

The **STANDARD BEARER**

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

... the cross of Christ is not a temporary expedient upon which God falls and of which He makes use to deliver His people, but the cross is as eternal as His mercy. In one word, God ordained all things with a view to the display of His eternal mercy.

See "God's Unfailing Mercy" page 27.

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THE STANDARD BEARER

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Editor's Notes

Prof. H.C. Hoeksema

Editorials you will not find in this issue. For the first time, I believe, since the editorship fell on my shoulders back in Volume 41 you will find nothing from my editorial pen except these few notes. The explanation? For one of the few times in my memory we have a rather large surplus of articles waiting to be placed. And seeing that each time we have surplus copy a regular department editor has to be "bumped," I am taking a turn to be "bumped" from this issue. I must say, too, that this is a rather relaxing experience for the one who has the ultimate responsibility of taking care of filling our magazine's 24 pages for 21 issues per year. Brother-writers, keep the copy flowing!

* * * * *

News Feature. We welcome to this issue the Rev. E.C. Case of the First Presbyterian Church of Woodville,

Mississippi, who is again favoring us with an interpretive report of the recent General Assembly meeting of the Presbyterian Church in America.

* * * * *

Translated Treasures. If you followed my advice and looked for our new department in the October 1 issue, you looked in vain. Although at this writing I have not yet seen that issue, I am informed that our printer, contrary to our instructions, omitted that department — yes, due to a surplus of copy. I hardly dare promise it will appear in this issue, but ... look for it. We hope you will enjoy it.

* * * * *

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MEDITATION

God's Unfailing Mercy

Rev. M. Schipper

"Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.

He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."

Micah 7:18, 19.

"I believe in the forgiveness of sins"

Such is the contents of the tenth article of faith as expressed in Apostle's Creed, which is recited in most Christian churches each Sabbath Day.

Among the many benefits accruing to the church which is both holy and catholic, and showered upon that church by the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of the exalted Redeemer, is the grace of forgiveness, without which none of the other benefits could ever reach us.

And this wonderful grace of forgiveness finds its source and fountainhead in the eternal, matchless, and unfailing mercy of God. Such is the idea and main thought of our text, which speaks to us of this, namely, the unfailing mercy of God.

To be noticed, first of all, is the compassionate and incomparable nature of this divine mercy.

Mercy is a divine attribute. Commonly it is classed as one of the communicable attributes of God. You may or may not know that the attributes of God are generally distinguished as incommunicable and communicable attributes. By this distinction theologians mean to point out that there are some attributes of God of which you do not find a creatural likeness in man. These are called incommunicable, and include attributes of God such as His eternity, infinity, independency, oneness, simplicity, and immutability. On the other hand, so it is pointed out, there are other attributes of which you do find a creatural likeness in man, such as: His goodness, holiness, righteousness, truth, love, grace, mercy, longsuffering, etc. To be observed is the fact that mercy finds its place in this last distinction. This classification of God's attributes will stand, provided we do not make the

mistake of ascribing to man some of the attributes of God. The idea is not that some of the divine attributes man possesses in no sense of the word, namely, the incommunicable attributes; while some of the attributes man also possesses, namely, the communicable. Such an idea could not be farther from the truth. It should be abundantly clear that God possesses all of His attributes uniquely alone.

This is expressly emphasized in the text, where the prophet asks the question, and mind you, of God: "Who is a God like unto thee . . . ?" The implication of this question is: There is none like unto God!

God is great, and full of infinite virtues!

Mercy, though it stands out, and is stressed in the text, and is intended to magnify the incomparable nature of God, is nevertheless, not an isolated virtue of the divine.

We must not therefore conclude that God is only merciful. Rather, He is full of infinite perfections. And when we are privileged to behold God in the radiation of all His perfections, we see Him in what the Scriptures denote His glory. And this glory He gives not to another, for He is God, and God alone!

Moreover, when the child of God looks at His God as He objectively reveals Himself in His Word, then He must exclaim: all of God's attributes are incomparable and one in Him. There is no one attribute he can single out as outstanding in distinction from others. Each one describes His God in the perfection of His Being, and all together they exalt his God as the Wholly Other.

On the other hand, when the child of God looks at his God from the subjective point of view, that is,

from the viewpoint of his experience, then the outstanding virtue of God is His mercy. Undoubtedly this is also the viewpoint of the text.

Who is a God like unto thee. . . who delighteth in mercy?

When Isaiah raised the questions (Isaiah 40:18) "To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?" he no doubt had in mind the same thing. In the context the prophet is speaking of the gospel of comfort: "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God." And again: "O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid, say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!" And again: "All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity." In the light of this, he asks: "To whom then will ye liken God?"

Micah, in our text, asks the same question, only with this difference, that he directs the question not to the people but to God. Who is a God like unto thee? . . . because he delighteth in mercy. But the purpose of the question is that the children of God may look at their God and discern how great He is when they consider that the very first of all His virtues they experience is His compassionate mercy. When the prophet considered that mercy, and its compassionate nature, he is overwhelmed by the greatness of his God. No different is it when we also consider it.

It is in His mercy God delights to reveal Himself to His people.

Mercy is the manifestation of God's perfect, eternal, unchangeable will. It is His eternal, unchangeable purpose to bless His people. From all eternity He delighted to deliver us from the deepest possible misery and corruption, and to make us partakers of the highest possible bliss. That is His mercy!

Mercy is therefore not a passing emotion in God, when in time He discovers their awful state and condition as miserable, lost sinners, whom He desires to save and deliver, if they will but turn to Him and accept His offer to deliver them and make them blessed. Such is not the God of the Holy Scriptures. Such is an idol-god.

No! His mercy is the will of His eternal counsel, in which He eternally delighted in mercy. His mercy is not an offer to save those who are willing to be delivered from misery, but the will to deliver all whom He in His mercy had given to Christ in that same counsel to be delivered by Him.

In this light, as we shall see presently, the cross of Christ is not a temporary expedient upon which God falls and of which He makes use to deliver His people,

but the cross is as eternal as His mercy. In one word, God ordained all things with a view to the display of His eternal mercy.

You will have noticed that we have been speaking of God's mercy to His people. This we have done in anticipation of our second thought as suggested in the text: the unworthy recipients of this mercy.

Unworthy, that is, in themselves.

This unworthiness the recipients of mercy also acknowledge. In the context we read: "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him, until He plead my cause, and execute judgment for me. . . ." (vss. 8,9). This is the judgment which those who are the objects of God's mercy made of themselves. They are those in the kingdom of Judah who bemoaned the sins of the nation, for which they confessed that they are also guilty. They had lately witnessed how the kingdom of Israel had been taken into captivity because Israel had refused to repent of their sins. They now also heard the word of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Micah that Israel's sister Judah had also committed abominations and would also be carried away into captivity. And they constitute the remnant that bemoan their sins, but in hope look to Jehovah their God to deliver them from their sin and misery in His eternal mercy. Indeed, the objects of God's mercy consider themselves unto all eternity unworthy of the mercy of God.

But let it become abundantly clear that in God's sight they are considered worthy of His everlasting mercy.

The text speaks of the remnant of His heritage. Most probably we are to understand this as the remnant which is His heritage. God's heritage is a remnant which He purposes to deliver from their sin and misery, and to make them partakers of the highest bliss.

Nor should we consider the "remnant" to be a left-over, something otherwise good for nothing. We sometimes use the term, of course, in this sense. Our housewives go to the dry-goods store to purchase remnants, that is, that portion of a bolt of cloth which is left after the major part of the bolt has been sold. The merchant, of course, considers the pieces left over of little value, and so the housewife may purchase them at little cost, while she may make good use of them. However, when the Bible speaks of God's people as a remnant it must never be concluded that the remnant which is God's heritage is some kind of a left-over which God gets after the Devil has succeeded in getting the best pick. Such a conception would be most God-dishonoring. The truth is, the

remnant is God's precious heritage, His special possession, His elect.

Chosen in Christ they are from all eternity to be redeemed by Him!

His delight in them is not a passing fancy, but they constitute the heart of His eternal counsel. Moses said it succinctly when he declared: "For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance." (Deut. 32:9). That means literally that God's people is that portion of all mankind about whom He stretches a cord, and declares, This is my precious possession. Isaiah expresses God's delight in His people this way: "This people have I formed for myself, they shall shew forth my praise." (43:21).

And so it is in our text: the remnant which is His heritage, is the object of His everlasting mercy.

To that people the prophet now comes with the gospel message: God retains not His anger for ever, because He delights in His mercy.

That mercy, while it is an eternal perfection of God, is likewise at the same time a redemptive power.

The power of God's mercy becomes manifested in His dealings with our sins, first of all. Notice how the text expresses this. It says: He pardoneth iniquity!

He passeth by our transgressions!

Iniquity is sin from the point of view of its emptiness, its vanity. This magnifies the fruitlessness of sin; and makes the sinner exceedingly foolish, for he gets nothing for his sin but emptiness. While it may appear to him as a pretty bubble, when it is pricked it disappears into nothing. Transgression, on the other hand, is the deliberate cutting across the law of God to perform our own will, — the will of our flesh.

That God pardons iniquity means that in His mercy He takes it away, so that it no longer remains on us. That he passeth by our transgressions cannot mean that He looks at our sins as it were through His fingers, that He ignores them. Were He to do this, He would at that moment cease to be righteous and holy;

and one could conclude that there is conflict between His mercy and His justice. We should not lose out of sight God's simplicity, which signifies that all of God's attributes are one in Him. And that means that His mercy is a just mercy, and can come to us only in the way of the satisfaction of His justice and righteousness.

This is precisely what God in Christ accomplished on the cross for us! God punished Christ for our sins, and He suffered in our stead. So in the judgment of God over our sins He passes us by to get at Christ. While He visited Christ on the cross in His wrath over our sins, he passes us by in His mercy. But that is not all.

We also see His unfailing mercy as He disposes of our sins! He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities, and He will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. That He subdues our iniquities means literally that He tramples on them so that none remains. That He casts all our sins into the depth of the sea can only mean that they are completely gone, never to appear again.

