

# The **STANDARD BEARER**

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

“Happiness is . . . .”

Happiness is the blessed assurance that my sins are forgiven, that by the grace of God I can hate and fight sin that still wars within me, that I never face my daily cares and needs alone, but that in all my trials and temptations I have an Advocate in the heavens, Who blesses me by His Spirit in my heart. He is my Savior, my Helper in the strife, My Lord, to Whom I belong now and forever.

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## THE STANDARD BEARER

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## MEDITATION

## Our Triple Knowledge

Rev. C. Hanko

*"How many things are necessary for thee to know, that thou, enjoying this comfort, mayest live and die happily?"*

*"Three, the first, how great my sins and miseries are; the second, how I may be delivered from all my sins and miseries; the third, how I shall express my gratitude to God for such deliverance." Lord's Day I, Question 2.*

"Happiness is . . ."

You are often expected to fill in the rest according to the fancies and dictates of your heart at the moment. Happiness may be gaining a friend, or striking a fortune, or gaining some token of esteem. Happiness may fluctuate, change, be snatched from us, or disappear like a morning mist. Something may seem to bring happiness today, the very opposite tomorrow. What seemed to be a goose with a golden egg may prove to be a mere chimera, a shattered

dream. Happiness in this world is something that everybody strives after, yet never attains.

Scripture alone knows of true happiness: happiness which is already attained by the believer, which suffers no disillusionment, which abides and endures as a "joy unspeakable and full of glory." Have you ever searched the Scriptures with a concordance at your side to discover how often the Word of God speaks of joy, happiness, peace, blessedness as the peculiar possession of the child of God? The prophets



in joyful anticipation declared: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy king cometh unto thee: he is just and having salvation." Zech. 9:9. The Psalmist arouses us to join him in holy adoration, "Sing to the Lord, sing His praise, all ye people. New be your song, as new honors ye pay." Jesus assures us that there is happiness even in days of sore persecution: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." Matthew 5:11, 12. Peter reminds us that true believers sing songs in the night, smiling through their tears in the blessed expectation of the glorious deliverance in Jesus Christ, "wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations." I Peter 1:6. The apostle Paul urges us: "Rejoice in the Lord always." In order to impress us with the fact that this is the only real, abiding happiness, he adds, "Again I say, rejoice!" Phil. 4:4.

True happiness in a world of sin and death is a joy that quells every sorrow, turns our night into day, our weeping into rejoicing, our misery into blessedness. It is, indeed, a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Our Heidelberg Catechism is subjective and experiential in the sense that it is a confession of the testimony of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer as drawn from the Scriptures. It speaks the truth according to the heart of Jerusalem. Our fathers who wrote this book of instruction were well founded in the Scriptures. They had studied the Word, digested it, so that the truth was part and parcel of their souls. We marvel as we read this Catechism, how they draw treasures, new and old, out of the gold mine of God's Word. We hear the Spirit testifying with our spirit for our own spiritual edification. We are ready to confess along with the saints of all ages, that our only comfort, in life and death, in body and soul is exactly this, that "I am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ." Therefore we lend a ready ear when the Catechism goes on to teach us that there is no happiness apart from that only comfort. There is no true happiness in marriage, no true happiness in our labors, no happiness in periods of rest and relaxation, no happiness at any time without Christ. Happiness is the blessed assurance that my sins are forgiven, that by the grace of God I can hate and fight sin that still wars within me, that I never face my daily cares and needs alone, but that in all my trials and temptations I have an Advocate in the heavens, Who blesses me by His Spirit in my heart. He is my Savior, my Helper in the strife, My Lord, to Whom I belong now and forever.

Three things to know . . . .

We are confronted with the question, "How many things are necessary for thee to know, that thou, enjoying this comfort, mayest live and die happily?"

Happiness is often thought to be nothing more than a feeling, an uncontrollable emotion. Either we are happy or we are despondent, and actually there is very little that we can do about it. One will try to find happiness in pouring out his soul to some willing listener. Another will try to drown his sorrow in indulging in tranquilizers, liquor, drugs, or some wild revelry. Happiness is trying to forget, or trying to convince one's self that "every day in every way we are getting better and better," or, as the philosophy of recent date expresses it, "I'm OK, you're OK."

We can appreciate the sober language of our book of instruction. Happiness, it tells us, is rooted in knowledge. Happiness is the strong conviction, "I know." We must hasten to add that this knowledge is not a matter of mental gymnastics or of cold reasoning. The knowledge that is meant here is the Christian knowledge, drawn objectively from the Scriptures, subjectively from the testimony of the Spirit in our hearts. It is the knowledge of faith. We are not hiding our heads in the sand, we are not superstitiously deceiving ourselves with vain delusions, we are in no sense trying to deny reality. We boldly face each new problem of each new day with the conviction that all is well, all is well between us and God. We see life as it really is, we see ourselves in our relation to God in every situation of life, and we are content in whatsoever state we find ourselves. In that conviction of heart and mind Job could say: "I know that my Redeemer liveth." Paul says: "I know Whom I have believed." Each of them spoke from the knowledge of faith.

Three things . . . .

These three things are often briefly summed up as: Misery, deliverance, and gratitude.

Did our fathers snatch these three concepts out of the air? Are they their own inventions? If so, you or I, or someone else might invent three other things necessary for true happiness. We might decide that misery is not a pleasant thing to think about, much less to be reminded of from time to time. We might decide that those three things were relevant four hundred years ago, but no longer fit in this enlightened, scientific age. These three things which our fathers mention are drawn from the Scriptures. I turn to Psalm 116 with its keynote, "I love the Lord." There David speaks of deep misery, of hellish pangs that gave him trouble and sorrow. He tells how he cried to the Lord, "O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul." And he concludes with the joyful acclaim, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits



He has bestowed on me?" Soon I find myself engrossed in Psalm 130, where the Psalmist cried to God out of the depths of his sin and misery; the Lord heard and delivered Him; his soul learned to wait on the Lord, even as watchers watch for the morning. Many other Psalms speak in the same strain. Paul's epistle to the Romans can readily be divided into those three sections, knowledge of our great misery, knowledge of our deliverance, and knowledge of our thankfulness to God for that deliverance.

A glance at our minor confessions shows us that these three necessary things are found there. Our Baptism Form begins with a confession that we are all conceived and born in sin, points out the riches of grace in being sanctified in Christ as members of God's church and covenant, and our "part" in that covenant to walk in a new and holy life. Our Communion Form speaks of this triple knowledge in the section pertaining to our self-examination. Each of us must humble himself before God, must seek his salvation in Christ alone, confident that He has atoned for our sins so completely as if we ourselves had atoned; and we must show true thankfulness in our relationship to God and to one another.

Small wonder that this first Lord's Day has always found a ready echo in the hearts of God's saints throughout the centuries.

We are actually a bit careless when we speak merely of "misery, deliverance, and thankfulness." As a result these three terms have at times been replaced by three others, which are supposed to express the same idea: Sin, Salvation, and Service. Taking a closer look at our Catechism we find that the emphasis does not fall upon "these three things," but on the *triple knowledge*, that I *know* these three things. Again, even that is not entirely correct. The idea is that I know *how great* my sins and miseries are, that I know *how* I may be delivered from my sins and miseries, and that I know *how* I shall express my thankfulness to God for that deliverance. The emphasis does not fall upon *me* and *my deliverance*. As important as that deliverance is to me, that is not the most important thing in life. Though God were to punish me in His sore displeasure, He would still be just and good. The emphasis falls upon *God*. Come, hear what God has done unto my soul, how God shows mercy upon me, delivers me, and makes it possible for me to show true thankfulness to Him for all His benefits to me. Then I do not end up with what I do in Christian service *for* God, as a sort of remuneration for what He has done for me, but I end up in thanking Him for the privilege of being able to show true thankfulness in deeds of gratitude before His face.

Thus we are taught to confess: "That I know how great my sins and miseries are." The believer does not take a certain delight in probing into sin as such, no,

not even into his own sinfulness. But he does know that behind all his problems lies that one great sin problem. He knows, "I am evil, born in sin; Thou desirest truth within." He recognizes his sins in his evil desires, thoughts, words, actions, deeds. The burden of guilt weighs heavily upon him every day anew. Even his prayers and worship are still so imperfect. Yet he has a strong desire to be holy as God is holy, perfect as a son of his heavenly Father. Therefore he is compelled daily to confess his sins before the face of God in true sorrow and a hearty repentance.

No, the result is not that he becomes depressed, morose. Confessing his sins and forsaking them, he experiences the riches of God's forgiving mercies. As he stares into the mirror of God's Word, deeply impressed by his own vile image, he sees behind him the Christ, Whose righteousness overshadows him. He knows that God sees him in Christ, adorned from head to foot, not in his own righteousness, but in the righteousness that Christ merited for him on the cross. He experiences the blessedness of the man whose sins are forgiven, whose transgressions are covered.

The Lord puts a new song in his heart. He recognizes sin as sin, hates it and flees from it. He fears the onslaughts of Satan, is alert to fight him off whenever he approaches. He seeks his fellowship with God in prayer, and finds his companions among those who fear the Lord.

This knowledge is not like a stairway, upon which we take one step at a time, from misery, to deliverance, to gratitude. But in the measure that we know our misery, we also experience our deliverance, and thus can confess:

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases." Psalm 103:1-3.

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## EDITORIAL

Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

## Baptism on the Mission Field

(10)

We are now ready to look at the Scripture passages from Acts which the Study Report cites as Scriptural proof for its position. To refresh our memories, let us quote the two paragraphs of this section of the report which refer to Acts:

Exactly how the Lord intended the commands of Matthew 28 and Mark 16 and how the Church understood them, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is clearly indicated in the account of the missionary labor of the Church throughout the Book of Acts. The testimony of Acts is that the missionaries baptized on the mission field; that baptizing, along with the preaching of the gospel, was part of their missionary office; that the apostles and evangelists baptized where there was as yet no church institute and that they did so with a view to instituting the church. Passages include: Acts 2:38,41; Acts 8:12,13,16; Acts 8:38; Acts 9:18; Acts 10:47,48; Acts 16:14,15; Acts 16:33; Acts 18:8; Acts 19:5.

The practice of the Church of baptizing as part of the missionary task, before the instituting of a congregation is indisputable. Acts 10:47, 48 teaches that Peter commanded Cornelius and his house to be baptized as soon as they believed and the Spirit was poured out on them. Acts 16:15 and Acts 16:33 teach that Lydia and her household and the Philippian jailor and his household were baptized by the apostles prior to the instituting of a church in Philippi, as an element of the missionary task of gathering a church.

