the quicksand of his own rationale and attempted to reason without taking into account the inscrutable wisdom of the Almighty. Asaph allowed the carnal things and earthly circumstance to dictate to him the spiritual state of things. The Psalmist forgot for a moment the truth which Paul later expressed in the Scriptures when he said, "... the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." (I Cor. 3:19) Asaph took off his spiritual spectacles for a moment and so he attempted to evaluate the situation. This is what he saw: wicked men who had great prosperity. They stood firm in the power and strength of their own flesh and died without agony. All through their life, the wicked had little trouble, and plagues seemed to pass them by while they prospered in all the abundances of this earth. Yea, in all their manifold corruptions and persecutions of the godly they proudly boasted throughout the earth and defied God. And there is something else which Asaph perceived. And that he does not understand. While the wicked prosper, he and all God's people are plagued, chastened all the day long, and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. Is God ignorant of these

things? His feet almost lost their stance of faithfulness and trust.

All this is not strange to us, is it? We, too, many times in our lives, very keenly feel this experience as Asaph records it. We feel it when the Lord brings sickness or takes a loved one to glory. This is our experience when we have to sacrifice greatly, even until it hurts, for the cause of the kingdom. Yes, when we see the wicked prosper and the hand of the Lord seems to weigh so heavily upon us, then we ask, "Doesn't the Lord know? How much more do we have to take? Is the favor of God no longer upon us?" Or maybe in a moment of greatest spiritual weakness we may ask, "Is it worth all this; or do I cleanse my heart in vain and strive after a godly life to no avail?" We understand that of which Asaph is speaking.

Oh, the wonder of God's grace in dealing with His people. "... my feet were *almost* gone; my step had well *nigh* slipped." The Lord will never let us go. For a while He may leave us to our own rationalistic fancies but the hand of His grace always and again takes hold upon us. Faith and trust for a moment were hid but they quickly tread to the fore. They begin to work. Listen, "If I ... speak thus ... I offend ... the generation of thy children. (This was) too painful for me." Asaph comes to his spiritual senses. Now the voice of faith reasons. If I say that I have cleansed my heart in vain, this strives with the assurance of God's people who have through generations faithfully maintained their weighty lot here below. Yet, the wicked prosper. It is a conundrum to him.

This problem will drive him into the sanctuary and there all will be made plain. The problem which is too painful will be rectified in God's house. Next time, D.V., we will go with Asaph into the sanctuary and there come to the clear understanding that God is indeed good to Israel.

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## SIGNS OF THE TIMES

# If Tomorrow I Were To Die

Rev. G. Van Baren

We have, in these columns, given our attention to the various signs of the times — signs pointing to the nearness of Christ's return on the clouds of heaven. Nor can there be any doubt in the mind of the discerning Christian that His return is at hand. The specific date none can say — Jesus Himself warned against attempts to determine the day and the hour.

In discussing the return of Christ, we do sometimes grow weary of the mention of this. We are not always that anxious for Christ to return — we do have it pretty good here on the earth. We might rather consider our interests and goals on this earth — than think constantly of that which is to come. Besides, does it not sometimes seem as though all things do



continue as they always were? Are not many of the signs of Christ's return, signs which were evident almost from creation itself? Why then mention so often the return of Christ?

This time, instead of speaking of Christ's return bodily on the clouds of heaven in the last day, I would mention another sense in which we can speak of His coming. There is the day of our death when Christ comes to receive the souls of His people to bring them to glory. How much do we think of that?

Perhaps a minister is, more than many others in a congregation, aware of the reality of death. He is called upon when there is sickness and death in the families of his parishioners. He is personally aware of the many sorrows which befall one on this earth. Especially when one who dies, or is about to die, is very young, one begins to think seriously of the fact that each must die — I must die. Most do not know the time of their deaths. Some however do know — that is, they know that within a few days or weeks they must die.

If I were to know that I would die tomorrow, if I were of the few that have an advance warning, how would this affect my life? My goals? My thoughts and attitudes? And if my position would be radically altered in the light of such knowledge of impending death, ought not that same spiritual attitude be seen NOW?

Were we certain of our death tomorrow, we would surely make necessary arrangements concerning our possessions and perhaps concerning funeral, burial, etc. Normally, we are inclined to ignore this because we refuse to face the possibility and reality of our own impending death. But if we knew the day, we would make plans accordingly.