And if this is what happened to our sins before the mind of God, so it must also be in the mind of all those forgiven. As we said at the beginning, we believe in the forgiveness of sins. That means that God has dealt with all our sins and will never deal with them again. In His unfailing mercy they are gone for ever. Even in the last judgment at the end of the world, we shall not appear to be judged for our sins. That judgment took place on Calvary. It is final. We only appear in judgment to be declared righteous before all.

The positive truth of our text is this: Because our sins are gone, and God in His unfailing mercy in Christ has delivered us from them, we have the right of eternal life, that is, to taste for ever the blessedness of eternal bliss.

That is the end of God's unfailing mercy!

Amen, and Amen!

TRANSLATED TREASURES

Acts of the Synod of Dordrecht

Historical Foreword Addressed to the Reformed Churches of Christ (In which the origin and progress of the differences in the Netherlands, for the removal of which this Synod was chiefly convened, are briefly and faithfully recounted).

(Editorial note. At our recent annual Staff meeting it was decided to add to our *Standard Bearer* a department which will feature translations of worthwhile writings in the Dutch language. Prof. Hanko and I were appointed to make arrangements for this depart-

ment. There are many worthwhile writings in the Dutch language which are not available to the vast majority of our readers for the simple reason that they do not understand and cannot read the language of our forefathers. These writings are not only in the area of doctrine and exposition of Scripture but also in such areas as church history, church government, and pastoral care. There are writings not only by our own earlier leaders but also by great Dutch theologians of the past.

The first feature of this department will be a translation of a history of the Arminian controversy prior to the Synod of Dordrecht. This historical account, which appears in the *Acts of the Synod of Dordrecht*, is worthwhile for two reasons: 1) It is a very careful and detailed account, written by men who had first-hand knowledge of the controversy. 2) It shows to what lengths the Arminians, for a long time aided and abetted by the government, went in order to maintain themselves in the churches. This history was written by the delegates from the Province of South Holland at the behest of the Synod of Dordrecht. Among those delegates was Festus Hommius, one of the clerks of the Synod. While this historical account is ascribed to no single delegate, it is safe to say that Festus Hommius, both because of his ability and because of his firsthand knowledge of the history, must have played a large part in the preparation of this account.

Once in a while the reader will tend to become discouraged by some of the long, involved sentences. When this happens, please remember that prior to translation many of the sentences were much more involved and were as much as three times as long. You will simply have to blame the Dutch literary style of that era. If you persevere, you will find this bit of history very interesting. HCH)

Two summers ago there was published the opinion of the Honorable Synod of Dordrecht concerning some main points of doctrine about which, until the time of the Synod, there was disagreement among the Netherlands Churches, a disagreement which greatly disturbed the churches. This opinion of the Synod was contained in certain Canons, or Articles. When the most illustrious Synod was convened by the States-General, the supreme authority of the United Provinces, mainly for the purpose of removing these religious differences, it was first thought that it would be sufficient merely to publish the judgment of the Synod concerning those doctrinal differences. Later, however, it was found that there were many who refused to learn from the Synodical Proceedings themselves everything that took place in addition to the adoption of the Canons, and especially how the Synod dealt with the Ministers who are called

Remonstrants. And seeing that the Remonstrants themselves, in order to hide their stiff-neckedness, will surely not publish anything trustworthy concerning these matters, therefore it pleased the States-General that the Acts and Proceedings of the Synod, faithfully reproduced from the public Documents, should be printed for the benefit of the churches. Among these Acts and Proceedings there appear very many items which belong to the history of the affairs which took place in the Netherlands Churches, things which cannot very well be understood by readers who are unacquainted with that history. For this reason the National Synod (as is evident in various sessions) appointed the Delegates of the South Holland Churches to write a brief account of what was done with the Remonstrants. Hence, it was thought good to place at the beginning of this Foreword an account of certain public events, in order that the Churches, especially the foreign churches, may understand the origin and the progress of these differences, and may understand the occasion and the reasons for the convening of this very excellent Synod by the States-General at such great expense. This is especially necessary because many things were claimed by the Remonstrants in their writings which do not very well harmonize with the truth of events.

What great unity there was during the preceding century among the Congregations of the United Netherlands Churches in all points of the pure doctrine, and what good order and decency was always maintained in the government of those churches — these things are so well known in Christendom that it is hardly necessary to recount them at length. This peace and unity, lovely in the sight of God and pleasing to all the godly, some sought to disturb. These were men who, having forsaken the papacy, but not having been fully purged of the leaven of the papacy, had come over to our churches and had been admitted to the ministry during the early period when there was a scarcity of preachers. These men, characterized by unbridled audacity, were: Casper Coolhaas, of Leiden; Hermannus Herbertz, at Dordrecht and at Gouda; and Cornelius Wiggers at Hoorn. However, they did not meet with great success. For although in the aforementioned places these men gained some followers who were not too well posted in the Reformed religion, nevertheless their wicked audacity was in due time suppressed by the authority of the Government as well as by the carefulness of the Ministers and the appropriate censures of the churches. Coolhaas was dealt with in the National Synod of Middelburg; Herbertz in the Synod of South Holland; and Wiggers in the Synod of North Holland.

Thereafter Jacobus Arminius, Preacher in the famous church of Amsterdam, attempted the same

thing with bold purpose. He was indeed a man of keen understanding, but a man who never delighted in anything except that which recommended itself by an appearance of novelty – even so, that he appeared to be nauseated by the greater portion of the doctrines accepted in the Reformed Churches, and for no other reason than that they were accepted by the churches. This man first prepared the way for his cause, openly and in secret, by belittling and blackening the name, fame, and authority of the most outstanding teachers of the Reformed Church – Calvin, Zanchius, Beza, Martyr, and others – aiming to achieve respect for himself at the expense of their good name. Thereafter he began openly to propose and to spread abroad various strange views, views which had great fellowship with the errors of the old Pelagians, especially in his explanation of the Epistle to the Romans. But through the carefulness and authority of the Honorable Consistory of the Church of Amsterdam his intention was partially frustrated, so that he could not bring about in the church such upheavals as he apparently intended. Nevertheless he did not cease promulgating his opinions in every possible manner both among the Preachers in his own church and among various Preachers of other Churches, namely, Johannes Uitenbogaard, Adrianus Van den Borre, and others, whose friendship and favor he enjoyed because of their former studies together. He even called into conference with regard to his views the very renowned Professor of Sacred Theology in the college at Leiden, Franciscus Junius.

When now, in the second year of this century, Doctor Junius was taken away from the Academy of Leiden by death, August 22, 1602, to the great sorrow of the Netherlands Churches, then Uitenbogaard, who already at that time supported the views of Arminius, with great diligence and earnestness recommended him to the honorable Curators of the Academy of Leiden, with the purpose that he should be called to the office of Sacred Theology in the place of Junius. When the Deputies of the churches understood this, they feared that the calling of a person so strongly suspected of strange doctrines would readily become the cause of confusion and

schism in the churches; and they pleaded with the honorable Curators that they would not thoughtlessly subject the churches to this danger. They would much rather see another capable person, free from this suspicion, accepted by the Curators. They also admonished Uitenbogaard to withdraw his recommendation. He, despising these admonitions, did not desist from promoting this call until he finally had gained his purpose. When the call was issued, the Consistory of Amsterdam did not approve the dismissal of Arminius. They refused this dismissal chiefly for the reason that the most prudent among them considered that a mind which was so skittish and so inquisitive would function with great danger in the Academy, where the youth accepted for the service of the churches are instructed. For in the Academy there is more freedom of teaching than in the local churches, where that freedom, through the diligent oversight and authority of the Consistory, is suppressed and can be held in check. Nevertheless, the dismissal of Arminius was finally gained through the repeated and numerous requests of the Curators, of Uitenbogaard, and also of Arminius himself, but with this condition, that he should first have a conference with Doctor Franciscus Gomarus concerning the chief points of doctrine. He was also required to clear himself of all suspicion of strange views by a forthright declaration of his views, and to promise firmly that he would never spread abroad his views if he possibly had any peculiar view. This conference was conducted in the presence of the honorable Curators and of the Deputies of the Synod on May 6 and 7, 1603. In that conference he testified that he expressly rejected the chief points of doctrine of the Pelagians: concerning natural grace, concerning the powers of the free will, concerning original sin, concerning the perfection of man in this life, concerning predestination, and others. He testified also that he agreed with all that which Augustine and other Fathers had written against the Pelagians, yea, that he judged that the Pelagian errors were rightly refuted and rejected by the fathers. Moreover, he promised at the same time that he would teach nothing which conflicted with the adopted doctrine of the churches. Thereafter he was admitted to the office of Theology.

Arise, my soul, earth cannot give,
A taste of true delight;
By faith, in Him who loved thee, live,
Be strong in Jesus' might.

The life of faith will arm the soul,
Against ten thousand foes,
The rage of earth and hell control,
Whenever they oppose.

The life of faith is life Divine,
'Tis heav'n begun below;
May but this precious life be mine,
I'll all things else forego.

'Tis peace in war, in storms 'tis calm,
'Tis riches to the poor,
It brings, for every woe, a balm,
And points to heavenly store.

TAKING HEED TO THE DOCTRINE

“Hyper - Calvinism” and the Call of the Gospel (21)

Rev. David Engelsma

The question must now be faced, whether the Reformed doctrine of the call of the gospel is actually threatened by the error of hyper-Calvinism. Does the denial of the well-meant offer have to exert itself to ward off the danger of restricting the preaching of the gospel to born-again believers; the danger of silencing the call to sinners to repent and believe; and the danger of losing zeal for missions?