First of all, let me make some general observations about this section of the Report. My first observation is that the Report does not accurately state what it must prove. It must not merely prove that baptism can and did take place before the church was instituted and where there was as yet no church institute. Nor must it merely prove that baptism can and did take place "with a view to instituting the church." In the abstract, we may freely grant both of these possibilities — although it is another question whether the passages in Acts show anything like this. What the Report must prove is this: that baptism can and must take place where there is no instituted church, where there will be no instituted church for a considerable time, and even when and where there may never be an instituted Protestant Reformed congregation in a given locality. It must prove, further, that baptism can and must take place where there is

only a hope (on the part of missionary and adherents) that perhaps there will be a church and that perhaps the baptism will eventually lead to membership in that Protestant Reformed congregation — or in some other true church. This is, in effect, the meaning of "with a view to" in the Study Report. It is *subjective* while the stipulation of our Form is *objective*.

My second observation is that the Study Report produces not one iota of exegesis to back up its bold claim of indisputable." And let us remember that the burden of proof is on the Study Committee, not on those who disagree or are unconvinced. In these two paragraphs the Study Report makes statements such as, "The testimony of Acts is . . .," "The practice of the Church . . . is indisputable," "Acts 10:47, 48 teaches . . .," "Acts 16:15 and Acts 16:33 teach. . . ." But notice that the Report does not even *quote* the passages, let alone give any explanation of the passages, show what in these passages proves their point, or show that their assumed understanding of the passages is correct in the light of the context and in the light of the rest of Scripture. *I submit that this is not the proper manner in which our churches in their Synod should make a major change in a policy of long standing regarding the administration of the sacrament of baptism.* We must not jump to conclusions but must have our position based foursquare on Scripture and the Confessions.

In the second place, I wish to make some general remarks that have bearing on our exegesis and understanding of a historical book such as the book of Acts. I have especially three remarks.

The first concerns the nature of historical accounts in Scripture. What I am writing here is true of all the historical books, including Acts. Negatively, these books are characterized by the fact that they do not furnish a complete historical account of what took place in a certain place and over a certain span of time. Many, many details may be omitted. What we might deem important facts may be omitted. Often what we would *like* to know may be omitted. Thus, for example, we call Acts the "Acts of the Apostles." But have you ever counted how many apostles are not even so much as mentioned by name? Have you ever wondered what became of Peter and his work after the last mention of him in Acts? Of Thomas? Of



Philip? Of Nathanael? Have you ever thought to yourself that it might, for the most part, better be called the “Acts of the Apostle Paul”? Have you ever noticed that large parts of Paul’s labors are passed over with a verse or two? For example, in Acts 20, just to use a casual example, we read in vss. 1, 2 that Paul “departed for to go into Macedonia.” What do we know of those labors? Only this: “And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece.” And what do we know about his work in Greece at that time? Only this: “And there abode three months.” Or again, after the account of the Ethiopian eunuch we read of Philip’s mission tour in 8:40: “But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.” Mind you, this was *before* Peter went to Cornelius at Caesarea. We are given no details concerning all this work (have you ever looked up how many cities Philip might have evangelized between Azotus and Caesarea?) And later, much later, we find Philip the Evangelist still in Caesarea — when Paul is on his way to Jerusalem after his three missionary journeys, Acts 21:8, 9. Sometimes — and the exegete must be on the alert for these — there are indirect and unexpected indications that something has taken place that is not mentioned in so many words. Have you ever wondered, for example, why the outward manifestation of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit did not take place in *every* instance, but only certain ones? Have you ever wondered why in the case of Cornelius it took place *before* his baptism and why in the case of the saints in Samaria it took place *after* their baptism? Questions to ponder for an exegete — but often very significant.

One of the practical cautions for the exegete which follows from the above fact is that the exegete must be *extremely* careful with an argument from silence. Just because Acts does not mention that a church was established at Damascus does not mean that there was no congregation there. Just because you do not read of the establishment of dozens of congregations by Philip does not mean they were not established. Just because you do not read that they had a congregational meeting in Philippi does not mean there was no instituted congregation there for months and years after Paul’s first visit there. Just because you do not read that Luke stayed behind when Paul left Philippi does not mean he did not do so; and remember the “we” narrative of Luke is interrupted at this point and not resumed for a long time. And so one could go on.

This is an important point for the present discussion. The Study Report argues (by assumption, for it does not exegete) that because in several instances you do not specifically read that the church was instituted in a certain place, therefore there was no

congregation in those places when baptism was administered, or immediately thereupon, i.e., established *through* the very baptism, which is, remember, the sacrament of incorporation into the church. This is erroneous reasoning on the part of the Study Report.

But there is more.

My second observation is also connected with the character of historical books — this time, from a *positive* point of view. This point is that Scripture in its historical accounts is both *selective* and *purposeful*. That is, the Holy Spirit tells us in the infallible record only what he wants to tell us, and He does so for a very specific purpose. And it is the task of the exegete to take note of this selectivity and to discern from Scripture itself the purpose(s) of the narrative. Let me use an example from the book of Acts again. Acts, we may say in general, tells us the things which Jesus *continued* to do and to teach in distinction from what He *began* to do and to teach, 1:1. But one of the specific purposes is to tell us how the gospel and the church, after Pentecost, broke through the national boundaries of Israel and Jewry and became catholic. If you study the narrative carefully, you will discover that various events mesh, so to speak, to achieve that goal. There is Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch; there is the persecution which caused the gospel and the church to be spread everywhere, even to Antioch; there is Peter’s lesson in the vision of clean and unclean animals; there is the revelation to Cornelius and the subsequent request to Peter; there is the conversion of Cornelius; there is Peter’s report to the Jerusalem church; there is the conversion of Saul the persecutor to Paul the apostle to the Gentiles; there is the separating of Paul and Barnabas at Antioch to be missionaries; there is the Spirit’s prohibition to preach in certain places of Asia Minor; there is the vision of the Macedonian man; and finally there is the spread of the gospel to Europe. All of these events are related, and there is a unified purpose in the narrative. And the exegete must look for this purpose in order to discern the truth of the Word of God. This is but one example. More specific examples can be found, also.

Now, what is the importance of this? This. The exegete must be extremely careful about drawing conclusions from a given narrative which the narrative itself does not intend to be drawn. I am not saying that such *incidental* conclusions may never be drawn. But the student of Scripture must have good exegetical grounds for drawing such a conclusion or lesson, and he must discern such lessons only in harmony with and in the context of the main line and purpose of the narrative. That means that in the Study Report we also have to face this question (apart from various other questions): is it the purpose



of this narrative to teach us something about the specific question with which we are concerned in our Study Report? If so, how and on what grounds do we reach this conclusion? As an illustration of what I mean, let me refer to what Abraham Kuyper said in one of my earliest quotations from his *Dogmatics*. He makes the point that baptism must take place in the midst of the congregation. Then he mentions that Roman Catholics, arguing against this, appeal to the example of the eunuch and the jailer at Philippi. But his reply is that this is a faulty argument, and that the point of these examples is not what the Roman Catholics claim, but this, that baptism without the presence of faith (*praesentia fidelium*) is not possible.

This brings me to my third observation, namely, that we must remember in connection with the historical books that not everything which is written in them is *normative* for our life and for the life and conduct of the church today. This is one of the differences between, say, a historical book and an epistle. When the apostle exhorts in Philippians 2:12, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," that is normative for our conduct today. When the book of Acts records that the Deacon Philip also preached as an Evangelist, that is not normative for deacons today, I assure you. Or when it tells us that the deacons waited on tables, that is not normative for our conduct today. The historical books infallibly record *history*, but this does not mean that every single action of yesteryear is also an infallible example for our conduct. Philip baptized the eunuch when they came to water; does that authorize us to baptize under such circumstances? Paul and Silas baptized the jailer in his house; this does not mean that we today baptize in private homes. Again, a determination of such things must be made in the light of Scripture before conclusions are drawn.

But now let us turn to specific passages. I do not intend to exegete all these passages in detail; that was the task of the Study Report. I will, however, try to point out certain key facts which must be considered, as well as to point out certain items which, in my opinion, the Study Report ignores in making the claim that these passages prove their position.

Acts 2:38, 41 is part of the narrative concerning Pentecost Day. Vs. 38 reads: "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." And verse 41 reads: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." It seems to me that this passage proves nothing for the Study Report, in the light of the following: 1) The church at Jerusalem was already represented before

the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the 120 in the upper room. 2) It was also *instituted* in the persons of the apostles who had been commissioned directly by Christ. 3) It might even be argued that they held a congregational meeting when they chose Matthias as a replacement for Judas Iscariot — whether or not that meeting was premature. 4) If the church was *not* present on Pentecost Day, then on whom was the Holy Spirit poured out? Surely, the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of Christ, came to dwell in the *church* on Pentecost Day, not simply in a mass of individual believers. 5) Vs. 41 speaks of 3000 souls being "added" when they were baptized. To whom were they added, but to the church of Jerusalem? 6) Vs. 47 speaks specifically of the fact that "the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

In Acts 8:1-25 (the Report mentions vss. 12, 13, 16) is the account of the establishment of the church at Samaria, as well as the spread of the church to many villages of the Samaritans. Again, I can find no support for the position of the Study Report. There are several factors to be considered here: 1) Is it not correct to understand that the effect of the persecution "against the church which was at Jerusalem" was exactly the spread of the *church* to many places, including Samaria? 2) Must we understand that Philip went to the city of Samaria all alone? Or is it possible and likely in the light of vs. 1 that more, perhaps a good many, of the Jerusalem church members went to Samaria, and that Philip was not the only saint in Samaria prior to that mass conversion? 3) Does not this narrative show exactly that through baptism (the sacrament of incorporation into the church) the church was actually established in Samaria? Note: this is more specific than the Study Report's baptism "with a view to . . ." 4) Is this not confirmed by the significant fact that in this case the Holy Ghost fell on them *after* their baptism in connection with the visit of Peter and John? Because they were Samaritans (previously thought by the Jews to be excluded; remember that at one time John wanted to call down fire on Samaritans?) it was necessary both for themselves and for the Jerusalem church, including the apostles, to have this confirmatory evidence of the Holy Ghost, so that it might be known and seen by divine evidence that this was indeed the church and that these Samaritan-outsiders were indeed baptized into the church. I understand the reference to be not to the Spirit Himself; they already were under the influence of the Spirit or they could not believe. The reference is to the outward and visible manifestation of the Spirit.