But if Christ were to return to take one of us tomorrow, and we knew this, there are *spiritual* matters in which we would surely involve ourselves today. What would *you* do and say were you to have such knowledge?

I suppose one would be inclined first to reflect upon the past — and not without regret. The years quickly went by. And what did we really accomplish? How many did not we waste — assuming that we had many more to come? What could not we have done differently — if we had known the brevity of the days given us! How much more time would not we have spent with God's Word and in prayer! How much more instruction we would have given our children! How much more we would have sought God's people and the coming of His kingdom! But the time is past — beyond recall.

But what would my thoughts and attitudes be in this last day God has given? First, I would doubtlessly

have a far different perspective on time which God allotted to me. When there would be one or but a few days remaining, I would surely make careful use of every last second. There would be no time to "waste." There would be far too many things to do and to say. There would be no time for idleness; no time for foolish things. Each moment would be regarded as a precious gift to be used carefully to accomplish what must be done.

One's attitude toward the world and its entertainments would certainly be altered if there were but a few hours of time remaining in this life. I am rather sure that the child of God would not while away the time in front of his television set. He would not find pleasure in the entertainments which the world provides. He would not be found going to one last movie. He would find no pleasure in the dance. He would not sing one last worldly song or rejoice in the rock music of this world. Conscious of the fact that Jesus would soon be taking him home, he would also know that shortly he would be giving account of all that he had done on this earth.

Without doubt, there would be a different attitude toward one's work in this case. Oftentimes, work can become the means of establishment and advancement in this world. That job may have been all-important. One might be willing to sacrifice his church connections, at least with the church where he believed the Word to be most purely preached, in order to advance himself. He might put all of his time into that work — having no time for family, for church, for school. But were there one day remaining, interest in work and job would suddenly abate. Even if part of this last day were to be put into one's job, it would not be in order to earn enough to have a good life here on this earth. That work would mean nothing anymore — at least nothing as far as his earthly life was concerned.

The same would be true concerning one's friends and concerning the question of marriage. Often, especially for young people, there is nothing more important than this. One might compromise; he might be ready to give up everything: church and family, in order to marry the one he "loves." God is not first in his thoughts. His own "happiness" (which often soon turns into bitter sorrow) is more important than anything that the Word of God teaches. But were death surely coming tomorrow, all of this would be different for the child of God. He would evaluate his "love" in a different light and with a different standard. Then it would not first be the friendship of man which is the most important, but friendship with the ever-blessed God. Earthly ties must be broken; but the child of God has eternal fellowship with Father in heaven through Jesus Christ His Son.

I would suspect, too, that the child of God, under



the circumstances, would not want any evils or sins he committed to remain unconfessed. Surely he would acknowledge before God all that which he had done amiss. It is true that he always confesses his sin before God. But often such is rather in a routine way. In the knowledge of standing soon in Jesus' Presence, one would surely desire to cry out for mercy before the Living God.

And one would want to remove every offense with a brother. There is not always a sense of urgency, when one thinks he has much time before him. There is always tomorrow, or next week, or month, or year. But if only one day remained, then the child of God would want to make sure that no offense remained. How could he stand before Jesus' face shortly, knowing that he had left unresolved even one offense?

If I had but one day remaining, what would I do?

All the above represents only a few thoughts of what might cross one's mind when facing the reality of death. But does not Scripture itself more clearly emphasize the calling of the child of God? Did not Jesus say, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33)? Did Jesus not add, "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (vs. 34)?

Jesus also pointed out, through parable, the foolishness of setting one's heart on earthly things. He spake in Luke 12:16-21 of the rich fool who made elaborate plans to tear down his small barns in order to build bigger to hold his material goods. He was assured that he had much goods "laid up for many years." He would take his ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But that very night God required of him his

soul. All his goods, all his plans, were of no value to him anymore. Others took what he had worked so hard to obtain.

Jesus speaks in John 9:4 concerning Himself, "I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work." And we are reminded in Romans 13:12, "The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light."

One cannot, of course, be "scared" into doing the good and holy by fear of impending death. Though the angel of death stood this very moment before a wicked person, that one would not therefore repent. Repentance and godly walk are the fruit of the work of the Spirit. There must be regeneration and conversion. Then one will principally seek that which is spiritual.