Hyper-Calvinism is not the predominant evil of our time. The man who has an eye for the overthrow of the doctrine of God's sovereign, particular grace in the Reformed sphere today is inclined to regard the hue-and-cry raised against hyper-Calvinism as a display of ignorance at best, or a subterfuge at worst. As the Reformed house goes up in flames, the watchers alert us to the peril of flooding, call for lifeboats, and give swimming lessons. The same folly occurs in society. As society goes under in lawlessness and immorality, the supposed guardians of society decry the evils of a strait-laced, “Puritan” morality. In view of the advance of Arminianism in the past fifty years, especially in the area of “evangelism” and the call of the gospel, one is tempted to propose fifty years of hyper-Calvinism as a radical measure to check the wildfire spread of the free-will cancer.

This temptation, of course, must be decisively rejected. Error cannot be fought with error, but only with the truth. The Reformed faith has always been characterized by a refusal to become reactionary. It has never allowed heresy to drive it into the opposite error. It will not engage in theology, or preach, out of fear. Steadfastly, it insists on being Biblical.

The outstanding example of this is the Synod of Dordt. The Reformed churches were confronted with the false doctrine of man's salvation of himself by his free will. Basic to this error was the teaching that the preaching of the gospel is God's gracious effort to save every man. The Reformed fathers viewed this error as a perversion of the gospel, the destruction of the Reformed churches, and the robbery of the glory of God in His greatest work, the work of salvation.

The vehemence of their opposition to the Arminian heresy might have led the fathers to react by slighting the importance of the preaching of the gospel and by denying the serious call of God to everyone to whom the gospel comes. But such was not at all the case. The presence and power of the Holy Spirit at that “most holy Synod,” leading the Church into all the truth, are evident, in no small way, in its firm emphasis on the unique importance of the preaching of the gospel as *the* means of grace and in its unwavering insistence on the serious call by God and His Church to every person to whom God sends the gospel.

The approach of the Canons is that of the necessity of the preaching for the saving of lost sinners. They open by declaring that some men are delivered from the common misery by the preaching of the joyful tidings of the cross of Christ (I, 1-4). They make the calling of the elect unto salvation through the preaching of the gospel part of the decree of election itself (I,7). For the assurance of election and salvation, they shut up the children of God to the preaching (I,

12, 16; V, 10). Even though the Arminians pervert this truth, deceiving many, the Canons are not at all embarrassed by the declaration that the promise of the gospel is that “whosoever believeth” shall be saved, nor do they hesitate to charge the Reformed churches and preachers to publish this promise to all nations and persons, “promiscuously and without distinction,” and to command all men to repent and believe (II, 5). This call is God’s serious call to all who hear the preaching, and those who reject it have themselves alone to blame (III, IV, 8, 9). The sovereignty of God’s grace in the actual quickening of the dead sinner, confessed by the Canons over against the Arminian teaching of a mere persuasion of the co-operating sinner, “in no wise,” the Canons are quick to add, “excludes, or subverts the use of the gospel, which the most wise God has ordained to be the seed of regeneration, and food of the soul.” God uses means, and, therefore, any separation of sovereign grace from “the sacred precepts of the gospel” is nothing less than the sin of tempting God (III, IV, 17). The preaching of the gospel is the necessary means of grace for the elect to the very end: “And as it hath pleased God, by the preaching of the gospel, to begin this work of grace in us, so he preserves, continues, and perfects it by the hearing and reading of his Word, by meditation thereon, and by the exhortations, threatenings, and promises thereof, as well as by the use of the sacraments” (V, 14).

Also of this aspect of the instruction of the Canons, the Reformed believer and the Reformed church must be good and faithful students.

For the threat of hyper-Calvinism is real. It is the lie on the right that must be guarded against as scrupulously as the lie of self-salvation on the left. The reality of the threat is indicated, first, by the history of the church. Church history contains a Hussey and a Brine, who, in the name of Calvinism and the doctrines of grace, denied that the call of the gospel in its external aspect comes to any save the elect and who charged those who called all men indiscriminately to repent of their sins and believe on Jesus Christ with Arminianism. These theologians have disciples today. Granted, these English hyper-Calvinists were not ecclesiastically Reformed. Nevertheless, since they claimed to be Calvinists and since others regarded them as Calvinists, they have had influence in the sphere of Reformed theology. Besides, evidence is not altogether lacking that the hyper-Calvinistic error has appeared in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. It is at least questionable whether opposition to the Arminian offer has not sometime taken the form of a denial of the serious call of the gospel to any and all to whom the gospel comes, reprobate as well as elect.

Certainly, a reading of the histories of the Re-

formed churches in the Netherlands after the *Afscheiding* of 1834 reveals a struggle over the doctrine of the call of the gospel. There has not always been perfect clarity concerning this doctrine, any more than there has always been perfect clarity concerning the truth of the covenant; there is development in the understanding and confession of the truth. Men struggled with the question, “If God has elected some and reprobated others; if Christ died only for the elect and not for the non-elect; if God’s desire is the saving of the elect only; and if the Arminian teaching of an offer of salvation to all is false; can the preaching of the gospel be a serious call to repentance and faith to everyone who hears it?” “How can a serious call to all men be harmonized with election and particular grace?” “And is there not a danger that an insistence on the serious call to everyone will open up the way once more to the introduction of the hated Arminian heresy?”

It is not difficult to conceive that someone would conclude that the defense of sovereign grace and the warding off of Arminianism demand a minimizing, a silencing, or even a denying of the promiscuous proclamation of the gospel and the serious call of the gospel to all hearers. No doubt, this was exactly the motivation of the English hyper-Calvinists. But error remains error, no matter how “sincere” the motive; and the consequences of error are not a whit abated because the motives are “honorable.”

Nor are we ignorant of Satan’s devices. The appearance of the error of hyper-Calvinism in the history of the church cannot simply be ascribed to the frailty of the theologians, but must be traced back to the father of the lie. Where the truth is and where, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the truth is being developed, there the Devil will also be found working. He is subtle. If he cannot prevent the recovery of the gospel of grace, he will try to turn grace into licence. If he fails to destroy the Reformed faith with the doctrine of universal grace, dependent upon the will of man — the well-meant offer — he will endeavor to pervert this faith by a denial of the serious call of the gospel to all hearers and by a questioning of the church’s duty, and right, to bring this command to all nations and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction. This tactic is especially effective in the heat of controversy. As the church contends against a false doctrine, get her to succumb, in reaction, to the opposite error. As she guards the front door, slither in through the back window.

It does not surprise us that the Reformed faith has been threatened by the stultifying, deadening error of hyper-Calvinism. Indeed, we would be surprised if this were not the case. But we thank God that it has repudiated this error, as vigorously as it has repudiated the error of free-will.

MY SHEEP HEAR MY VOICE

Letter to Timothy

Dear Timothy

October 15, 1976

It has been a long time ago that you wrote me concerning a problem of pastoral counseling in cases of abortion. Now that we have the time, we can come back to this matter. From your letter I did not detect any urgency in an answer, and so I thought it best to complete our discussion on practical preaching before we concentrated on this matter. Since your request to discuss this problem came a number of months ago, it might be well to get the matter clearly before our minds before we discuss it.

You wrote that you had a problem in this connection in your own congregation. I think it best to mention the problem because it has bearing on our discussion. You wrote concerning a young girl of your congregation who was married to an unbeliever. Through mistreatment by her husband, this girl lost her baby. You write that you consider this tantamount to an induced abortion. At this point you construct something of an argument. The argument, I think, goes like this. Abortion is, in the opinion of many, murder. But, it is clear from Scripture that murder must be punished with death. The law of the land does not agree with all this; in fact, it diverges at two points. The law of the land, in the first place, does not consider abortion a murder. In the second place, the law of the land does not permit capital punishment for murder except under particular conditions. (On this latter point, as you know, the law differs from state to state, the whole law is rather complex, and the Supreme Court has recently passed additional decisions on the matter. But we need not go into all this now.) But, because the law of the land is deficient in this regard, the Church must consider a person who commits murder to be what you call "legally dead." Now this, in itself, means nothing; but you bring up the question whether this is not grounds for divorce. Some, you say, hold to this opinion. And the reasoning seems to be that if a person is legally dead, the marriage tie no longer exists.

You have written of what you have done. You say that you have sent the girl back to her husband, that you have given the girl into the care of an older woman in the congregation, and that you have urged

the people of God to pray for them. Then you write: "I would like to see you treat the pastoral implications in cases of abortion and separation from a man who ought to be dead."

Before I actually enter into the matter, there are a couple of observations which are worth making. The first one is that one never ceases to be amazed at the terrible mess people can make of their lives through sin. And the point that needs emphasis is that sin is a dreadful monster which devours and destroys. God's people must always be reminded of this. We can become so careless towards sin and we can so easily shrug sin off with a shake of the shoulders as if we need not really fear it. It is a toy to be played with, a fire which cannot burn, a dragon which we can keep as a pet. In fact, however, sin is a frightening monster. It consumes all in its path. It leaves devastation and broken lives in its wake. It, when it is permitted to enter the door of our lives, soon becomes our master and binds us in chains from which there is no escape — except by the tremendous and marvelous power of the grace of God.

But secondly, it is well also to observe that sin always carries with it consequences from which there is no escape. Sin, because it is the sin of the human heart, is so extremely complex that our lives become so tangled that it is scarcely possible to sort out the threads. The problems which sin creates are so involved that there often seems to be no solution. And the consequences of sin are consequences from which we cannot be delivered and with which we shall have to live the rest of our lives. This is even true when sin is forgiven by God. After all, David's sin of murder and adultery was forgiven. But David had to live the rest of his life with the sword in his house. And how grievously that sword wounded and destroyed in David's family. The repentant drunkard, or dope addict, or fornicator is forgiven. But he carries with him to the grave a broken and ruined body ravaged by disease. And who can tell what untold harm is done to the man who gives himself over to the sins of pride, or lying, or hatred, or the like?

God's people must understand sin's dread power —

not only that they may learn to flee from sin, but also that they may see the wonderful power of the grace of God which delivers from such horror.

But, to turn to your questions.