Next is the example of the Ethiopian eunuch, Acts 8:26-39, who was baptized by Philip upon profession of faith, vss. 36-39. Concerning this example: 1) It should be noted that the *narrative* drops the account



of the eunuch with the words, "... and he went on his way rejoicing." In other words, we know nothing, absolutely nothing, about what became of the eunuch after this. 2) If this silence of Scripture is intended by the Study Report as proof of its position, it proves too much. For on this basis, it cannot even be proved that this was baptism "with a view to" instituting the church. 3) We do know, however, that the eunuch was not a man who spurned his connection with the church prior to this. For vs. 27 informs us that he had made his long journey to Jerusalem "for to worship." 4) Apart from all this, and apart from the fact that Scripture is completely silent — one way or the other — as to the after-history of this eunuch, we must not overlook the fact that here was an unusual case. Philip was made to meet this eunuch by direct revelation, vs. 26. By the same direct revelation, vs. 29, Philip was told to join him in his chariot. I would say that if we today were guided by the same direct revelation to baptize such an individual, there could be no hesitation. But such direct revelation there is not. And to make this instance normative with respect to the issues of the Study Report has no foundation.

As to the baptism of Saul at Damascus, Acts 9:18, the following: 1) How does this qualify as baptism on the mission field? From every indication in the chapter, it is evident that the church was already in Damascus. There was a publicly known group of disciples in the city — whom Saul originally intended to persecute, and with whom Saul stayed certain days while in Damascus. Ananias was one of them and was directly commissioned by the Lord to baptize Saul. 2) Surely, no one would question whether Saul was joined to the church through his very baptism. 3) There was no missionary labor in any ordinary sense of the word at all in the conversion of Saul. It was the Lord Jesus Himself Who turned Saul miraculously on his way to Damascus. And at the end of the process, Ananias very briefly conveys the message, heals Saul, and immediately baptizes him.

In Acts 10 we find the remarkable narrative of Cornelius, and the Study Report refers to two verses, 47 and 48, which refer to the baptism of Cornelius and his household. But the Study Report does not show how this proves the point. It makes the factual statement, to which anyone will agree: "Acts 10:47, 48 teaches that Peter commanded Cornelius and his house to be baptized as soon as they believed and the Spirit was poured out on them." But do not overlook the following facts: 1) Again, there was a remarkable chain of *direct revelation* by vision to Cornelius and to Peter lying behind this baptism. 2) There is absolutely no proof that there was not already a church in Caesarea, through Philip's prior labor, Acts 8:40, and that Cornelius and his household were joined to that congregation. 3) What is of most significance

however, is the fact that the missionary in this instance, Peter, had tangible evidence that, as our Form puts it, the Lord was making his work fruitful unto the gathering of the church in that place. What was that evidence? The remarkable fact that while Peter was busy speaking the Holy Ghost fell on all them that heard the Word. This again refers to the tangible, visible evidences of the Spirit. But remember that where the Spirit is poured out, there the church is; for the Spirit of Christ is given only to His church. Hence, the Lord was saying in effect: "Here in this Gentile household I am gathering My church." Small wonder that Peter, then, commanded that they should be baptized.

In Acts 16:9-40 we find the account of the first preaching of the gospel in Europe, in a colony city, Philippi, where there was apparently not even a Jewish synagogue. In this context we find two instances mentioned by the Study Report: the baptism of Lydia and her household, vs. 15, and the baptism of the jailor and his household, vs. 34. The Study Report claims that there was no church at Philippi. I call attention to the following: 1) That again there was direct revelation (the vision of the Macedonian man) behind the preaching of Paul and Silas at Philippi. 2) That we obviously do not have a complete and detailed account of all the work at Philippi. The account is given only from the viewpoint of three persons: Lydia, the soothsaying damsel, and the jailor. Besides, when Paul first preached, he preached unto the women who gathered at the riverside. But before he left, he and Silas saw the *brethren* and comforted them, vs.40. 3) That Luke apparently stayed behind in Philippi. The "we" narrative ends here. Luke reappears in Philippi in Chapter 20:5 ff., at the beginning of the second "we" section of Acts. One commentator suggests that Luke was the "true yokefellow" mentioned in Philippians 4:3. 4) That in all likelihood the congregation of Philippi was established at the time of this first visit of Paul. This is in harmony with the general work-method of the apostle; he did not leave a place until the fruits of his labors became evident. The narrative, of course, does not say in so many words that a church was established, nor that it was not established. But as I indicated, there was a community of "brethren" by the time Paul left — even though only certain women, a woman, a damsel, and one man are specifically mentioned. And let me add that this is not only my personal view, but also that of several reputable commentators on Acts. But, you see, if this is true, then these baptisms were not merely "with a view to" the instituting of a congregation. No, they were baptisms *into* the church; and through these baptisms of heathen Gentiles the church was formed at Philippi.

In Acts 18:8 is one verse in the account of Paul's



labors at Corinth. The narrative about Corinth embraces vss. 1-18. We may notice the following: 1) Again, as so many times, Scripture says nothing either way about the formal organization of the church at Corinth. 2) We must remember that Paul personally, though a missionary par excellence, did not think it important that *he* baptize. He baptized only a very few at Corinth – though many believed and though the Lord had much people there. Did Silas and Timothy do the baptizing? This is a possibility; but then the Corinthians could still claim to have been baptized in the name of Paul, I Cor. 1:13, in the light of their close association with Paul. But if not, there must have been others who were qualified to baptize – which would lead to the conclusion that very soon there was a congregation at Corinth and office-bearers who could baptize. 3) It seems likely that a congregation was established in the house of Justus, which became Paul's center of labors after he left the synagogue, vss. 6, 7. If so, the "many" who were baptized were again not merely baptized "with a view to" the instituting of a congregation while there was no guarantee whatsoever that a congregation would ultimately be formed. But they were baptized *into* the church. Their baptism was the sacrament of their incorporation into the church. 4) And thereafter, Paul continued to labor for a long time at Corinth, because the Lord assured him He had "much people" there, vss. 9-11.

As to Acts 19:5, the following: 1) It is at least possible that vs. 5 does not even refer to any act of baptism. If it does, then it is a *re*-baptism. Rev. H. Hoeksema is of the view that no baptism took place at this time. *Triple Knowledge*, II, 475, 476; *Reformed Dogmatics*, 671, 672. 2) No proof is offered by the Study Report that there was not already an infant congregation in Ephesus. Apollos, Aquila, and Priscilla all preceded Paul at Ephesus. There was also a known and recognized group of disciples there. Acts 18: 24-28, Acts 19:9.

Finally, a few words about the last part of this section of the Report. It speaks of the *reason* for the apostolic practice. In general, I can agree with this section. I wish, however, that it was more precise on the following counts: 1) Baptism is strictly a secondary means of grace. 2) Baptism has no meaning and no significance apart from the preaching of the Word. It is a sign and seal of the promise of the gospel, *added* to the promise. 3) Baptism, therefore, is not a means of the Spirit to save the elect in the same sense as the preaching. 4) Baptism, in the view of Reformed churches, has never been considered *indispensable*, though ordinarily required. 5) Baptism does not merely serve so that a repentant sinner "*can be* a member of the church institute," as the Report puts it. That is only possibility. No, by baptism one *is incorporated* into the church.

## Correspondence and Reply

### OPEN LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF THE STANDARD BEARER

Esteemed Prof. H.C. Hoeksema  
Editor-in-Chief of the *Standard Bearer*

Greetings in the Lord, Jesus Christ.

It would please me much to be granted a little space in the S.B. to state my considered opinion concerning your "editorials" on "Baptism On The Mission Field." Thanks!

Let me come directly to the point. I believe that you have not addressed yourself to the document written by Rev. R.C. Harbach to the Mission Committee, dated May 23, 1975. (Acts of Synod, 1976, page 111) Instead you have gone rather far afield to show that baptism may only be administered in Christ's Name *in* an organized church. However, Rev. Harbach, holding to that point, asked the question, underscoring it, "*May the sacrament of baptism be administered on the Mission Field in an unorganized congregation, but under the auspices of the*

*Consistory of the calling church?*" Your editorials do not address themselves to this point.

It seems to me that this cardinal point should not be glossed over nor lost from view shall the discussion be fruitful, meaningful. The illustrious authors which you quote (Bavinck, Calvin, Hodge, Berkhof) don't address themselves to the point raised by Rev. Harbach at all. They were writing their "Dogmatics" and not principles and guidelines for the Mission field in a given situation!

One thing more. My name has been mentioned in your Editorials, in passing, in quoting the decision of the Synod of 1956. Ironically as it may seem, the baptism referred to by the 1956 Synod took place in an organized congregation, under the auspices of the Consistory of Loveland, where I was Missionary, and



in a sense, "on loan." The Congregation at Loveland, a Reformed Church, was received into our fellowship in Classis West, without being re-organized and a new Protestant Reformed Consistory being chosen. They were received finally into our church by the fiat of the Synod of 1958. (Acts of Synod, 1958, pages 86-99) Incidentally, Mr. Editor, you were on the Committee of Pre-advice to receive Loveland as a congregation!

No one seeks to maintain a baptism *apart from the organized church*. Perhaps this point has not been sufficiently stated by the Committee which you have been criticizing at such great length.

Cordially,  
Your brother in Christ,  
Rev. G. Lubbers

### REPLY

Amice fraterque:

Thank you for your letter. My reply is as follows:

1. I believe that in dealing with the Study Report in my editorials I have also touched on every point brought up in Rev. Harbach's document to which you refer.

2. As I pointed out in one of my editorials there is a fundamental flaw in Rev. Harbach's thesis. An "un-organized congregation" is, to me, a non-entity — what the Dutch calls an *onding*. If it is unorganized, it is not a congregation; and if it is a congregation, it is organized.

3. If you will take the time to review what I have written, you will discover that what you say of my thesis is not correct: I do *not* take the position that baptism can only take place in an organized church. I

do take the position that we may not baptize before the Lord makes a missionary's work fruitful unto the gathering of a church, as the Form puts it. The concrete issue is whether baptism may take place on the mission field *long before* there is organization or any hope of organization, and even where possibly there will be no organization. That was the concrete case at Houston, I remind you, when this question arose. My position, as I trust I have made clear, is that baptism on the mission field may indeed take place — and this is more necessary on the heathen field than the home field — when the work has progressed to that point that a congregation is ready to be formed. At that point especially, adults are baptized into the congregation that is formed.

4. I am well aware that most of the men I quoted in my separate articles on "Reformed Thought On Baptism" were writing their dogmatics. I will insist, however, that: a) Dogmatic principles may also be valid with respect to mission work, and may also be applied to it. b) That in several instances these quotations dealt directly with Scripture passages at stake in this discussion. c) That in at least one instance (Dr. Bavinck) direct reference was made to the question of baptism on the mission field. d) That we must be careful that we do not dogmatically create a cleavage between the home church and the mission field. Dogmatic principles (if they are true) are valid any time and anywhere.

5. Indeed I was present both at the Synod of 1958 and that of 1956, and thankful that I had a part in them. I promised that I would discuss the decision of 1956 which the Study Report rejects. I must reserve that treatment, however, for the June 1 issue.

Cordially, in Christ,  
HCH

## THE DAY OF SHADOWS

# Laughing with Confidence

Rev. John A. Heys

"And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as He had spoken."