But the point we ought to see is that often the child of God is deeply affected by the world and his own sinful flesh. Often he puts off til next year what ought to be done today. Often he enjoys the very things which he knows will have no place in heaven. He seeks to defend and excuse his actions. He considers that he has much time til Jesus' return; or much time before Jesus calls him from this earth. So he procrastinates. He has forgotten that the night is far spent — the day is at hand.

We know not how many tomorrows we have. But we know that God has given us this day to use to His glory. May we be aware of the brevity of our days that we may set our hearts on wisdom's way. Perhaps we could well ask ourselves before we did, or failed to do, anything, "Would I do this if I knew that today were my last?"

## Book Review

*The History of Christian Doctrines*, by Louis Berkhof. Baker Book House (Twin Brooks Series) Grand Rapids, Mich., 1975. Paperback, 285 pp. \$4.95. [Reviewed by Rev. Mark H. Hoeksema]

This book is a new paperback reprint of what was originally the historical volume of Berkhof's well-known *Reformed Dogmatics* (later entitled *Systematic Theology*). According to the author, though the study of the history of dogma is intimately connected with that of systematic theology, yet this discipline is a separate study and deserves separate

treatment. This is evidently the reason for the reprint under separate cover. At the same time, however, it is meant as a companion volume to *Systematic Theology*, and should be used in connection with it, since it contains the historical material related to it.

As far as the book itself is concerned, Berkhof begins in the prolegomena by speaking of the subject matter, task, method and divisions, and history of the history of dogma. As to his method of treatment, Berkhof uses the vertical method, i.e., traces each of the major doctrines from its inception down through



the history of the Christian church up until more recent times, doing so also from the standpoint of what he calls the confessional method, which means the evaluation of various views from the perspective of Scripture as interpreted by his own confession, although he does not specify what that confession is. He then devotes a short section to the apostolic fathers, setting forth their views in brief and treating various developments in the early church, including Gnosticism, Montanism, and Monarchianism. It should be noted here that although it is difficult to know exactly what the author means, it is disturbing to find the heresy of Marcion called a "movement of reform." Berkhof then goes on to deal with the development of the major doctrines roughly along the lines of the six loci of dogmatics, spending considerable time with the Middle Ages and the Reformation, as well as mentioning some of the more recent developments of the 19th century.

There are several weaknesses in this book. For one thing, the treatment of the history of the various dogmas is very brief, and often assumes further knowledge on the part of the reader. Though the author obviously did not intend a lengthy and detailed study of the history of dogma, one often wishes for a little more light, not only concerning facts, but also regarding depth. Secondly, the confessional presuppositions from which the author claims to proceed are not always as evident as they could be. It seems reasonable to assume that the various views and doctrines are judged in the companion volume, *Systematic Theology*. But at the same time, there is not enough evaluation, which should be the task of the dogmatic historian, especially one who

proceeds from a confessional basis. Assuming that by his confessional basis the author means the Reformed confessions, then it must be remarked that it is often difficult to see his Reformed standpoint clearly. There is not enough emphasis upon the roots and development of Reformed theology in its various shades and manifestations, as one might expect from a Reformed writer. Finally, the book stops too soon in the history of dogma. There are those who caution against evaluating too quickly the events of recent history. And though we may heed that caution, it is unfortunate that a book which originally came out as late as 1937 does not include more of the doctrinal developments in the Reformed churches, both here and abroad.

But the book also has its strong points. Somewhat paradoxically, its brevity is also its strength, because it sets forth briefly and concisely, almost with outline clarity, the history of dogma. If this is what the reader is looking for, the book will serve admirably. Especially helpful are margin notations indicating which subjects are treated on each page. Also helpful are the three indexes, those of literature, names, and subjects. And encouraging is the lack of footnotes, the perennial stumblingblocks of easy and steady reading. The questions at the end of each chapter are also helpful, providing incentive for review and food for further thought as well.

If the purpose of the book is remembered and it is read with its companion volume, no doubt it will be instructive and informative. With the above reservations, the book is recommended as worth obtaining and using.

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The Free Christian School of Edgerton, Minn., is in need of a teacher for grades Kindergarten thru 4th grades. Please send applications to: MR. ART VER HEY, RT. 1 — BOX 188, EDGERTON, MINN. 56128.