In the first place, I do not think it proper to argue in this connection the whole matter of criminal abortion and capital punishment as a just punishment for premeditated murder. You know my position well. Abortion for any other reason than to save the life of a mother is indeed murder, for it is the wilful slaughter of a *person*. God's Word is clear enough on the principle that the man who sheds another's blood wilfully and deliberately, must himself suffer the punishment of being put to death. We need not argue long about this. It is a Scriptural injunction. I just finished reading a rather lengthy series of articles in the *Reformed Journal* which was devoted to this latter question. It struck me that in all the writings of the authors (the articles were a kind of symposium), there was not one reference to Scripture. Many arguments pro and con were raised; but Scripture was not consulted on the matter.

There is also no question about it that this surely implies that the abortionist ought to be put to death. This follows in the nature of the case. Those doctors who perform abortions are murderers. Those who operate abortion clinics ought themselves to be put to death. There can be no question here.

But whether this applies to the case you mention is another matter. I do not think it does. Although the young man who harmed his wife so badly that their baby was aborted surely committed a grievous sin, he did not wilfully and deliberately take a life. In the deeper sense of the sixth commandment which prohibits even hatred, he was certainly guilty of murder. But he did not, with premeditation, take a life. Scripture speaks of this as murder. The law of the land must uphold this outward keeping of God's commandments. The law of the land cannot judge the heart. Only God can do this. It is important in our country (and in any country) that the outward observance of God's law be enforced by the magistrate. But the inward observance of the law which requires *love* for God and our neighbor is beyond the reach of him who wields the power of the sword. The young man was not guilty of murder in this latter sense. He did not wilfully kill his child.

I think too this answers the question concerning divorce. You did right in sending her back to her husband. There is no grounds here for divorce. Indeed, Paul writes concerning this problem in I Cor. 7:12-17: "But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: if any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that be-

lieveth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy. But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace. For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband: or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife? But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches." If you have not already done so, you should read Rev. Engelsma's discussion of this passage in his book: "Marriage, The Mystery of Christ and His Church."

I think it an excellent idea that you have put this young girl in the care of one of the older women in the Church. It may be, in fact, that Paul suggests something along these lines in I Timothy 5:2-14. I do not think we do nearly enough of this in the Church. In fact, we very seldom make use of such help as that which older mothers are able to supply. I am sometimes concerned about this matter. There are many young married girls in the Church who soon become mothers. Many times, of course, they have their own mothers to whom they can go for help and guidance. But many times this is not possible for various reasons. These young wives and mothers not only face many and difficult problems of which they cannot speak very well with their husbands, but they are also uniquely subject to temptations — especially in the times in which we live. These temptations deal with such matters as abortion, birth control, bringing up children, etc. They are intensely personal problems and it is not easy to speak of them, even to their pastor. There are also many mothers in Israel who have borne and raised many children, and who have done so faithfully and with devotion to their covenant calling. They have acquired a deep understanding of God's Word and a practical wisdom which is from above. They can understand and sympathize, help and guide; but in such a way that the Scriptures are always followed. I like your idea very much and encourage this practice.

But, of course, all this leaves you with the problem of continual pastoral labor in this situation. And pastoral labor is extremely important. The ultimate hope is, of course, that God will bring this young man to repentance. And God may be pleased to use his wife for this purpose. Scripture speaks of this both in that passage in I Corinthians 7 and in I Peter 3:1. This young wife will need a lot of help, though, to learn what it means to be in subjection to her husband. This is, no doubt, especially true with respect to the question of future children.

If the Lord is not pleased to bring this husband to repentance, then surely you have other problems. Especially if she is forced to leave her husband because life with him becomes impossible. I do not believe that there can be any grounds for a breaking of the marriage bond however. And that means that the young girl will be unable to marry as long as her husband lives. She must be made to see all this, for this is the clear teaching of Scripture.

Please feel free to write again if I have not touched upon the exact problems which you wanted me to discuss. I would like to talk about this matter of pastoral counseling sometime in a general sort of way; but we can do that in the future.

May God bless you in your labors.

Fraternally in Christ,
H. Hanko

THE VOICE OF OUR FATHERS

Our Gracious God

Prof. Robert D. Decker

"We believe that our most gracious God, in his admirable wisdom and goodness, seeing that man had thus thrown himself into temporal and eternal death, and made himself wholly miserable, was pleased to seek and comfort him, when he trembling fled from his presence, promising him that he would give his Son, who should be made of a woman, to bruise the head of the serpent, and would make him happy."

The Belgic Confession, Article XVII

This article marks a transition in the *Confession's* presentation of the doctrines of Holy Writ. The *Confession* begins with a treatment of the doctrine of Scripture itself (Articles II – VII) and then continues with a discussion of the doctrine of God (Theology) and of the doctrine of man (Anthropology). The next main subject covered by our *Confession* is the doctrine of Christ (Christology). This subject is treated in Articles XVIII through XXII. The article under our consideration in this issue serves to introduce those articles which speak of the doctrine of Christ.

As such Article XVII is rather strikingly different from those which we have previously discussed. Each of the preceding, and for that matter, succeeding, articles contain a concise and definite statement of a doctrine of the Scriptures. But Article XVII contains no such doctrinal statement. There are some powerful doctrinal *implications* for the article speaks of God and of His grace, wisdom, goodness, good pleasure, and promise. It also speaks of God's seeking and comforting fallen man and of Christ who is made of a woman and bruises the head of the serpent. And, it speaks of man's temporal and eternal death which constitutes his "wholly miserable" condition. But

there is no specific statement of doctrine here. What we do find might be called an obvious pastoral emphasis and concern. Article XVII speaks of our most gracious God Who seeks and comforts dead, miserable, fallen man. It speaks of the promise of God to miserable man, a promise which is contained in Genesis 3:15. Thus in a beautiful way this article of our *Confession* serves to introduce the doctrine of Christ.

In general, what we confess in this article is that God saw that man had thrown himself into temporal and eternal death and had thus made himself "wholly miserable." When man trembling fled from God's presence, God was pleased to seek and comfort him. This seeking and comfort was a revelation of God's grace, admirable wisdom, and goodness. It was grace because it was wholly unmerited on the part of man who had fallen into sin and death. It was wisdom because this was the way God intended from all eternity to reveal His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. And, it was sheer goodness on God's part for He was not obligated to seek and comfort man in his misery. This comfort consisted in the promise of God's Son who would be "made of a woman, bruise the head of

the serpent, and make man happy." All this we believe with our hearts and confess with our mouths.

It is well that we concentrate on this promise as it occurs in the context of Genesis 3. Upon their eating of the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Scripture tells us, the eyes of the man and woman were opened and they vainly attempted to cover their shame and nakedness with fig leaves. (verses 1-7) When fallen man heard the voice of the Lord God, he and his wife "hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden." (Vs. 8) Indeed it is true as our creed expresses it: "man trembling fled from God's presence." The Lord seeks and comforts fallen man by calling Adam from his hiding place and insisting that Adam, himself, explain what he had done. Adam blames the woman whom God had given him for his predicament. The woman in turn blames the serpent who beguiled her. (vss. 9-13) This already indicates how deeply man had fallen. Really by their answers they attempt to cast the blame for their sin upon God Himself Who had given the woman to the man and Who had created the subtle serpent. How true it is that man by his fall had rendered himself, "wholly miserable." After pronouncing the curse upon the serpent as the instrument of the devil God speaks the Word of the promise: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." (vs. 15)

Concerning this promise we may note in general that it was spoken to the serpent, although in the hearing of our first parents. And Adam and Eve, who could not know the meaning of this promise in all its riches as we do, nevertheless undoubtedly understood its essentials. Note too that this promise really contains all the truth of the Word of God in seed form. The whole of Scripture is actually summed in these powerful words. All subsequent revelation of God up to and including the coming of Christ is only a further development and revelation of this promise. For this reason our Dutch forebears were fond of calling Genesis 3:15 the "*moeder belofte*," the mother promise. These words constitute *THE* promise out of which the whole of Scripture is born.

According to this promise God puts enmity, sharp hatred between two seeds: that of the woman and that of the serpent. That seed of the woman is one seed, not many seeds. According to the revelation of the promise in Scripture that seed may be traced throughout the ages. The seed of the woman is Abel and then Seth in his place. It is Enoch, the prophet, who testified of the Lord's coming in judgment (Cf. Jude) and who walked with God and was not, for God took him to glory. The seed of the woman is realized in the seed of Abraham which is as the stars

of heaven and the sand by the seashore innumerable. That seed is the twelve tribes of Israel and especially the tribe of Judah and more especially the house of David, the man after God's heart. Still more, that seed is ultimately realized in the Son of David, our Lord Jesus Christ and all the elect who are in Him by faith. (Cf. Romans 9-11, Galatians 3) The seed of the serpent is the whole devil's brood of reprobate who manifest themselves in all of history, but whose ultimate manifestation comes in the person of the Antichrist, the man of sin, the son of perdition.

Between these two seeds God puts enmity or hatred. While that enmity reaches its culmination at the cross of Jesus Christ, it is evident all through history in the great struggle between the church and the world, the children of God and the children of the devil. It is really enmity against God. And it is manifest in the constant hatred of the world over-against the church. Repeatedly the world attempts the destruction of God's church. Always the church as representative of God and His Christ on earth must wage spiritual warfare with the whole armor of God, not against flesh and blood but against spiritual wickedness. (Cf. Ephesians 6) The life of the child of God, and he must never forget it, is a life of fierce battle against the devil and his hosts. The child of God must never forget that God has put hatred between him and the children of the devil. His path, therefore, is never easy. It's a bloody path on which the child of God must tread. Overagainst him and in bitter hatred stand the devil and his seed, the reprobate. These are the seed of the serpent exactly because their father is spiritually the devil; they bear his image and they do his bidding. (Cf. John 8:44, I John 3:8) This is reality and this explains all of history. This is what is going on right now in our world and in our times.