These words, which may be found in Genesis 21:1, speak volumes. God did as He had said. He said that He would visit Sarah, and He did. He promised to give Abraham a son through aged Sarah, and He did as He had spoken.

We do well to bear in mind that although we read this of God here in a particular incident in the life of

Abraham and Sarah, this is a statement that is always true. God always does exactly as He has said that He will do, and events of which we see and hear are always exactly the thing which He has spoken. Today — and until all that which He has said will come to pass has become fact and history — He is doing as He said; and through the ages whatever happened did take place because God said it would.

This does not mean that we have a record in the



Scriptures, or anywhere else, in regard to all that which transpires in time, and that all occurs exactly as that record states it will take place. The Scriptures would have to be bigger than the universe of which they would speak. A speck of dust takes little room, a whole lot less than the five-letter word we use for it. And in far less time than it takes for you and me to state that this speck of dust flitted from one point on the table to another, it is there. It does mean that what the three Persons in the Holy Trinity decreed among themselves, in the silence of eternity, would happen in time, happens exactly that way. It means that the promises and predictions we do find in Scripture are fulfilled in every respect exactly as God told us they would become fact.

Men try to keep their word when it suits them. And when they do we say that they are honest men. We call them trustworthy and men of their word. In fact we even read in Psalm 15:4 that this is one of the signs of those that will dwell with God in His house of heavenly glory. We read, after the question, "Who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in Thy holy hill?" This answer among others, "He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not."

But this is so difficult for man most of the time. He may intend to keep his word, but he depends upon God. And when God has decreed that this promise of man, this intention of man shall not be fulfilled and realized, there is nothing that man can do about it. In fact he cannot even say that he is going to do a particular work unless God gives him the breath of life to state it. Only when God has said to Himself in the silence of eternity that this or that is going to take place in this history of mankind do the things which men decide and proclaim as their intent take place.

With no such dependent, changeable creature do we have to do in the matter of our salvation and when we speak of the God in Whom we put our trust. As He said He will do. What He spoke in His Word He still speaks today, and at the appointed time every promise and prediction will be fulfilled at the split second He has picked for it, and in exactly the way that He has determined and declared to us. He Who said that He would visit Sarah and spoke to Abraham and promised a son through Sarah is Jehovah. That name of God Moses uses here in Genesis 21:1, and uses it twice. And in that name God stands before us as the eternal, unchangeable I AM. What is more, He can say I am — rather than I Was, or I Will Be — because He is the Self-Sufficient One, the Independent One Who has all His life in Himself and needs no one or anything outside of Himself. And being the Almighty He has all of the creation which He made at His constant command to use to fulfill every word that He has spoken and every decree He has eternally in Himself.

Here is comfort for the child of God who puts his trust in this mighty and glorious God of our salvation. The cry rises ever more strongly as we rush to the end of time, "Give us something practical and much less doctrine!" In a catechism class some years ago a young man asked me after class, when we had a lesson on the names of God, "Why do we have to learn all these names of God and what they mean?" Well, the answer is quite evident: "Our comfort, and in fact our trust in God goes hand in hand with our knowledge of who, how, and what God is." Know Him as the One Who does as He says, the One upon Whom we can rely completely, in Whom we can safely put all our trust, and our faith in Him will be strong. There is no faith to practice, if we do not know Him as He truly is.

And wonderful as this truth is in all its broad implications, these words in the first verse of the chapter have tremendous force and meaning for all that follows in the chapter. Sarah does conceive in her old age. The humanly impossible event takes place. The dead bring forth life. The covenant seed that seemed so impossible is there as big as life, and the other promises of seed as the sand upon the seashore, inheriting the land of promise, and a continuation of the covenant line all now seem so possible and sure. And these words of God's power and faithfulness must also be borne in mind when in the chapter we read of the persecution of that covenant seed by Ishmael and the difficult calling of Abraham to send Ishmael away. For as true as it is that God keeps His Word and does as He has spoken, it is true that we must not ignore that word or try to break it. Instead we must learn to submit to what He has said and to receive what He sends in meek submission with unshaken trust in Him. It is so easy to close our ears to what He said, or to rebel against it and even foolishly to try to make it so that what He has said will not take place. Our prayers often reveal this to be the case; and we can so quickly — also when, as He said, He sends wars and rumors of wars — pray for Him to change so that things round about us can change. We quickly follow our flesh and forget or ignore the fact that in order to do what He said these wars and rumors of wars must be here so that His Son's way may be prepared and that Son may come again as He had said and had spoken throughout the day of shadows.

But, to return to the first part of this chapter and these words with which it begins, here you have the gospel of the Old Testament. Here you have the Gospel according to Moses. That is correct. We have the Gospel According to Matthew, the Gospel According to Mark, the Gospel According to Luke and the Gospel According to John in the New Testament. In the Old Testament here we do have the gospel accord-



ing to Moses. In that one sentence wherewith Moses begins Genesis 21 we have the good news of salvation in Christ.

Consider a moment three words which God had spoken thus far in the history of His church and in the unfolding of His covenant. (1) He had promised seed to the woman that would hate the whole kingdom of sin and would crush it in due time. Genesis 3:15. (2) In Isaac would that seed be called. In the line of his descendants would The Seed come Who would by His cross and through His Spirit realize this hatred of sin and love of God and would triumph over the forces of evil for us, to give the death blow by crushing its head in that day of His glorious return at the end of time. (3) Sarah would bring forth this Isaac — Sarah the woman with whom it ceased to be after the manner of women, Sarah who had always been barren, Sarah who had an husband who by this time also was sexually as good as dead. The word of God said that she would be the mother of this seed that in time will bring forth The Seed, which is Christ. Galatians 3:16. What a history there is — all as God had said — between Genesis 3:15, the so-called Mother Promise, and Galatians 3:16! But there it all is with the birth of Isaac and then of Christ together with His death, resurrection, ascension, and presently His return to complete all that which God had said.

Surely here we have the gospel. There is good news because God does as He said. There are glad tidings of great joy because God keeps His word. Upon Him you can depend. The good news which He gives never has a bitter aftertaste. It becomes sweeter as the years go by, and in the everlasting day of rest that comes His mercies will be new every morning.

What is more, God Himself has labelled this as the gospel. He had told Abraham before the conception of the child, before Sarah had laughed upon hearing that she would yet bring forth a son, that his name should be called Isaac. That we read in Genesis 17:19, "And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him." And that name Isaac means "laughter." It is for that reason

also that Sarah states now in Genesis 21:6, "God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me."

The laughter of Sarah after and at the birth of her son, Isaac, is one which all God's people have, the laughter, the joy of the good news, the glad tidings of great joy that shall be to all people. The birth of Isaac is the birth of Christ, Who brings spiritual, unending laughter and heavenly joy to all the seed of the woman. Isaac's birth in the day of shadows is a sure word of God that, when the Sun of Righteousness appears in Bethlehem to dispel all the shadows and bring us the Light, we shall all laugh and sing and shout for joy as He also said in so many passages of the Old Testament Scriptures. The Psalms particularly are so full of it that it is only necessary to make the statement and not endlessly quote the passages. And the prophets also are full of this truth, and they spoke what God said. Therefore, what they write is true and will come to pass.

There is quite a difference between this laughter and the laughter of Sarah when she first heard of the promise of a son, for then she did not take hold by faith of the words that God had said. But now she does, and although she could not see what we now see (being in the shadows while we live in the days after the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world, has been born) she does speak of a joy and laughter which all who hear of this will have.

All who hear by faith, all who hear in their hearts, all who hear *God* tell this story, all that hear of the birth of Isaac in its implications for the church of God, will laugh and do laugh with Sarah today. And when, according to what God has said, this Son shall come again, there shall be no sorrow or crying, all tears will be wiped away, and at God's right hand there are pleasures forever more for all the seed of the woman.

Can we be sure?

Yes, the Lord visited as He said, and He did as He had spoken.

God's people laugh with confidence.

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## GUEST ARTICLE

# Is Drama a Legitimate Means to Convey the Truth?

*Rev. W. Bekkering*

Drama is a sin that continues to plague the people of God from year to year and from generation to generation. There is more drama in the world today than ever before, and yet less and less it is pointed out and warned against as a sin to be avoided. We have become strangely silent about drama. Perhaps the reason for that is that most of us have in our homes television sets with which we watch drama, and if we condemn drama we condemn ourselves. It seems that we are willing to let the issue of drama die so that our "sacred cow" can live.

Drama is certainly nothing new. In fact, "the story of these dramas goes back at least to 3200 B.C., and the content of the Pyramid Texts seems to indicate that it may be extended as far back as 4000 B.C. As a matter of fact, Herodotus, 5th century B.C. Greek historian, asserts that the Dionysiac festival was transferred from Egypt to Attica, and it is certainly out of this festival that the drama arose in Greece. In any case, whether the drama itself, or merely the festival from which it arose, came from Egypt or was spontaneously recreated by the Greeks, the drama seems to have originated in religious tribal dances such as exist among primitive peoples today. The first crude dramas, whether Egyptian or Greek, told stories and legends of some god, having originated in rites of worship held in the god's honor." (Encyc. Americana, 1949 vol. 9, p. 304) From the above quotation we can see that drama has its origin in pagan tribal dances in honor of idol gods. Drama was developed to a high degree in the pagan civilization of the Great Empire of Greece. Drama reached its "golden age" in Greece nearly 500 years before Christ under men such as Aeschylus (525-456 B.C.), Sophocles (c. 496-406 B.C.) and Euripides (485-406 B.C.). After the decline of Greek dominion, drama was revived by the Romans, "and during the final phase of the Western Roman Empire, which fell in 476 A.D., a vulgar and frequently obscene form of theatrical entertainment called the 'mime' became popular." (Encyc. Am., 1949 vol. 9, p. 306)

Since drama was present and active during the time

of Christ and the writing of the Scriptures, one may wonder why the Scriptures are not more explicit in condemnation of this sinful pagan practice. I think that the Scripture stands in sharp condemnation of drama. Paul tells us in I Cor. 1:22 that "the Greeks seek after wisdom." That wisdom of the Greeks was manifested by their philosophers, poets, dramatists, and polished orators. That wisdom was the wisdom of the world. Paul says in I Cor. 2:1 & 4, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Why did Paul take that position? Because God had rejected drama as a means to save His people. The Greeks in their wisdom could have argued that there was no more effective means to convey a message than through drama. But God had a better way. We find in I Cor. 1:21, "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

The church through the ages has reprobated drama; but now some churches think that drama can serve as a legitimate means to convey the truth of God's Word. Not only are the people of God confronted with drama from the world with its television, movies, and live stage productions, but also in the church and in Christian schools. Churches have offered various pageants, and morality plays. Christian high schools have regularly sponsored dramatic presentations with their class plays. Christian grade schools have also presented various plays and operettas. Parents who send their children to a member school of the National Union Of Christian Schools usually find that they use the "Revelation-Response" Bible Curriculum. This curriculum employs drama as a method of presenting lessons from the Bible.