### NOTICE!!!

The annual Spring Lecture will be held, the Lord willing, April 29, 1976, at 8:00 P.M. in the First Protestant Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Prof. Robert Decker will speak on the subject — "THE WOMAN'S PLACE IN THE CHURCH." Make plans now to hear this timely lecture and encourage and invite your friends to attend also.  
The Lecture Committee

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies Society of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan, expresses its Christian sympathy to one of its members, Mrs. Henry Vander Kolk, in the passing of her father, MR. RALPH VAN SPYKER.

May our Covenant God comfort her by His Word and Spirit.

"For me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).

The Ladies Society of the  
First Protestant Reformed  
Church of Holland, Mich.  
Mrs. G. Wassink, Sec'y.





## News From Our Churches

### REPORT OF CLASSIS WEST

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches met in Edgerton, Minnesota, on March 3. Classis began with devotions at 8:30 A.M. and finished its work about 9:00 P.M. the same day. Ten ministers and eleven elders carried out the work of the churches of the West.

Present at Classis for the first time were the delegates from our Edmonton, Alberta, Canada congregation, the brothers Folkert Tolsma and Dave Zylstra. Rev. Harbach, missionary in Houston, Texas, also attended Classis and was given the right of the floor, as well as the right hand of fellowship. His presence was explained not only by the meeting of Classis, but also by the conference on church extension work by the local congregation that preceded Classis, Tuesday afternoon and evening. Arranged by the committee on officebearers' conferences, the conference was chaired by Rev. B. Woudenberg.

The president of the previous Classis, Rev. D. Engelsma, led Classis in its opening devotions on Wednesday morning. He read Luke 22:19-30 and spoke on verses 24-28, "Being Great in the Kingdom." After the approving of the credentials, Rev. M. Hoeksema Presided over the Classis — a first for him.

The report of the Reading Sermon Committee (the consistory of Edgerton) indicated that there are plenty of reading sermons for the churches, although a large number are out on loan — more than 150. Churches that have reading sermons of the Classis lying around should return them to Edgerton's consistory. The report of the Taped Sermon Committee (the council of South Holland) likewise indicated that Classis has a sufficient number of taped sermons on hand for the use of the churches, including a complete set of the Heidelberg Catechism. Since there was no report of the Church Visitors, Classis instructed the visitors to present their report at the Fall Classis.

Edmonton received classical appointments: April 4, 11, 18 — Rev. M. Hoeksema; April 25, May 2, 9 — Rev. J. Kortering; May 16, 23, 30 — Rev. R. Miersma. Classis instructed its Classical Committee to ask the

Classical Committee of Classis East to supply Edmonton the Sundays of March 14, 21, 28, and advised Edmonton to ask the seminary for supply during the summer months.

Seven churches requested and were granted subsidy, in the amount of \$42,550: Edgerton; Edmonton; Forbes; Isabel; Lynden; Pella; and Randolph.

Classis rejected a "protest-petition" from a consistory, that Classis' decision of September, 1975, regarding the fourth commandment "be reconsidered in terms of its formulation and nomenclature."

Classis spent a good deal of time considering the advisability of incorporation, in view of the fact that Classis West is one of the chief beneficiaries of the will of the late Mr. Cecil Vander Molen. Its decision was to incorporate under the laws of Minnesota. It mandated the Classical Committee to implement this decision.

Classis elected several functionaries: classical committee — Rev. J. Slopsema; primus delegate ad examina — Rev. W. Bekkering; secundus delegate ad examina — Rev. J. Slopsema; church visitors — Rev. J. Kortering and Rev. G. Lanting.

Classis also voted delegates to the 1976 Synod in South Holland. The minister delegates are: D. Engelsma; J. Kortering; G. Lanting; and B. Woudenberg. Alternate minister delegates are: W. Bekkering; M. Kamps; G. Lubbers; and J. Slopsema. The elder delegates are: M. Alsum (Loveland); A De Jong (South Holland); H. Huiskens (Edgerton); and J. Kalsbeek, Jr. (Doon). The alternate elder delegates are: E. Kuiper (South Holland); B. Menninga (Pella); F. Tolsma (Edmonton); and E. Van Ginkel (Doon).

The next meeting of Classis will be held in Loveland, Colorado, on September 1, the Lord willing.

Rev. David Engelsma, Stated Clerk  
Classis West

Rev. Richard Moore has accepted the call extended to him by our congregation in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.