In the light of this reality the calling of the child of God is perfectly clear. He must love the Lord his God with all his heart and the neighbor as himself. He must maintain the truth overagainst the lie. Never may he compromise with the devil and his brood. He must "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world . . ." (I John 2:15-17) Taking to himself the whole armor of God, he must fight the good fight of faith withstanding the wiles and fiery darts of the evil one. In all that battle he must expect to suffer for Jesus' sake.

That constant strife results in the bruising of the heel of the seed of the woman and the bruising of the head of the seed of the serpent. The heel of the seed of the woman is bruised when Christ is falsely accused by the representatives of the devil and finally nailed to the cross of Calvary. This bruising continues when the elect of Christ are made to suffer all kinds of persecution and hatred in this world. The mocking

and scorn, the imprisonment and killing of God's faithful, that is the bruising of the heel of the seed of the woman. The head of the seed of the serpent is bruised also at the cross of Jesus Christ. For through that cross Christ was not defeated but victorious. The cross of Christ is His final victory over "him that had the power of death, even the devil" (Hebrews 2). At the cross Christ accomplished the salvation of His elect and gained the victory over sin, death, and all the powers of hell. Thus the seed of the woman receives a relatively minor bruise on the heel while the power of the seed of the serpent is crushed, for its head is bruised.

That too is the paradox and at the same time the glory of this struggle between the two seeds. The heel of the seed of the woman is bruised but this bruising itself constitutes the victory for the seed of the woman. That's the cross! It constitutes the judgment of this world! At the very moment when the devil

imagined he had succeeded in destroying the seed of the woman he himself was crushed forever. This means as well that when the devil and his host persecute the seed of the woman, when they hate and kill the elect, they are really defeated. They cannot harm the church and people of God. Through death, that last enemy, the saints are transported to glory in the presence of God. And, ultimately Christ returns to make all things new and cast His and our enemies into everlasting hell. Thus, while the struggle rages, the child of God need never fear, the victory is his! For Christ has gained the victory and the children of God are in Him by faith and faith is the victory that overcomes the world.

This is the admirable wisdom and goodness of our most gracious God Who sought and comforted "wholly miserable" man and made him happy through the promise of His Son.

IN HIS FEAR

Communion of Saints

Rev. M. Joostens

At times one sees disharmony, bickering, and even hatred at evidence in the church of Jesus Christ as it is manifest here below. There is, perhaps, nothing that grieves the soul of a pastor more than to see such lack of love and mutual concern in the flock which he shepherdizes.

Certainly, these things do not reflect the image that the Scriptures give to us of the church. She is the body of Christ and each of us are members in particular of that glorious body. We are Christ's body! That means that as His members we are partakers of His love, mercy, lovingkindness, tenderheartedness, gentleness, and the root of all these, His Spirit. How sad, how unbecoming, when we as Christ's members let sin obscure the wonderful gifts which He has given to us. Oh, true, this side of the grave we are plagued and subverted by the flesh. But this must never become an excuse! We must at all times, with great spiritual reign, manifest our true essence as Christ's body amongst ourselves and so be manifest as such before the world.

To the end that we, as congregations and churches, may better be equipped for this high calling, we desire to furnish a few practical remarks and observations.

In order to be sufficiently impressed by the seriousness of the matter under consideration it would not be superfluous for us to touch upon the Scriptural basis of the idea of the communion of the saints. The fellowship that must be present in the church is implicit in the definition of the church which the Bible gives us. We read, ". . . and gave him (i.e. Christ) to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body. . . ." (Eph 1:22 & 23) Here and in other places the Scriptures use the figure of a body to reveal to us the idea of the church. We may therefore assume that there is a certain identity between the church and a body. And the characteristic which is of chief interest to us here, is that a body is a whole or unity that functions through various diversified members. To illustrate this we may consider ourselves for a moment. If I set out to

accomplish a certain task, many members of my body must properly function in order to accomplish it. I must direct my hands and feet with my head. Yet the head without the dexterity of my fingers is useless. Or, if my feet refuse to function, I am immobile. Every member must work together in its own differing capacity, and only then will I be able to accomplish my end purpose. It is no different with the church. This physical figure illustrates to us a spiritual reality. The church is Christ's body spiritually. That which binds every member, each of us, into one whole is the tie of faith which we have to Christ. We are spiritually one because we all possess His Spirit.

But, lest we miss a vital point, let us add immediately, that in the application of this spiritual truth it is an impossibility to sever the spiritual from the physical. Let us make this plain. Someone may say to us, but your tie is spiritual, that has nothing to do with your physical day to day dealings. Exactly here you have the key point regarding our subject. This we must clearly understand. Our spiritual unity must override and encompass our physical relationship. Does not our spiritual rebirth drastically affect our daily physical life in every activity? So also, the spiritual unity which we have in Christ manifests itself in our natural relationships.

Having these things ingrained in our consciousness we can proceed to the idea of the communion of the saints itself. We must take note that the communion of which we are speaking is enjoyed exclusively by "saints." There is one erroneous conception which must be eradicated regarding the word saint, namely, the lingering Roman Catholic notion that a saint is a canonized, christian hero of sorts. Often times our children hold this misconception. We must not think of a saint as a "super-christian" who has earned his title by his pious life and deeds. Rather, a saint is a christian. We who profess to belong to the church of Christ are saints! We need simply to follow biblical usage here. The Psalmist speaks of the "congregation of the saints." Paul in his epistles addresses the churches as "saints." Literally the Scriptural word is "holy ones." This does not mean that we are called saints because of our own holiness and perfection. But rather, we are called saints because we belong to the church of Christ and are made holy and perfect in the blood of Christ Who redeemed us unto Himself as God's Church. Our holiness, or sainthood, if you prefer, is grounded in the fact that we are members of His body! We reiterate that the communion of which we will presently speak, is the exclusive experience of such saints. We might mention here as an aside, that the modern church world does not understand this. Though some speak of a certain bond of brotherhood from a material viewpoint, the truth is that the fellowship and communion necessary and vital to a

congregation is rooted in a common, spiritual bond with Christ. An emphasis upon social functions, parties, corps, and what have you can never be the root of a true unity. Rather, these are the outgrowth of a deeper unity that is a bond with Christ, the Head of His Church. It is for this very reason that they attempt to bolster congregational unity, lagging church attendance, and waning membership roles by scheduling all manner of social interaction instead of preaching the Gospel that commands, "be ye holy as I am holy." They can never be successful.

At any rate, true saints experience fellowship in the bond of Christ. The word communion, which in our confession designates this fellowship, is a very expressive word. Communion is an act of sharing, participation, and mutual intimate intercourse. An inherent characteristic of this word is that it presupposes interaction. Communion is never one-sided. This is an impossibility. It always designates friendship, mutual sharing, and concern. It requires more than one party. Communion of saints, therefore, designates that "holy ones" have mutual intercourse, sharing and concern, between and among themselves.

We must move on to consider together how such a communion of the saints works itself out in an extremely practical way in the church. A certain implication is that there is one common, unifying principle that is spiritual in the church. But we have dwelt upon this at great length. Let us move on to the practicalities. This unifying principle dictates that there be one common life style amongst us. We do not mean by this that from a physical viewpoint we all live exactly the same. This is not so. We all have our natural likes and dislikes. Our tastes vary. Our fellowship is not in and around natural, physical things or interests. This is the manner of the world. But, all those who are saints have a certain underlying spiritual principle that guides them in the whole of their life. And that principle is the dictator of the Spirit of Christ. According to this principle we strive after a godly life, struggle against the desires and lusts of the flesh, and walk as pilgrims and strangers here below.

Implied in the communion of the saints is yet something else. Not only is there a principle that unifies the saints but there is also a necessity of diversity. That is, in order to have fellowship as saints in Christ, we must have a common ground, namely the indwelling of His Spirit. But at the same time, there must be differentiation among us. The latter is easily understood. For example, if you had two individuals that were identical, communion would be impossible. If they were one in thought, activity, personality, and ability, then there could be no interaction of any kind. An exchange of various ideas or a helping each other with regard to differing abilities

would be out of the question. So it is with the church of Jesus Christ. We are all members in particular! Just as our bodies are not all thumbs or feet, but diversified and specialized members that make up the whole, so God endows His saints with widely varying gifts. To some within the congregation God gives the ability to teach, to others the ability to pray, and to yet others ability to comfort. These spiritual and physical gifts and abilities are in order that the whole might plausibly function.

This very fact carries with it an injunction. We must employ and exercise ourselves as particular and unique members in the church of Christ as a whole. This is not some nice theory but a serious calling. As members of the church, God does not give unto us varied abilities for our own advancement and welfare. Though this may go with it, the primary purpose of

our specific gifts is to benefit the church as a body! We must never serve ourselves but each other and in this way the communion of the saints is advanced and strengthened. Does God give us a strong faith? Let us use it to strengthen the weak and so to build the church. Don't hide the gift of wisdom, but share it dutifully to the enlightenment of the church.

Our calling is inescapable. We are members of the body of Christ. No member of Christ's body is dispensable! When a member does not function, the body is hindered. If we do not function in our place and specific calling in our congregation, the body of Christ becomes spiritually hindered. Let us determine our gifts and talents and use them to further the body of Christ. Then God is more fully glorified. Then we walk in His fear!

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

“And there shall be earthquakes in divers places. . . .”

Rev. Mark Hoeksema

According to the Scriptures there are many signs of the times. To those who are acquainted with the language of the Bible, the reference of these signs is to the end of the ages, the present world and order of things as we now know and experience them. And, as the title of this department suggests, with those signs we are concerned. We are concerned with all of them in general, to be sure; but it should be our intention to point out very specific signs of the times in the light of God's Word and to apply them to the people of God through careful explanation and analysis. And this I will attempt to do in this rubric, which I am scheduled to share with the Rev. H. Veldman during the present volume year. But before we examine the specific sign which is the title of this article, it is proper that we pause for a moment to understand the necessity and importance of this approach a bit more.