This situation places us squarely before the question, "Is drama a legitimate means to convey the truth?" If it is, then the main concern of the child of



God is to discern between “good drama” and “bad drama.” If the situation is thus, then we ought to have movie and theater reviews in the *Standard Bearer*, along with a television viewing guide, so that we are enabled to make use of the good and reject the bad. If drama as to its form is permissible, then our main concern is whether or not the content is presented according to the Word of God as interpreted in our Reformed Standards.

To my mind the question of drama stands or falls here. I take the position at this point that drama is per se wrong, and that the question of “good drama” or “bad drama” is irrelevant. Drama is not a proper means of presenting the Truth!

The fundamental error in drama is impersonation. Impersonation is defined as assuming or acting the person or character of another. Impersonation can be distinguished from imitation. To imitate means “to follow as a model, pattern, or example; to copy or endeavor to copy in acts, manner, or other wise.” Imitation is a good and important means of learning to walk in the ways of God’s truth. Children learn by imitating parents, teachers, and their pastor. These in turn must be careful to imitate God so as to be good examples for the children. The Word of God calls us to follow examples of godliness. The word “follow” in the texts cited below means to imitate or mimic. In II Thes. 3:7 we read: “For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you”; In III John 11 we read: “Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good.” We can see from this that imitation is not per se wrong, but commanded by God and therefore is to be distinguished from impersonation.

Impersonation is the main element in dramatic presentations. For drama to be successful and effective the actor must suppress, as much as possible, his own God-given personality and enter into the thoughts, moods, feelings, and actions of the person he is portraying. The same is true for those watching. They too must “give” themselves, heart, mind, and soul to the drama, if they are going to “go through” the experiences being enacted.

A child of God may not put aside or suppress his own personality which God gave him. Rather he must live honestly before the face of God in thankfulness and obedience, and do that through his own God-given personality. To do otherwise and to impersonate, is fundamentally a *lie*. A lie cannot be and is not a proper vehicle to present the truth. The end does not justify the means.

God calls us to a life of absolute responsibility before Him so that “all men shall give an account of every idle word they have spoken, which the world only counts amusement and jest.” (Belgic Confession,

art. 37). The fact is that by impersonating someone else one does not escape his responsibility before God for the things that he says or does. If a man becomes drunken and goes out and kills another person, is not that person responsible before God for his deed? He certainly is! He is doubly responsible. First for disregarding God’s command concerning drunkenness, and secondly for murder. If a man wants to participate in drama, either by watching or acting, he violates God’s command to be *temperate*, which carries the meaning from the original Greek of “self-control.” Thayer in his *Greek Lexicon* defines “temperate” as “The virtue of one who masters his desires and passions, especially his sensual appetites.” Temperance or self-control, which is a fruit of the Spirit, is contrasted in Gal. 5 to the works of the flesh. Part of the list of the works of the flesh in Gal. 5 reads: “envying, murders, drunkenness, revelling and such like” (verse 21). Secondly, the man who participates in drama becomes partaker in the acts which he portrays and therefore responsible for them. The command of God to His people is to be in control of one’s self at all times; and one does not do that with drama. Drama has an intoxicating influence on a person, and he does not remain in control of his whole being.

Someone may argue that this would hold true for the acting part of drama, but not for the watching part. But we deceive ourselves if we think that we can remain objectively detached from the drama. Say, for example, you walk into the room and your children are watching drama on television. You are annoyed, but you sit down at a distance to judge it. Soon you move in a little closer. Next, you are telling the children to quit talking. Quickly the hour is gone. Drama has a way of moving a person from one mood to another and carrying him along from one emotion to the next until that person is rapt by the drama. That is the intoxicating power of drama. The lie of the devil is that you can handle it; and if you believe that lie he will soon have you eating out of his foul hand.

One may agree at this point that the drama of the world is wrong, but still maintain that drama could be a legitimate means to convey the truth. If we only act out biblical themes, then drama can be used in churches, and in school programs and plays, and in textbooks for covenant children. Or someone may object that little church and school plays are so innocent and harmless that we need not take a hard line with respect to them. The truth is that drama is wrong in any form and that we must flee from it and teach our children to do so from little on.

Would you like to have your child assigned the role of Cain, Esau, Pharaoh, Pilate, Herod, or even of Satan, and be urged to impersonate or even to imitate one of these wicked persons?



One may object that I have chosen the worst examples. Let's then choose the example of Jesus Christ. Could one—may one—act the life and deeds of the perfect and sinless Son of God? Could one who is a corrupt sinner stand in the place of the Sinless One? Blasphemy! Choose another example. Have a dramatic portrayal of the life of the apostle Paul. He has a dramatic history. Depict him in his murder, blasphemy, and persecution of the church. Then show his sudden dramatic conversion. Then follow his labors as a missionary, filled with moving events. In such a presentation, who would stand on the fore, Paul or our Lord Jesus Christ? You know that the only point and purpose would be to make of Paul some sort of a saintly hero and at bottom to glorify man. Yet Paul himself emphasizes time and again that he is nothing and that Christ is all. Paul has determined to know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and Paul says that he counts all things as loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord. "Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" chides Paul in Gal. 3:3. Drama is a work of the flesh, and the wisdom of the world. Are we now going to use it to be made perfect?

Another objection that is often raised is that there is no difference between reading a dramatic novel and seeing the book enacted. There is, however, a difference. Reading, of course, is not in itself wrong. The Word of God admonishes us to read and study books. With reading it is much easier to maintain the necessary objectivity and self-control. That does not mean, however, that there are no restrictions on what God's people may read. For example, a child of God may not pick up a trashy and sensuous novel and "give" himself to it without self-control. That would be

equally as wrong as drama. Parents must supervise not only *what* their children read but also *how* they read. We must control ourselves and imitate the best things.

We must look for and live in the fruits of the Spirit in our own lives. We must not do that in an unnatural or artificial way, which yields no true fruit of the Spirit, but only a make-believe fruit. The point is that our struggle to live our lives before the face of our God is a serious matter, and not something to be played with. That is true with respect to the acting out the lives of either believers or unbelievers.

In the case of acting out the sins of an unbeliever, one plays sin or plays with sin, and that, of course, we may not do. We must ourselves have a proper biblical view of our own sins first of all. That will lead us to hate sin and flee from it in ourselves and in others. Secondly, the acting out the life of a believer leads one to have an unreal or superficial view of God's sovereign and gracious work in His people.

We pray "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"; and the Heidelberg Catechism, in Lord's Day 52, interprets that to mean that "since we are so weak in ourselves, that we cannot stand a moment; and besides this, since our mortal enemies, the devil, the world, and our own flesh, cease not to assault us: do Thou, therefore, preserve and strengthen us by the power of Thy Holy Spirit, that we may not be overcome in this spiritual warfare; but constantly and strenuously may resist our foes, until at last we obtain a complete victory." We must recognize our own weaknesses and sin and not attempt to stand in our own strength but pray God for His grace and Holy Spirit to stand against sin and thus to glorify His name.

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## MY SHEEP HEAR MY VOICE

# Letter to the Members of the Church at Philadelphia

May 15, 1977

Dear Timothy,

We were discussing in these letters some practical aspects of the minister's calling in relation to his congregation, especially as Paul comments on these things in I Timothy 4. I want to continue this discussion in this letter, for Paul has more things to say which are profitable to us.

In this letter I want especially to discuss with you some of the implications of vss 7 & 8: "But refuse

profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

It is rather interesting that Paul contrasts our calling with respect to exercising unto godliness with refusing profane and old wives' fables. He apparently means that it will be difficult, if not impossible, to



exercise unto godliness unless we make a special point of refusing these fables of which he speaks.

We ought first of all therefore to ask ourselves the question: to what does he refer by this rather graphic expression? Searching for an answer to this, we are reminded of something similar which he wrote in chapter 1, verse 4: "Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do." The word which is translated "fables" could just as well be translated "myths." But the apostle does not refer particularly to the myths of Greek and Roman mythology, but to the myths which were current in Jewish thought. This is clear from the fact that he links these myths with genealogies. The Jews loved genealogies and even based their salvation on them. But along with their genealogies, especially as these extended back into the Old Testament, the Jews wove endless myths around the central characters and related all these myths to the Word of salvation as it had come from God. The inventing, embellishing, and narrating of these myths were not, therefore, harmless exercises in story-telling, but were considered, in themselves, to be pious activities, conducive to godliness and salvation.

In vs. 7, Paul characterizes these same myths as "profane and old wives' fables." They are profane because they are the opposite of the holy narratives concerning the saints found in the Scripture records; and they are of about as much value as the endless and tedious cackling of old crones. They are, in a certain sense, exercises. They exercise the imagination, the mind, by clever subtleties and endless variations, the thinking faculties as all sorts of questions are invented and answers sought for them. The Jews considered this a pious and spiritually healthy exercise besides. But, says Paul, disdain to have anything to do with this sort of a thing.

I suppose that if one would attempt to put this into some kind of current language, the words of the apostle here should be construed as a warning against becoming enmeshed in questions about the text of the Scriptures which are, in their nature, unanswerable and which have nothing to do with the Word of God in the text. This sort of a thing can easily happen — especially in some of the societies. I will invent an example, but it is, in my experience, rather like some discussions which sometimes take place in society meetings. Suppose that a society would be discussing the passage in Genesis 5:21-25 where Scripture tells us of Enoch who was translated without seeing death. We would be doing what Paul here warns against if we would permit ourselves to be led into a discussion of all the myths which have been woven around the life of Enoch; if we would speculate on questions concerning whom he married, where he lived, what

happened to his family after God took him to heaven, whether he was taken in the sight of his friends or the wicked, etc. God has not revealed any of these things to us, and if we nevertheless persist in speculating about them, we might exercise our imaginations and we might even kid ourselves into thinking that we are treating God's Word with a pious interest in spiritual things which are conducive to our spiritual life; but we are occupied with profane and old wives' fables for all that. And there is nothing profitable in that sort of exercise. All it does is lead to endless questionings and not "a godly edifying which is in faith."

I think that this same thing may be said of much of the work which is done by higher critics of the Bible who reject the infallible inspiration of the Scriptures and who attempt to explain the words of Scripture by a literary and an historical analysis of the passage. They take, e.g., the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand as recorded in John. Now their basic pre-supposition is, of course, that John is not the author of this gospel, but that the gospel was written very late in the second century. They furthermore assume, although they do not say this in so many words, that miracles just can't happen because miracles are contrary to our scientific view of the world. But they have to explain how in the world this sort of a thing ever got written. And so they talk about the fact that the Church, in evaluating the teachings of Jesus, noticed that Jesus talked quite often about the lofty principles of sharing what we have with those who are less fortunate than we are. And because the early Church was convinced that Jesus was a marvelous teacher, they say that Jesus illustrated the need for us to share of our bounties by persuading a small boy who had five loaves and two fishes to share what he had with someone else. Others, seeing this wonderful example began to do the same. And so there was plenty of food to feed this huge multitude. But, because the early Church wanted to drive the lesson home as strongly as possible and because the early Church had a very exalted view of Jesus, they cast this story about sharing in the form of a miracle.

Now the higher critics of the Bible do this with the whole of the Bible. They show a remarkable facility to exercise their imaginations and come up with the most startling and original explanations for the simple stories of Scripture. And they even think that this is an exercise which leads to godliness. But they are accomplishing little more than the gossipy cackling of some toothless crones.

The higher critics have to be answered, I suppose. And to answer them one has to know something about what they are doing. But it is a great weariness to the spirit to get involved in all this sort of thing. Avoid it, Timothy. Such exercise is of no profit. And if you have to answer them, don't let yourself get



involved in their reasonings; come with the Word of God only.

Nevertheless, there is a proper exercise for the Christian minister. That is an exercise unto godliness. Twice in the passage Paul mentions that. "Exercise thyself rather unto godliness." "But godliness is profitable unto all things. . . ."

And quite strikingly, this is further contrasted with the comparatively little value which is to be found in the exercise of the body.

I do not want to write extensively about the latter. There are only a few remarks which I think ought to be made in this connection. The first remark is that there is, to my mind, no question about it that Paul means here exactly the exercise of the body. Some have doubted this and made Paul speak here of various ascetic practices which are so popular among Roman Catholics — especially of the bygone years. They are wrong. Bodily exercise is exactly what the apostle has in mind.

In the second place, this text is often used as the chief basis for a whole Christian physical education program. It is not that. It cannot be that. And a Christian physical education program which is built on this text is on flimsy ground. The argument is that Paul gives some significance here to bodily exercise when he talks about it having "little" profit. But as this little bit of profit is discussed and developed into an entire program, the "little" becomes "much," and even "most." Now, I am not against a Christian physical education program of the right sort. In fact, I have my own personal devil to fight in this respect, for I like sports more than I ought. But the point that needs to be made is that the apostle is talking here about exercising unto godliness, and the great profit

to be derived from this. And in that connection, he makes the observation, rather in passing, that exercising unto godliness is far preferable to bodily exercise because the latter profits only a little.

We could talk about that "little" of course. A minister has a great responsibility in the Church of Christ. He must "take care of himself" so that he can better be able to fulfill his responsibilities. Part of his care of himself is his care of the body. And implied in this is the truth that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit — as Paul writes elsewhere. And Christ has redeemed the body as well as the soul. So this "little" profit is then that if we take care of our bodies — also with proper exercise — we will the better be able to exercise ourselves unto godliness. The *little* profit is because the profit of bodily exercise is strictly subordinate to exercise unto godliness.

And this is the point at which we must be so careful. It is so easy to make bodily exercise an end in itself. This is exactly what is done in our day. It is done by all professional athletes. It is done when mere pleasure becomes an end in itself. We ski or horseback ride or play ball or whatever for the sheer pleasure of it as an end in itself. This is wrong. This may never be. A minister too must keep himself healthy in body. But we are not Greeks and Romans who gloried in the body and extolled the perfect specimen of manhood for its own sake. We are of Christ. And bodily exercise is important only insofar as it helps us in the exercises which lead to godliness.

We shall have to talk about this important part of the apostle's teaching in our next letter, the Lord willing.

Fraternally,  
H. Hanko

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## GUEST ARTICLE

# Holding Fast the Faith

Rev. R. G. Moore

In our age, more and more, we are witness to the fact that the truth that the Bible is the infallible, inspired Word of God, and that it is normative for faith and life is brought under attack. It is said that God's Word is *in* the Bible, rather than that the Bible *is* God's Word. The Bible is said only to tell stories of what could happen, or is said to tell something of what God is willing to say to us. Much of the historical fact of Scripture is brought into question, and parts of the Bible are denied altogether. But these are

attempts to destroy God's revelation to His people! And this attempt is made in order to substitute for God's Word the word of man and a god of man's imagination. From such vain philosophy God's children must flee!

You may answer, that of course we may have no part of such a perversion of God's Word. Yet, have you noticed that in our day there is an ever increasing lack of true spiritualness in the church world? And it



is one that we all too often are led to witness. There is a continuing attempt to bring God down to the level of man. No longer are those things that were held precious in the past being maintained today. Examples abound! The holy bond of marriage, and the keeping of the Sabbath Day in sanctification unto God are scoffed at. True childlike reverence and fear of God and of His Word are being displaced by the speaking of God and to God, in prayer, in worship, and in song, as though He were no more than a next door neighbor. Often we may see a total disregard for the officebearers of Christ, with true Christian discipline becoming a thing of the past. When God's child encounters these things it brings to him deep concern, for he knows that the Scriptures exhort, "Exalt ye the LORD our God, and worship at His footstool; for He is holy."

The above departures from a Christian walk and faith, as well as other examples that could be cited, can be traced to a willing lack of holding precious the faith of our fathers. In this article we notice this in connection with that faith as it is specifically connected with God's Names: Jehovah and the Holy One. We must beware of all such departing from the faith held precious by our fathers. The Scripture sounds forth clearly: "Trust ye in the LORD forever: for in the LORD Jehovah is everlasting strength. For he bringeth down them that dwell on high; the lofty city, he layeth it low; he layeth it low, even to the ground; he bringeth it even to the dust" Is. 26:4ff.

When one with impunity throws over the faith of generations, and exalts his own way above that of God's way, there remains but destruction for him. Depart from the Word and cease to wait upon Jehovah, and no strength shall sustain you. "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall." Is. 40:30.

The judgment of God is against those who fail to serve Him in His Word. "This is thy lot, the portions of thy measures from me, saith the Lord; because thou hast forgotten me, and trusted in falsehood. Therefore will I discover thy skirts upon thy face, that thy shame may appear . . . Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! wilt thou not be made clean?" Jer. 13:25-26. Let us not harden our ears to this Word of our God, but rather hold fast the faith.

Then let us hold fast faith in Jehovah as the sovereign God. This name means, that I Am that I Am. Jehovah, is God's covenant name through which He reveals Himself to be our sovereign God. Then we understand that Jehovah's sovereignty is such that He is wholly different from the creature. God is perfectly the "I AM," sufficient in Himself; but we are always dependent for what we are and for all things upon our God. How foolish it is then ever to exalt ourselves over against God, or attempt to make God dependent upon our will or our vain philosophies!

God's counsel stands forever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations. cf. Ps. 33:11. God is not worshiped, "as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things." Acts 17:25. How vain is man when he thinks God is dependent upon his desire to be saved! Our God rules over all things and does all things alone according to His own will and good pleasure. cf. Psalm 115:3.

It is also evident that Jehovah alone is Lord. Oh, man may desire to make God's Name common; he may attempt to speak of God as he would of man, to make of God but an idol of his own imagination. But our Lord, Jehovah is, and ever shall be! He alone establishes the law, His is the sole prerogative to judge the creature and to execute His own will. He alone is the standard for all law, righteousness, and justice. Does not Scripture say: "He is the Rock, His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He"? Deut. 32:4. Does one forget God is judge of heaven and earth when with impunity he takes God's name upon his lips? God will not be mocked! Jehovah is the Most High. He alone is the Almighty God.

Certainly in every sense the sovereignty revealed in the name Jehovah is emphasized by God's Word. There is no host of heaven or earth that exists apart from God. Who is the king of glory? "The Lord of hosts, He is the king of glory," Ps. 24:10. The Lord is the great God: "In his hand are the deep places of the earth, the strength of the hills is his also," Ps. 95:4. God is the Lord and saith: "I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God," Is. 44:5. Who can question what God does; Who can require an answer of Him? He says, "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things," Is. 45:7. Jehovah is merciful to whom He will be merciful, and He hardeneth whom He will. cf. Rom. 9:15ff. To Jehovah alone belongs the kingdom, the power, and the glory!

When by grace one lives in the consciousness of the presence of Jehovah, the sovereign God, as an elect sinner he is emptied of all self-seeking. And as he is given grace he glories alone in God. Further, as God reveals Himself in His name Jehovah, He demands childlike reverence and fear — a living in absolute subjection to His Holy Word. This requires a deep spiritual attitude and life.

But, further, this growing lack of spiritualness in our day is due to an overthrowing of the faith of our fathers with respect to God's Holiness. There is an increasing lack of consciously living before the knowledge of God's holiness. Indeed, there comes to pass today the saying of our Lord Jesus Christ, "and because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." Matt. 24:12. And it comes to pass in fulfillment of the prophecy of Jeremiah: when the call to repentance is sounded, there comes the answer,



“there is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will everyone do the imagination of his evil heart,” Jer. 18:12.

This declining spiritualness is often manifest in worship services that become more and more man-centered, rather than properly God-centered. There comes an increasing cry for less sound exegetical preaching, and the corresponding desire for more liturgy. The emphasis is often that we must make worship services more entertaining and more relevant, to the detriment of true God-glorifying worship which is sanctified unto the living and Holy God in reverence and godly fear. Modern preaching has come to so emphasize man's earthly needs in the social sphere, and man's responsibility with respect to this world, that there is no longer a consciousness of our deepest need for the forgiveness of sin. And lest we be misled to desire the same, may we remember our reformed heritage. We remember when the congregation came to church, the proclaimed Word completely emptied the elect sinners, so that they fell in holy reverence before God's Holiness — then to be filled with the blessedness of God's grace in Christ which saves, and thus were renewed in a life of sanctification unto the service of God. And so it still is where the reformed faith is held precious. The whole life of our fathers was God-centered in their worship, in their daily walk, and in their confession. Thus it ought to be in the church; and thus it shall be where the Scriptures are rightly divided and soundly expounded from Sabbath to Sabbath. For the Scripture reveals God to be the Holy God, well pleased with the righteous in Christ, but a consuming fire unto the wicked walking in impenitent sin.

God reveals throughout Scripture, and the reformed faith holds precious, His Holiness. It is in His Holiness that God is incomparable with any other. “To whom then will ye liken me or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One.” Is. 40:25. God in His holiness stands alone — He is by and of Himself God. Dare we attempt, then, to make Him common? To confess “the Holy One”, is to speak of His incomparable majesty, glory, and sovereignty! Never can the comparison of God so be made that He stands on a par, on the basis of equality with the creature. It is exactly His Holiness — that He is the God of ethical perfection, the sole good with no imperfection or darkness in Him — that causes Him to be incomparable as God. Perfectly God is consecrated unto Himself as the Holy One; and, as the Holy One, God is glorious and alone worthy of all praise.