It is necessary to evaluate various current events in the light of Scripture for the simple reason that for

the child of God the Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and life. The Scriptures set forth the doctrines of God's salvation in Jesus Christ, telling us all that we need to know to enjoy eternal life. But there is much more. The Bible is not merely a collection of general truths which may provide some support and comfort for those who believe them, but the Bible is also the rule of *life* for the children of Christ. That presupposes that the Scriptures speak to the people of God; there is a connection, a concrete tie between what Scripture says and what we experience as we walk our pilgrim way here below on the way to that eternal and heavenly city. Though the word is often misused and misapplied, in the true sense of the word the Bible is relevant to 20th century believers. And for Reformed Christians that means that all things must be viewed from a Scriptural perspective. And that in turn implies that all things must be viewed in the light of the establishment and realiza-

tion of the kingdom and covenant of God in Jesus Christ. In this age of indifference, therefore, the people of God are called to see and understand that this is true and how it is true. It is thus incumbent upon us to point out this relevancy.

And, I believe, it is most important to be specific in this endeavor. We live in a world in which things happen at a dizzying pace. So much is going on so fast that it is almost impossible to keep up on the news today. We hear news of wars and strife all over the globe, of natural disasters, of economic and political change and conflict, of false Christs, and much more. And perhaps we are inclined simply to ignore many of these events, to tune out. There is just too much taking place for us to stay abreast, for from every side we are assaulted by the various media with all the news, the scope of which ranges from the local to the international and even the interplanetary. But if we ignore these events, we make a big mistake, because virtually all that takes place is, whether directly or indirectly, a sign of the end times, a portent of the realization and perfection of the kingdom of God in Christ. Thus, while it is impossible to write of all that transpires, it is my intention to treat major and significant manifestations of the signs of the times as they take place all around us.

One of those signs is that of "earthquakes in divers places," in the words of our Lord in Mark 13:8, as well as in the parallel passages of Matthew 24:7 and Luke 21:11. The fact that earthquakes take place cannot be disputed. But what is so striking in our time is the frequency and severity with which they take place. According to a recent NBC news report, since the beginning of 1976 there have been 37 major quakes. The emphasis belongs on the "major," that is, those which do damage or cause loss of life and injury. The vast numbers of lesser quakes are not even reckoned in this total. At the time of this writing, that number averages out to approximately one major earthquake *every week*. Of these 37 major tremors, three have been called disastrous: the one in Guatemala in February, and those in Red China and the Philippine Islands in August. The destruction and devastation in these was well-nigh unbelievable. Thousands were killed in Guatemala, whole towns were wiped out of existence, many lost their homes or were injured, damage ran into the millions of dollars, and the effects will be felt for years. In the Philippines quake the figures, as given by *TIME* magazine in its August 30 issue, include 3,100 dead, 3,700 missing, 1000 injured, and 90,000 homeless. And, while it is difficult to obtain any information from the Communists in China, an American recently returned from the vicinity of the tremendous upheaval there conservatively estimated the number of dead at 100,000, a mere 5% of the population near

the epicenter. In addition to all of this, more earthquakes are predicted in various parts of the world, including California in the United States, where quakes occur with the greatest frequency.

Now all of these events are signs. In general, they are signs of the coming of the Son of God to perfect His saints and establish His kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth. But more specifically, they are signs of the judgment of God in a two-fold sense. In the first place, earthquakes generally are a sign of judgment. In Isaiah 29 woe is pronounced upon Ariel in the words of verse 6: "Thou shalt be visited of the Lord of hosts with thunder, and with earthquake, and with great noise, with storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire." According to Revelation 6:12 one of the manifestations of the sixth seal is a great earthquake. In Revelation 8:5 an earthquake is among the signs of the judgments to come through the sounding of the seven trumpets. And in Revelation 11:19 the earthquake is a sign of judgment closely associated with the presence of Almighty God. When we consider the nature of an earthquake this is not difficult to understand. God places many signs in His creation, although many of them are not destructive. But the earthquake is among those signs which must be considered most terrible of all. An earthquake is the trembling of the solid ground, an upheaval of all that seems to be solid and stable and permanent. The ground rolls and buckles, great crevasses appear in it, and the face of the ground is altered. Not only is such a thing most terrifying for those who experience it, but it is also extremely destructive, as the recent earthquakes make abundantly plain. Thus, the earthquake must be viewed in the light of Scripture as a manifestation of the wrath of God against sinful man, a manifestation which comes through the means of the creation which he has subjected to himself in the service of sin. Wicked man likes to think that he is master of the earth and that he can use it for his own purposes. But God in the earthquake witnesses very clearly that the earth is His and that He does with it as He pleases. Therefore, the earthquake is a sign that in the good pleasure of God He will destroy the present order of things in order to make way for the perfected creation to come. The earthquake is then in general a sign of the almighty and powerful judgment of God upon the wicked world throughout all of history.

Further, the earthquake is in the second place a sign of the final judgment of God at the end of time. According to Revelation 16:18 "a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great" takes place at the very end of time in connection with the battle of Armageddon. When rightly understood in the light of Scripture, this earthquake is the primary means

whereby the present earth is destroyed in order that the new heavens and earth may come into existence. The earthquake of Revelation 16:18 will then be the final, catastrophic upheaval, resulting in the total destruction of the world as we know it. Of this final destruction all the other earthquakes are signs, also those of our day. When we understand the pattern of the book of Revelation, so that we see the progression of the seals to the trumpets to the vials to the final destruction, then it is clear that the earthquakes of the sixth seal and that preceding the seven trumpets are omens of that final tremor. God, as it were, gives warnings of that final catastrophe all through history, and with increasing clarity and frequency as the end approaches.

It is precisely that increasing clarity and frequency that the people of God see today if they are attentive to the signs of the times. Again in harmony with the pattern of the book of Revelation, we learn that progressively greater severity and intensity and frequency characterize the signs of the times as the end approaches. The data cited above make it very clear that we are witnessing this now, not only from the viewpoint of the frequency of major quakes, but also from the standpoint of their effect. These tremors, because of the development of communications and inter-dependence in the world of today, have a world-wide effect, especially from the economic viewpoint.

What then is the significance of these upheavals in nature? In the words of a Philippine official on the island of Mindanao, "God in all his glory did not let this happen without a reason." (*TIME*, August 30, 1976). I have no way of knowing whether or not this man understood what he said, but truer words could hardly have been spoken. The significance is exactly the glory of God. That is His purpose in all things, the highest goal of all that He is and does. God wishes and wills the glory of His own name. And therefore, all that He does has the manifestation and magnification of that glory as its reason. That is the reason for His salvation of His people in Jesus Christ. That is the central reason behind all that transpires in the history of heaven and earth. And that is also the deepest reason behind the sign of the earthquake. For, you understand, God glorifies Himself in and through the establishment and perfection of the kingdom of Christ. And the earthquake is one means whereby He realizes that kingdom. Make no mistake: God *will* be glorified. He will be glorified willingly and joyfully by His people, and in spite of themselves by the wicked. He will get that glory in the final and telic sense at the consummation; but He is even now getting it through the precursory signs, which testify to wicked and righteous alike that the final day of His glory is coming very fast.

As far as the wicked are concerned, the earthquake is a sign of the judgment unto condemnation. And wicked man can read those signs. Do not forget, he has what the Canons of Dordt call the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God. That in itself is sufficient to condemn him. But even the wicked in our day have the Scriptures, both in written form and through the preaching of the gospel, for the white horse of Revelation has run throughout almost the entire world. Certainly wicked man does not believe the Scriptures and will not be receptive to the message of judgment through natural phenomena as interpreted in those Scriptures. He devises all sorts of means to avoid the truth. Man has his Richter scale for measuring the severity of earthquakes, his seismometers for detecting them, and his communications for informing the entire world about them. Man attempts to alleviate the effects of earthquakes by sending relief to their victims and by repairing the damage done. Man today even attempts to predict when and where earthquakes will occur, though he must admit that up to this time he has had very little success. No doubt man will someday even try to prevent or control earthquakes, since he already understands their cause as being movements of the various plates which comprise the crust of the earth. But in all of this the testimony of God is inescapable: He is coming in Christ to establish His kingdom, and that coming shall be in the way of judgment. Therefore, wicked man is left totally without excuse for his obstinate rebellion, in order that he may be righteously condemned unto the exaltation of the glory of the sovereign God.

But also for us who are God's people these earthquakes have significance. Basically they testify to us as well as to the wicked that the coming of God in Christ is imminent. To us who see the signs of the times in nature, and read them properly in the light of God's Word, the message is that our Lord is coming. But for us the message is not one of doom and judgment, but of comfort and hope. Perhaps we may be afraid in a human sense of these signs, especially if we are affected by a terrible earthquake. But by faith we know and believe that these signs mean our swift and sure salvation. Listen, then, people of God, to these signs and their testimony. If you do listen, then you will hear the footsteps of Christ as He comes for salvation and judgment. You will hear those footsteps in the earth, so that the very ground trembles at His coming. And when you hear those heavy steps resounding throughout the world, then your faith will be strengthened in the knowledge and conviction that your Lord is coming to execute judgment upon all the workers of iniquity, and to redeem you and all His elect Zion in the way of judgment, unto eternal perfection in the new heavens and the new earth. Watch, therefore, unto His coming.

NEWS FEATURE

Fourth General Assembly: Presbyterian Church in America

E.C. Case, Pastor

The Memorial Auditorium in Greenville, South Carolina, provided the setting as the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America was gavelled to order by Retiring Moderator, Judge Leon F. Hendrick, on Tuesday evening, September 14. This was the fourth meeting of the court to be held in the nearly three years' existence of the PCA, and the first to be held some other place than in one of the denomination's churches. There are now some 400 churches in the PCA, all of which are entitled to send at least one commissioner to General Assembly. And, there are 431 ministers, each of whom may also sit in this court. Since there are few churches in the Assembly capable of handling so many commissioners, plus alternates and visitors, it is likely the court will be meeting in such auditoriums many times in the future, at least until the number of congregations exceeds 500, at which time the current practice of "grass roots" representation will be reviewed.