When man, therefore, comes before the presence of that holiness of God he must confess that naturally before God he cannot stand. He of necessity is emptied of all boasting, and of all self-esteem. This was the reaction of Isaiah when coming before the

revelation of the Holy God. “Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts,” Is. 6:5. When Isaiah in vision saw the Lord sitting upon a throne on high, and the seraphims crying out, “Holy, holy, holy,” he stood in the presence of the holiness of the sovereign God. And he is wholly amazed, realizing that he was but sinful man.

Always the above ought to be the effect of coming before the revelation of our God — also from Sabbath to Sabbath through the preaching. For in the preaching the Holy God addresses His people, and in the Word stands just as surely before them. How then can we help but, in uttermost humility and prayer, worship God under the Word? According to Isaiah 29:19 we are instructed that it is the meek that shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. Thus God saith that meekness and humility is the only proper attitude that dare be assumed towards our God, Who forever seeks His own perfect glory. And on the other hand the wicked who are so brazen to exalt themselves against God taste His consuming wrath.

But then who can stand before God? Praise be the Holy One, for He is the God of all grace! The Holy One is Redeemer, and exactly as the Holy One. “As for our redeemer, the Lord of hosts is his name, the Holy One of Israel,” Is. 47:4. In holiness God consumes the sins of His elect people by burning in holy wrath upon our Lord Jesus Christ until His wrath is utterly quenched. And as the Holy One, by the Spirit and Word of His Son, He purifies and sanctifies His own, that they might be consecrated unto Him in service and in love. And, further, by His Word rightly proclaimed the Holy One efficaciously calls His children to repentance and holiness. “But as He which has called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy,” I Peter 1:15-16.

By grace the church hears and heeds this word of her God. She is emptied of all man-centeredness; she desires, longs for, and in principle becomes God-centered in all things. And as she is cleansed by Christ's blood and sanctified by His Word and Spirit, her members become pilgrims in this world, sanctifying the Lord God in their hearts, heeding the word of the apostle in I Peter 3:15, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.” And thus in all things — their worship, their prayer, and all their life — God's Name receives the glory. Let our prayer be for grace to hold fast this faith of our fathers.



## TRANSLATED TREASURES

# Acts of the Synod of Dordrecht

*Historical Foreword (10)*

(Connection: In the last installment we saw the conflict become more intense. In some parts of the country actual separation began to take place, and even the formation of so-called "nood-gemeenten" (emergency congregations). Meanwhile, Simon Episcopius, on advice of the Remonstrants, was called to the Academy of Leiden. Again pleas were made to the States-General to authorize a National Synod; but this was prevented through the influence of the Remonstrants. The latter continued to make open and shameful propaganda, to the grief and injury of the churches.)

Especially the Illustrious Count of Nassau, Willem Lodewijk, Governor of Friesland, in harmony with his outstanding love toward the Churches and toward the Republic, admonished in particular Uitenbogaard, on the one side, and Festus Hommius, on the other side, that seeing that the condition of the Republic itself was severely upset by these ecclesiastical disputes, they should in friendly and brotherly fashion consider whether no honorable means could be found whereby this grievous dispute might be quieted and unity might be attained. Festus declared that if the Remonstrants did not differ from the other Ministers in any other articles than in those five (concerning predestination and the related points), he believed that a way could be found whereby a certain peace might be established between the parties until the entire controversy might be resolved in a National Synod. But seeing that there were weighty reasons why the Churches believed that many Remonstrants diverged in almost all of the more important doctrines from the adopted doctrines of the Netherlands Churches, and seeing that they ought not to tolerate or to allow that under cover of these five articles very grievous errors would be introduced into the Churches, he believed that there appeared to be no hope to achieve peace with the Remonstrants unless they would uprightly declare that they, with the exception of these five articles, were of one mind with the Reformed Netherlands Churches in all other points of doctrine. Uitenbogaard, when questioned about this, answered that as far as he was concerned, he had nothing else than those five articles wherein he differed, and that he would be prepared always to declare his views concerning the other points. Also, he did not doubt but that many Remonstrants would do the same thing. And further, he wished nothing so much as that for that reason a conference would be held between certain Ministers who were moderate in

their feelings. And when he had renewed the same declaration at Leiden, and particularly to Festus, they agreed that they would both, each with his own people, bring it about that three Ministers from each side might be delegated. These Ministers would come together with one another in a friendly way, in order seriously to consider together a proper way of peace; and thereafter this would be submitted to the Churches for their approval. The States of Holland, understanding that this was being taken under advisement in secret, praised this their intention, and publicly ordered that this conference should be held at once.

Shortly thereafter, February 27, they came together for this purpose in the city of Delft. From the side of the Remonstrants, there were Johannes Uitenbogaard, Adrianus Borrius, and Nicolaus Grevinchovius. From the side of the other Ministers, Johannes Becius, Johannes Bogardus, and Festus Hommius. First the States admonished them through their Deputies that they should put aside all secret hatred and evil passions, and should exert all the power of their understanding, in order that they might find some proper way of peace; and they declared how pleasing this would be to God, to the Churches, and all the pious, and especially to the States. Then all the individual Ministers also testified that they had come with a peace-seeking intention and would do all that was in their power to make peace. Thereupon a friendly conference was held between them. In this conference the Remonstrants declared that they could point to no other way to peace than the way of mutual tolerance (as they called it), to wit, that every party should be allowed openly to teach his views concerning those Five Articles in the churches; and they requested of the other Ministers that they would declare whether they considered their views, expressed in the Five Articles, to be in that manner allowable and tolerable. If they held them to be insufferable, then it was not necessary further to take under advisement anything concerning the way to peace. For, according to their judgment, there was then no way to peace left. The other Ministers judged that the surest and most proper way to peace, seeing that on both sides they were Ministers of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands and wanted to be counted as such, was that each party would subject their case to the lawful judgment of the Netherlands Churches; to that end they should labor earnestly and uprightly that, through the authority of the States-General, the



National Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands should be authorized to meet as soon as possible, if possible in the coming summer. At that Synod the entire matter should be lawfully investigated and considered; and either it should be determined which of the two views ought from then on to be taught in the churches as being in accord with God's Word, or it should be determined whether the so-called way of tolerance, with the united advice of all the Churches, might be followed as being according to the Word of God. They declared, moreover, that they were ready to submit themselves to the judgment of this Synod, and that, if the Remonstrants were willing to do the same, in this manner peace might be established. But they declared that tolerance, which would be limited by various conditions, however much they had exercised it to this time, and however much they appeared still to desire it, could not serve to the peace and edification of the Churches. But if they, nevertheless, were willing to limit the way of tolerance by honorable conditions, they declared that they were prepared to confer with the Remonstrants about these conditions, provided the Remonstrants were willing first by forthright declaration to assure the churches that, except for those Five Articles, they would hold views other than those of these Reformed Churches in no other point of doctrine. They pointed out that for two years now, December 3, 1611, the States had expressed by name six points of doctrine concerning which they forbade to teach differently than until this time had been taught in the Netherlands Churches, namely: concerning the complete satisfaction of our Lord Jesus Christ for our sins, concerning the justification of man before God, concerning saving faith, concerning original sin, concerning the certainty of salvation, and concerning the perfection of man in this life. Therefore they requested especially that the Remonstrants be willing to declare that they supported the views of these points of doctrine expressed in the Confession and the Catechism of these Churches, which they had summarized in certain articles out of those documents, and that they rejected the contrary views in certain contra-articles from the writings of Arminius, Bertius, Vorstius, Venator, and others. Over against this, the Remonstrants said that they could not see how these differences could be settled by a National Synod, and that on this account they could not consent in this situation to the authorizing of such a synod, nor request it. Further, they declared that this matter could not be helped by synodical decisions, and that they did not believe that the Province of Holland, in the matter of Religion, would be subject to the decisions of other Provinces. As far as the declaration which was demanded was concerned, they declared that they would take counsel about that with the

other Remonstrants. And when they had briefly summarized in writing the views of both sides, they separated from one another with nothing accomplished.

After this the States summoned Uitenbogaard and Festus, in order to learn from them what hope of peace and unity there was. Festus forthrightly told them what had taken place and declared that there was hope if the Remonstrants were willing straightforwardly to declare their views concerning the articles which had previously been delivered to the States. Uitenbogaard had deceitfully taken care that he would be heard only in the absence of Festus, in order that he might more freely present that which he thought would serve his purpose. And, after he had at length censured the dealings of the other Ministers, as though by their demand of a declaration (which he had nevertheless promised before the Conference) they sought to introduce a new and entirely intolerable inquisition, he managed to have them forbidden to exact from the Remonstrants any more the aforesaid declaration. In addition, they were at once ordered that they should declare in writing more broadly their advice concerning the best way of peace and concerning the conditions with which they believed toleration should be limited. When this had been done by them, and when at the same time they had shown that the proposed articles concerning which the declaration had been desired stood in so many words in the Confession and the Catechism of the Netherlands Churches and that the contra-articles were to be found in public documents with many with whom the Remonstrants had great fellowship in these lands, and after this their writing had been openly read, then the Remonstrants brought it about through the Advocate that it was strictly forbidden that this should be passed on to any man either in print or in handwriting. And since they saw that the Deputies of the Churches or Synods, to whom the common care of the Churches was committed, through their labors (as was in harmony with their office) were much in the way, therefore they also brought it about, even as previously all annual Synods had been forbidden, that it was forbidden from now on that anyone should use the name of Deputies of the Churches or of the Synod, or should serve in such an office. Their purpose was to take away all care for the welfare and the peace of the Churches, and thus to be all the more free to rage against them. Through this conduct the Remonstrants made themselves more and more suspect with the Churches, since all those with understanding judged that if they did not differ from the Churches in these points of doctrine, they would have no reason to avoid this declaration, seeing that this would tend in particular to the advancement of the peace of the Churches and to the benefit of their name and fame.



## ALL AROUND US

# Difficulties in the P.C.A. Herman Dooyeweerd: 1894-1977 Roman Catholic – Reformed Lord's Supper? Schuller's Branch Church

Rev. G. Van Baren

### Difficulties in the P.C.A.

The recently formed denomination, the Presbyterian Church in America, is having difficulties – judging from recent issues of the *Presbyterian Journal*. This young denomination originated out of the Southern Presbyterian Church (P.C.U.S.) because of the liberalism in the latter body. Now, however, those who found themselves united against liberalism, find themselves divided as to how to handle the Reformed faith. Although traditionally and confessionally Calvinistic and Reformed, the new denomination is struggling with a wide diversity of views within its own midst. In throwing off the yoke of modernism, it has found that this is no guarantee of unity nor a basis for a continuing Reformed church. At least three of the past issues of the *Presbyterian Journal* treat the questions. It speaks rather disparagingly of the “TR” – the truly Reformed. These TR's are presumably a class by themselves in the new denomination who insist on pure Reformed doctrine. And although the magazine and its writers claim to desire that which is Reformed, these would make allowances for those with different views: pentecostals, premillennials, arminians, and others. The question is, can these views live together under one denominational roof? It appears that there are many in the P.C.A. who are of the conviction that this is not only possible, but desirable. Rev. William E. Hill, Jr., in the Mar. 16, 1977, issue writes:

A noted Southern Presbyterian theologian of a bygone generation has given a clear and cogent description of the Reformed faith, and the differences between Arminianism and Calvinism in a little book entitled *The Gospel as Taught by Calvin*. Dr. R.C. Reed wrote briefly but to the point, and he also sounded a note of warning and caution:

“After all, it is largely a difference touching words and names. Arminians believe that the atonement is limited in its application to those who believe; Calvinists believe nothing more and nothing less.

“Inasmuch, however, as Calvinists believe that God makes the application, they say the atonement is limited in design as well as application. But there is nothing in their view to prevent their offering Christ to every sinner and assuring him, on the authority of

God, that if he will accept, he shall be saved. ‘Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.’

“This is good Calvinism; and if anyone holds to a Calvinism that does square with the widest offers of God's mercy, then he has gotten hold of a spurious article, and the sooner he flings it away the better. ‘Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.’ Any so-called Calvinism that does not chime with this sweet Gospel bell deserves to ‘be cast out, and to be trodden under the foot of men.’

“We ask for no leniency of judgment on any argument or inference that would tend to make the strait gate straiter, or the narrow way more narrow. Above all things, let us believe that ‘Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners,’ and that ‘him that cometh to him He will in no wise cast out.’ ”

My father, grandfather and greatgrandfather, ministers in the Presbyterian Church, warmly embraced the Reformed faith and I fully concur with Dr. Reed's thesis and warnings as they did.

...Some try to rule out what God is doing through Billy Graham and Campus Crusade, saying they make salvation “too simplistic.” But we should beware lest our presentation becomes too complicated. It may not even touch base with the ordinary fellow, and even dedicated Christians are alienated as well, because they do not understand what the preacher is talking about.

Disagreements between those espousing the Reformed faith and other evangelical conservatives weaken the testimony of the Gospel. Such polarizations are unnecessary. “Reformed” and “evangelical” are not mutually exclusive nor should they be made so.

Or Prof. Jack B. Scott, of the Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Miss., wrote in the Mar. 9, 1977, issue:

Now it pains me to say this, but I almost have come to the point where the term “TR” makes me sick! I don't mean the concept. I believe that the concept of being thoroughly Reformed is a commitment everyone of us should have. I believe every seminary should stand for doctrines that are thoroughly Reformed. But that term “TR” has become heinous to those out in the Church. The two basic reactions to it are fear and laughter.



Last of all, the editor of the *Presbyterian Journal* presents an editorial in the issue of March 23, 1977, titled, "Lo, the TR!" It gives an account of a younger minister in the PCA who was released from his congregation because he was T.R. (truly Reformed). The editorial concludes:

... It is one thing to react against a situation in which the Bible is ignored, the Gospel is perverted and Christ is dishonored; it is quite another thing to adjust to a religion which to the uninitiated appears as strait-jacketed as that of the strictest Pharisee.

If it is un-Reformed to give a Gospel invitation; if it is heresy to tell an unsaved person God loves him; if an Arminian is no better off than one who denies the deity of Christ; if a woman cannot give her opinion in a congregational meeting; if Christmas is of the devil; if the Holy Spirit bestows no special gifts today; if an elder who has served twenty years must be expelled from the Session because he admits to being premillennialist; if a child may not be baptized because the parents have not submitted themselves to the discipline of *that* particular congregation — if all these, I say, are of the essence of what the Church must stand for (and I do not for one moment acknowledge that they are) — then at the very least the truly Reformed spokesman should approach his assignment the way a women's liberationist might feel moved to address a meeting of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Male Chauvinists.

That is, treading *very* lightly.

So the picture is one of struggle in the new P.C.A. It's impossible to know all the details of the struggle taking place. On the one hand, the *Presbyterian Journal* presents these "TR's" as harsh, crude, rude, unsympathetic, unloving tyrants who refuse to teach lovingly but will force doctrinal truths down the mouths of spiritual infants capable only of sipping some of the milk of the word. But on the other hand, one receives the distinct impression that there is a concerted effort to down-play that which is Reformed, to allow all sorts of doctrinal deviations (except a denial of Trinity and the divinity of Christ), to place Arminianism alongside of that which is Reformed — insisting that the difference isn't all that important. If the latter is the case, the future is not bright for this new denomination. If it rejects its Presbyterian and Reformed heritage already now, the

inroads of modernism will again quickly be seen there, too.

### Herman Dooyeweerd: 1894-1977

Several magazines note the passing of Dooyeweerd, a well-known philosopher from the Netherlands. He was, until his emeritation, professor of jurisprudence at the Free University in Amsterdam. His best-known work was in the Dutch, *De Wysbegeerte der Wetsidee*. Dooyeweerd sought to carry out the thought and ideas of Dr. Abraham Kuiper. Dooyeweerd has his followers in Canada and in this country especially in the A.A.C.S. movement, centered in Toronto.

### Roman Catholic — Reformed Lord's Supper?

From *Clarion*, the Canadian Reformed magazine, the following appears:

The Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church (Hervormde Kerk) has adopted a declaration which could serve as a basis for a combined celebration of the Lord's Supper/Eucharist between the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformed Church. This declaration, set up by an interecclesiastical committee, especially discusses the "function of the offices" in connection with the Lord's Supper. It has already been adopted in the Reformed Churches Synodical.

### Schuller's Branch Church

*The Calvinist Contact* reports on a branch church of Schuller who is a minister of the Reformed Church in America:

Dr. Robert Schuller, pastor of the famous drive-in walk-in Garden Grove Community Church near Disneyland, now plans to build a branch near Disney World in Florida.

"The Florida church will be almost entirely a ministry to older people," he said, adding that its site near Disney World was "coincidental." The 10-acre site was donated by the developer of an adjacent mobile home park.

Dr. Schuller hopes to form the Florida congregation from among "shivering senior citizens in northern U.S. cities (and Canada)" who faithfully watch his Hour of Power television program.

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On May 23, 1977, D.V. our parents Mr. and Mrs. Anthony De Young will celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary. We, their children, are thankful for the years in which God has given them to each other and to us. It is our prayer that the Lord may continue to bless them.

"Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children.

And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us:" Ps. 90:16 & 17a

Their children,

Mr. and Mrs. Jozef Postma  
Rev. and Mrs. Meindert Joostens  
and 4 grandchildren

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On May 27, 1977, our dear parents, MR. AND MRS. CHARLES E. KREGEL, hope to celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary. We thank God for keeping them for each other and for us these past years and pray for His continued blessing on them in their future years together.

their children,

Kenneth and Mary Velthouse  
Joel and Ellen Bruinooge  
Chuck and Robin Kregel  
David Kregel  
Laura Kregel

their grandchildren,

Michael and Kristin Velthouse  
Heather Bruinooge



## News From Our Churches

Rev. David Engelsma lectured to a full church on April 21 in our new Hudsonville church auditorium. Rev. Engelsma's topic was "Reprobation — Is it Reformed?" This lecture as well as many others was tape-recorded. For information on obtaining one of these recordings, you may write to the *Standard Bearer* Business Office.

Rev. Engelsma lectured in Randolph, Wisconsin on April 1. His topic for this lecture was "A Reformed Look at Pentecostalism." Rev. Wayne Bekkering, the pastor of our church in Randolph, sent along a report of this meeting as follows: "A bit of news that we could perhaps share with our people is that Randolph had a wonderful and exciting evening when over 200 people turned out to hear Rev. Engelsma's lecture. This was a record crowd for our little church and we had to set up extra chairs.

"A couple of factors that accounted for our large turnout are, first, Neo-Pentecostalism is having a great deal of influence in our area of late and is causing quite a stir among the people of the various Reformed denominations. Secondly, we advertised widely and got good coverage in the local paper.

"One other unusual experience in connection with our lecture is that it was 'picketed'; at least, a group from a Pentecostal church in a neighboring town passed out literature in front of our church to those attending our lecture. Included in the literature was a letter especially prepared to refute 'Reformed Pentecost.'"

I do not recall when one of our denominational lectures has been 'picketed' before, at least in recent history. It must be that the truth as it is proclaimed in the Protestant Reformed Churches is particularly obnoxious to some who hold to opposing views. This too would appear to be one of the 'signs of the times.'

Recent bulletins from our church in Pella, Iowa, contained a number of items of interest. Pella's pastor, Rev. Lubbers, has a Classical appointment to preach for our new congregation in Houston, Texas on May 15, 22, and 29. The Pella consistory wrote Rev. Harbach to ask whether he could stop in Pella on his way from Houston to Michigan and preach in Pella during Rev. Lubber's absence. However, Rev. Harbach's plans had been changed, as he has been

assigned by the Mission Committee to proceed to Lynden, Washington and from there investigate the interest in the Reformed faith in the Vancouver, British Columbia area. However, the consistory of our church in Hull, Iowa, has given permission to their pastor, Rev. Mark Hoeksema, to vacate his pulpit on May 22 and preach for the Pella congregation.

Rev. Lubbers too has been busy of late lecturing and giving instruction in the Reformed faith. He spoke on Central College Radio, led devotions at the Pella Christian School, conducted a series of four midweek services in the Pella Nursing Home, and answered a number of questions of a group of Central College students concerning the inspiration of the Bible.

The Young People's Societies in First Church, Grand Rapids, continue to sponsor 15 minute song services after the Sunday evening service the last Sunday of each month. The November singspiration featured numbers requested by the little tots in the congregation who wanted to have the congregation sing the songs they had learned in Sunday School. The April edition was also an 'all request' nite. On Easter Sunday evening a special edition song service was held to sing praises to the risen Lord.

Rev. Van Baren also placed a news item in the First Church bulletin as follows: "The sermons of the pastor on Genesis 1-3 are still being presented on the 12 stations of Family Radio. On most of these stations the sermon is broadcast at 9:05 PM on Wednesday evenings. The last sermon of this series will be broadcast on May 11. We have also submitted the recent series on Romans 9, but that has not yet been scheduled for broadcast. Several letters do come in each week, usually requesting cassettes of the message." A goodly number of these requests for message tapes have been filled. Rev. Van Baren presently is continuing his series on the book of Genesis during the Sunday evening services.

One other note concerning First Church — a practice which continued for 50 years has been discontinued in that the Sunday bulletin is no longer printed, but mimeographed. It seems that with the cost of printed bulletins projected to exceed \$2,000 for 1977, the practice was discontinued.

K.G.V.