The first major order of business to come before the Assembly was the election of a new moderator. Two men were nominated: Ruling Elder Kenneth Keyes, a Miami, Fla. businessman who was quite active in the establishment of the PCA, and Dr. William A. McIlwane of Pensacola, Fla., a retired missionary with over 40 years service in Japan who also was active in the beginning stages of the PCA. Mr. Keyes, pleading ignorance of parliamentary procedure, asked that his name be withdrawn. Dr. McIlwane was elected without opposition.

The remainder of the first session was taken up mostly with worship, including the observance of the Lord's Supper. There was some business tended to, however. Fraternal delegates from other churches were recognized and allowed to bring greetings from their respective denominations. The Assembly heard from representatives of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, and the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. Fraternal delegates from the Christian

Reformed Church were recognized and heard from in a later session. All of the fraternal delegates, except the one from the ARP church, were from denominations involved, with the PCA, in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC), the establishment of which was formally recognized by this Assembly.

Another item of business disposed of the first evening was a recommendation from the Committee on Administration that the PCA make a bid to purchase Sullins College in Bristol, Va., with a view to housing Assembly offices there as well as establishing a college and seminary and having a place for various conferences. There is little doubt that this was a good deal, a real bargain, if you will. But, the prevailing mood was that this was simply too much of an investment, fraught with too many uncertainties, to be undertaken at this time. Also brought up in the discussion was the matter of whether a church, as such, ought to be in the education business, at least apart from seminary training. It was felt more study was needed in this area. Finally, as one commissioner pointed out, at the rate colleges are going under these days, should the PCA ever decide she wants a college, there will probably be several around from which to choose.

On the question of seminaries, the Assembly did approve a study of the matter which hopefully will result in the establishment, soon, of a denominational seminary. This course has received more support of late due to the deterioration of the situation at Reformed Seminary in Jackson, Ms., where a woman has been admitted to the Ministerial Degree program and grave concerns have been raised over the teachings of some professors.

One of the main areas of conflict at previous assemblies has been the foreign missions policy of the church, centering basically around the cooperative agreements which the PCA has with some independent evangelical mission boards. The Third Assembly sent to the churches, for study and suggestions, a

policy manual for missionary activity. On the basis of that study, revisions were made and presented to this assembly, which approved the manual for a two-year trial run. Though much has been done to overcome the objections of those who want a thoroughly Presbyterian and Reformed program, there are still some problems. The provision for cooperation with independent boards, which are not the church, remains, though the terms of the agreement which must be signed by these boards has been toughened up a bit, requiring that those sent under such arrangements must be free to preach and teach the Reformed faith and practise Presbyterian polity as comprehended in the Westminster Standards. Even so, cooperation with independent boards is a basic denial of the sufficiency of the courts of the Church as established by the Word of God. This sufficiency is recognized by the founding documents of the PCA, such as the "Message to all Churches of Jesus Christ" adopted by the First Assembly, which expresses the traditional Southern high view of Presbyterianism. Also, the Confession of Faith, Chapter 25, Section 3, states that Christ has given, "unto this catholic visible church...the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world: and doth, by His own presence and Spirit, according to His promise *make them effectual thereunto.*" (Emphasis mine-ECC). And, even the missions manual states that Presbyterian polity is Biblical and that the believer is to discharge his missionary responsibility through the church. Cooperation with boards, which are not the church, contradicts this. It may indeed be granted that movement in this matter has been, generally, in the right direction. However, there is the fear that progress may stop and even be reversed due to a prolonged usage of erroneous methodology. Corruption, in a respect, needs but a little beginning to become widespread.

The biggest disappointment in the area of foreign missions came with regard to the *possibility* of cooperation with national churches which are members of the World Council of Churches. At present, there is no such cooperation. However, in some nations, especially those of the so-called Third World, churches are required to join the WCC in order to organize. If the PCA is to work in these nations with these churches, she would have to accept this fact, so we are told. Rather than surrender a field, it is felt that we should be willing to work with a church even if it is a WCC member. This, of course, involves a most loathesome kind of compromise — compromise by working with a church which will not take a stand for the exclusive kingship of Jesus Christ over His Church. For this principle, many of our covenanting forefathers in Scotland gave their lives. But now, many are willing to abandon that heritage in order to

get into as many fields as possible as quickly as possible, not turning away any requests for principle's sake. This reflects the attitude of many in the PCA who refuse, it would seem, to acknowledge that the Lord closes some doors. If this attitude had been assumed by Paul when he was forbidden by the Spirit to preach the Word in Asia (acts 16:6), that apostle likely would have told God that He lacked vision. General Assembly apparently approves such insubordination and does so by an appeal to the Great Commission. But Paul also served under that Commission, so surely that can not be introduced as a reason for attempting to bridge, with the shaky timbers of compromise, chasms which God has established.

What little press attention was given the Assembly focused upon the issue of abortion which came before the court in an overture from Calvary Presbytery asking that the PCA, "protest, decry and abhor this mass slaughter of unborn babies who are persons by every right of the just laws of God and man," and that the Assembly call upon every responsible citizen to support the enactment of moral legislation that will protect the life of the unborn. This overture was answered in the affirmative, but not without some misgivings on the part of many. Does this involve the PCA in the area of social pronouncements in a manner unlawful insofar as a court of the Church is concerned? Or is this a legitimate condemnation of murder on an unprecedented scale? Perhaps the study committee appointed to deal with the issue will be able to give us some guidance on this matter. Most of us have had quite enough of the type of social and political intermeddling engaged in by the church of our former connection and cling strongly to the idea of the spirituality of the church. We do not, as one commissioner pointed out, want to see our agenda crowded with social and political matters.

One final thing which should be of interest to readers of this periodical is the fact that an attempt was made to get the Assembly to express fraternal concern to the Christian Reformed Church in connection with the issues raised by the Dutton appeal at the recent CRC Synod. This the Assembly refused to do, mainly (one hopes) because of the lack of information on the matter. But, would not such an expression of concern be a means of getting more information? Some of us question whether, in the light of this, the whole concept of NAPARC and fraternal relationships is nothing more than a mutual association of back-slapping "good ole boys" from the various churches. The only matter of substance anyone in NAPARC seems much interested in now is the union of the various bodies. One of the fraternal delegates was noted to have said, "I do not wish to die an Orthodox Presbyterian." To which this writer would reply, "Neither do I." It will be interesting to see how things develop in this area.

There were, of course, many other issues, chiefly of denominational interest, to come before the Assembly. This report has intended to touch only upon those of broader interest. It makes no claim to objectivity. This writer views the work of this assembly from a very definite theological and ecclesiastical perspective, which, it might be noted, is a minor-

ity perspective, at least in the PCA. On balance, one can only say that things are not as good in the PCA as might be hoped for or expected. But neither are they as bad as might be feared. The PCA is still very much in the toddler stage. Our prayer is that her formative years may be God-directed years.

ALL AROUND US

W.C.C. Meets in Nairobi C.R.C. Synod and Dr. Verhey

Rev. G. Van Baren

W.C.C. Meets in Nairobi

During the past summer, various of the councils of churches held their meetings — this time in the continent of Africa. Both the World Council of Churches and the International Council of Christian Churches (of which Dr. Carl McIntire is head) met in Nairobi, Kenya, in Africa. The Reformed Ecumenical Synod also met in Africa — but in Cape Town, South Africa. These meetings are scheduled in such locations because of the growing political power of the “third world” nations.

Perhaps at some future date we can present summaries of what was decided at these various meetings. For now, I would call your attention to the reaction of one man to what he saw and heard at one of these meetings: that of the W.C.C. in Nairobi.

In the *Presbyterian Journal* of Aug. 18, 1976, and *Evangelical Action* from Australia, a certain Dr. Byang H. Kato, General Secretary of the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar (who drowned shortly after this report was given) reports his impressions as an observer. He writes:

The Fifth WCC Assembly at Nairobi was more like a meeting of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) or some other economic or political meeting than a Christian meeting

This is not to say it had no Christian touch to it, no mention of the name of Jesus Christ, or that there were no Christians there. Many outstanding evan-

gelical Christians attended. However, the meeting had very little spiritual expression. I don't remember any time when the sessions were either opened or closed with prayer. Prayer was offered only in the form of a written document. Although worship should have been an integral part of the whole Assembly, it was unnoticeable. Even the sessions set aside for “worship” were of such dubious quality that it was hard to see the lesson being conveyed.

For example, the United Bible Societies took the first session of morning worship, presenting in music and drama the parable of the prodigal son who later found his way home. This parable, meant to teach the lostness of man in regard to salvation, implied instead that those outside the ecumenical movement were the lost son. Perhaps it was my failure, but I do not believe our Lord's simple picture story was intended to be so difficult that only a genius could understand

. . . At one place in the conference center where a long display board was mounted, people were allowed to write whatever they wished. Somebody wrote: “I have heard women's liberation and liberation from oppression. What about liberation from sin? I haven't heard it yet!”

. . . The Assembly had an admirable theme, “Jesus Christ Frees and Unites.” Spiritually concerned Africans exercised the caution of wait and see. Other African participants had on their agenda the primary goal of drawing the Assembly's attention to the question of the liberation on the continent.

At youth congresses in Arusha, Tanzania, and Limuru, Kenya, several proposals were drawn up for the Assembly, but none of the proposals showed concern for evangelism. The WCC spent lengthy hours every day dealing with every conceivable problem of man anywhere — with hardly a reference to sin as man's fundamental dilemma

The "mission" of the WCC is clearly secular and seems to be highly political. The political emphasis at the Assembly was leftist. After sitting through the Assembly, I came out feeling it would take a miracle to save most African countries from Communism. The stage is all set.

Things mentioned in the book of Revelation may be near at hand, though I realize we cannot be dogmatic about this. The marriage between the political and ecclesiastical systems seems very likely in our own age

. . . The effort for unity was not only for the unity of Christians. The documents that were prepared in advance for Nairobi indicated that there was a search for a common humanity, a search for human unity. And it was evident at this Assembly, because when the leaders gathered there, it was not only church leaders — not only Protestants, Orthodox, and Roman Catholics, but beyond Christendom as well. One day, in the discussion on "Seeking Community," there were seated on the platform not only Christian leaders, but there was a Sikh, a Muslim, a Hindu, a Buddhist, and this Jewish Rabbi. They were all involved in the discussion. There was a big applause, because we were at last successful in bringing these non-Christians to sit with us and share in the effort for unity.

The report contains much more which indicates the trend of the W.C.C. to be in the direction of an antichristian world religion and world power. That this is the case is not surprising. What is disturbing is that so-called evangelicals can continue to tell themselves that they can function in and with the W.C.C. and make their "good" influence felt. At best, this is nothing else than an attempt to unite light and darkness.

C.R.C. Synod and Dr. Verhey

The Christian Reformed Synod of this past June was confronted with an appeal from Dutton (Mich.) Christian Reformed Church against a decision of Classis Grand Rapids East in approving Dr. Allen Verhey for ordination at its meeting of Sept. 18, 1975. It seems that Dr. Verhey (who has now been ordained and is presently teaching at Hope College) made two statements in his examination which met with strong disapproval of some at the Classis. According to the Dutton appeal, Dr. Verhey "plainly stated in his examination that he did not believe that the serpent spoke to Eve as reported in Genesis 3 and that he believed that the earthquake reported in

Matthew 28:2 should be understood as an eschatological symbol and not necessarily as a fact." Nevertheless, Classis approved the examination and the synodical deputies representing neighboring classes also approved — though with advice that Verhey be dealt with pastorally by his consistory (Neland Ave. C.R.C.).

The Synod, in effect, rejected the appeal of Dutton. It refused to judge the errors presented but insisted that Dutton did not follow proper procedure in dealing with this case. Rather the Synod advised Dutton: "... if they remain convinced that the position of Dr. Verhey brings him into conflict with the confessions they must follow the procedures outlined in the Form of Subscription and the Church Order."

Without considering the merit or error of the decision, I would quote just a few of the reactions within the C.R.C. to the entire incident. Dr. Leonard Greenway, one of the Synodical deputies which approved the final examination, writes in the September 1976 *Outlook*:

It is regrettable that in all the discussion that has ensued following the action of Classis last September relatively little recognition has been given to the many important elements in the doctrinal examination of Dr. Verhey where his answers were very acceptable

The area where Dr. Verhey's answers provoked lengthy discussion was in Hermeneutics and specifically his interpretation of the speaking serpent in Genesis 3 and the earthquake reported in Matthew 28. Here Dr. Verhey adopted a less than literal interpretation and confused us by suggesting that we were asking the wrong questions

The synodical deputies were led to conclude that brother Verhey in his application of hermeneutical principles was involving himself in ambiguities The synodical deputies felt that here was a restricted and localized matter that could be taken care of by Dr. Verhey's consistory without delaying the plans for his ordination

One wonders to how many "ambiguities" of this nature a candidate is entitled before he would be refused the privilege of being ordained into the ministry.

Editor DeKoster in the *Banner* (Sept. 10, 1976) writes:

The Candidate said, apparently, that Moses and St. Matthew need not be taken literally. For that he was long detained in his candidate's examination, and the subject of a protest carried all the way to Synod

But what did the Candidate say that had not already been paralleled by a Synodical study committee (indeed said, in effect, by two Synodical study committees — the other reporting in 1973), namely, that what the Bible says very plainly, and quite liter-

ally, in the Epistles to Corinth and to Timothy, need not be taken literally? A committee's "meat" is a Candidate's "poison"? . . .

So that there may be no mistake about it, I probably should recall that I argued here that both of those study committees were mistaken, and I think that the views attributed to the Candidate are likewise in error.

Nonetheless, it seems to me that either the Church hereafter owes such study committees a Motherly admonition, or its newly ordained Minister an apology. There cannot be one standard for the "scholar", and another for the pulpit!

The Association of Christian Reformed Laymen in their *Bulletin* of Aug. 1976 present a far more serious charge, one, it seems to me, they cannot maintain while remaining within the denomination. One can understand some of their frustrations, but their conclusions are too serious to allow them to remain within the fold, for they accuse of "treason" and "irrevo-

cable" decisions of their Synod. They write:

Synod "baits" Dutton by reminding them that *IF* they remain convinced that the position of Dr. Verhey brings him in conflict with the confessions, then they must follow the procedures outlined in the Form of Subscription and the Church Order. As one of our retired ministers recently said, "The way of appeal is now the road to oblivion." How true it is. Decisions of this kind are by the nature of the case *irrevocable*. Synod has committed treason to the Lord Who has given His life for us. We hope and pray that all local consistories, which by way of Scripture and the Church Order are the center of all authority in the C.R.C., consider the action of synod as *not* settled and binding for them and take united action to rescind this decision and in the meantime deny Dr. Verhey access to their pulpits. We know this is speaking plainly, and it saddens us that it must be so, but the C.R.C. is espousing two entirely different religions. If one decides for one, he decides against the other.

— NOTICE OF LECTURE —

On October 29, 1976 at 8:00 P.M. in First Church, our annual Reformation Day Lecture will be given. Rev. M. Joostens will speak on "The Priesthood Of All Believers". Plan to attend and urge others also to hear this interesting lecture.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Adult Bible Class of Faith Protestant Reformed Church (Jenison Mich.), wishes to extend their sympathy to Mrs. Charles Westra and family in the loss of husband and father, CHARLES WESTRA.

We pray that our Heavenly Father's love will sustain and comfort you through every coming day.

"Blessed be God . . . the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort." (II Cor. 1:3).

Rev. M. Joostens, Pres.
Frank Block, Sec'y.—Treas.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On September 28, 1976, our beloved parents, MR. AND MRS. GEORGE KAMPS, JR. celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary.

We, their grateful children and grandchild, are thankful to our faithful covenant God for the many years of love and Christian instruction they have given us. Our sincere prayer is for God's continued blessing on them in the years which lie ahead of them.

Rienetta Muhlheim
Peter
Jacelyn
Henry Benjamin
Linda Corrine
Christine Grace
Calvin George
Leon Marvin
Gretchen Jean
Benntte Martin
Timothy Steven Kamps
and Christine Elaine (grandchild).

REPORT OF CLASSIS WEST September 1 & 2, 1976

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches met for two days, September 1 and 2, in Loveland, Colorado. After Rev. M. Hoeksema opened with devotions, addressing Classis from Jude 3, and presided over the approving of the credentials, Rev. M. Kamps took over the chair.

Classis heard reports from various committees and instructed its Taped Sermon Committee to investigate the possibility of some revision of the taped sermon program.

Classis ratified Articles of Incorporation that had

been drawn up under the direction of its Classical Committee.

An overture from the Council of South Holland to use money recently bequeathed to Classis in the establishing of a retirement fund for Protestant Reformed ministers was rejected.

In executive session, Classis advised a consistory to proceed with the second step of censure with two members, after the Classis had been informed concerning the cases by the delegates of the church involved.

Redlands asked and received classical appointments during her vacancy.

Much of Classis' time was devoted to two appeals that lodged objections against the preaching in a congregation. Classis rejected both appeals on the ground that the accusations were not substantiated.

The consistory of the Edmonton, Canada congregation addressed a letter to Classis in which they expressed their thankfulness "to the Lord Who has so abundantly blessed us in this past year, since we, as the Edmonton congregation, have joined your fellowship." It added that they "count it a great privilege that our church is now a member of your classis and

part of your denomination. Words are insufficient to express the beauty of the unity in faith and purpose we now may experience! To experience this full assurance, without a doubt, that God's Word is the truth, with you our fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord, is a gift of God's grace. May we be found ever faithful to that Word of truth, guided by the true confessions of our fathers which we hold so dear!"

Classis will meet next in Hull, Iowa on March 3, 1977, the Lord willing.

The cost of the Classis was \$3,020.58.

Rev. David Engelsma,
Stated Clerk
Classis West

News From Our Churches

Recently Rev. Marvin Kamps was installed as the new pastor of our church in Doon, Iowa. Rev. Kamps' former charge was in Redlands, California. The Redlands congregation extended a call to Rev. Jason Kortering who has been serving the congregation at Hull, Iowa, just a few miles from Doon. Rev. Kortering has accepted the call to Redlands. Hull has made the following trio: Revs. Dale Kuiper, Mark Hoeksema, and Ronald Van Overloop.

The following report from our missionary, Rev. Harbach, was printed in our Hope Church (Walker, Michigan) bulletin: "The Protestant Reformed worship services here in the Houston area, as to anything soundly Presbyterian/Reformed in church government, doctrine and church and home life, are like an oasis in a desert. We are accumulating a reputation here, as people are beginning to discover, that as to the theological liberal versus conservative issue, we are definitely on the conservative side. Happy we are to see that there are some looking for a place where the infallible Word of God and the Reformed truth are prized and conserved. As a result, four families have recently come our way and now worship with us. These newcomers, as with our old stand-bys, are of Westminster Standards stock. Hence, they are not being exposed to Calvinism and the

Reformed Faith for the first time, but are Reformed people, and desirous of organizing soon into a Protestant Reformed Church. We thank the Lord for the increase of these fellow saints. One of these families was recently blessed with a son, Jonathan Edwards. We soon (D. V.) begin catechism classes with the addition of five new pupils! Now, too, there is also prospect of beginning a young people's society. 'Brethren, pray for us,' that we may have spiritual strength and wisdom in our labors and upon them the continued blessing of our covenant God."

The construction of a new church building for our Hudsonville, Michigan congregation seems to be a co-operative undertaking. The following notice appeared in their September 5th bulletin: "The consistory would like to have as many men as possible to come out Wednesday and help nail furring strips on the inside wall of our church building. Please take your own hammer." The following week this appeared: "Repeat: Furring strip mechanics: Brethren, continue your good labors on Monday evening and help nail down our future church." It sounds as if the Hudsonville brethren are literally pounding their way into a new building!

K. G. V.