

The STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Would that there would be more of the attitude
today which is expressed in Luther's hymn:

That word above all earthly powers —
No thanks to them — abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours
Through Him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill,
God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.

See "Thoughts For Reformation Day" — page 55

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THE STANDARD BEARER

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MEDITATION

The Christian's Shoes

Rev. H. Veldman

“And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” Eph. 6:15

How beautifully this third part of the Christian's armour follows upon the girdle of truth and the breastplate of righteousness! They belong together; the one follows upon the other. Having experienced the wonder of being righteous in Christ before God, the Word of God becomes for us the gospel of peace, and nothing is more wonderful in the consciousness of the Christian warrior than peace.

As the truth is the girdle and righteousness the breastplate, so this preparation of the gospel of peace is our heavily spiked military shoes. We do not read of a preparedness *unto* the gospel of peace, but of a preparedness *of* the gospel of peace. Of course, the church must always be ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. And every child of God must be ready to give an account of the hope that is in him. But the

text speaks of a preparedness of the gospel of peace. This is a preparedness which comes to us from the gospel of peace. It is this gospel of peace which constitutes the Christian soldier's preparedness in the world, enables him to stand in the midst of his fearful battle and struggle.

THEIR IDEA

How wonderful is the gospel! The gospel in this text surely refers to the entire Scriptures. The whole Word of God is the gospel because every part of it is related to the gospel. Besides, the word "gospel" means: good news, glad tidings.

In Galatians 3:8 the gospel is obviously identified with the promise. God, preaching the gospel to Abraham, preached the promise to him. Hence, the gospel is no offer. How could a mere offer, God's offer of salvation to all men, dependent, therefore, upon the will of a sinner, ever be good news? How could such a preaching serve this Christian warrior, equip him with these military shoes for the battle? Need we say more?

The gospel is good news because it concerns the promise. And God's promise is a divine solemn announcement of what He will do, never dependent upon anything outside of Himself. The promise of God is unconditional — He alone fulfills it. This is clearly stated in Heb. 6:13-14. The promise of God is as sure and as faithful as God is faithful. Fact is, He confirms it with an oath — see Heb. 6:13-18. And this promise is also strictly particular. Heb. 6:17-18 speaks of God's immutable counsel and the heirs of the promise, namely the elect.

Indeed, the promise is good news, glad tidings. This is true, first of all, because of Him Who promises: the unchangeably faithful covenant God. This is true, secondly, because of him to whom the promise is made. Mind you, we are conceived and born dead in sins and in trespasses. We are hopelessly lost in our sin and guilt, worthy of eternal condemnation, do not desire salvation and can do nothing in our own behalf. And, thirdly, please notice what is promised by God! The Lord promises, not only salvation, but salvation in everlasting glory and heavenly immortality.

We read now of the gospel of peace. Hence, peace is the content of this gospel, these glad tidings. Indeed, how rich, according to Scripture, is the gospel! It is as rich in its content as the promise of God is rich. Of course, the content of the promise is Christ. This promise implies the forgiveness of sins, our righteousness before God in Christ, and our adoption unto children of God. It implies that we receive, in Christ, all the spiritual blessings of salvation, that we are heirs of eternal life and glory, of the

incorruptible and undefilable inheritance that fadeth not away. Indeed, the gospel has for its content Christ and all His spiritual blessings of salvation as ultimately realized in heavenly life and glory.

In this text we read of the gospel of peace. Peace means harmony, unity, concord. God is the God of peace. The true God is in perfect harmony with Himself. Peace for us is harmony and fellowship with God. Spiritual peace means that, spiritually, we, who by nature are enemies of God, are now at peace with Him, love Him, and live in blessed harmony with Him. But we can also speak of peace in the judicial sense. This means that the middle wall of partition between God and us has been removed, that the guilt of sin has been paid, that His covenant fellowship with us has been established as according to His law, that God has reconciled us to Himself and we are heirs of His fellowship and communion. It is this judicial peace which is meant in this text. To have this peace means that we have the unspeakably blessed assurance of heart and soul that God is not against us but for us, that He has made peace with us, has laid the basis and foundation for His eternal covenant of friendship with us.

The gospel of peace! The gospel of peace is the gospel that proclaims peace. As the gospel of peace, it is also the power of God which also works peace in our souls and consciousness, grants us the assurance that all is well between the living God and us. Indeed, of all the blessings of salvation, of all the riches of the promise of the gospel, the apostle singles out this one, lays his finger upon this one gift of grace as so necessary and vital for the Christian soldier in the midst of the world.

And now we read of the preparedness of the gospel of peace. We interpret this expression, "preparedness of the gospel of peace," in the same sense as the other similar expressions in this Christian armour. Even as the girdle of trust, etc., means that the truth is the girdle, so the gospel of peace is this preparedness, and this preparedness constitutes our shoes in this battle. This preparedness of the gospel of peace means that this peace, as wrought in Christ and experienced in the soul and consciousness of the Christian warrior, is our preparedness. It constitutes our heavily spiked shoes, enabling us to stand in the battle, to hold our ground and sustain every onslaught of the enemy.

THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

Surely, the apostle here is not speaking of a preparedness, a readiness, for the gospel of peace. The idea, then, would be that we must be ready to preach the gospel; preaching it, we will turn the hearts and minds of many of our enemies to become friends and join our ranks in this struggle of the ages. How impossible is this view! The apostle here is emphasizing

ing the gigantic struggle of all the ages between the Church and the World, between the seed of the serpent and that of the woman. That world surely never becomes the church, that Seed of the woman never becomes that of the serpent, even as wolves never become sheep and the tares never become wheat. The question here is not how many of the foe we can induce to join our ranks, but that we are engaged with him in a relentless, uncompromising struggle even until the end.

These shoes are the spiked shoes, the hobnailed sandals of the Roman soldier. With these shoes he stands, holds his own, maintains his position, cannot be forced into surrender or retreat.

How wonderful are these shoes of this preparedness of the gospel of peace! Why can I sustain my position in the midst of this struggle of the ages? Why is it that this gospel of peace grants me this preparedness, this state of heart and mind and soul to be able to endure? Are not the odds stacked up hopelessly against me . . . ?

On the one hand, we now have peace with God. God is now for me; who can, therefore, be against me? God is on my side; what, then, can man or all the forces of hell and darkness do unto me? What else matters now? I am righteous in Christ before God; my sins and iniquities are all forgiven; I am an heir of everlasting glory. Indeed, with all due consideration to whatever may be my distress in the world, what does it really matter? Can this present light affliction (2 Cor. 4:17) be compared with the glory that shall follow? Can this life ever be compared with that which is to come? Shall one drop of affliction and sorrow (in comparison with the eternal bliss) be likened to that endless ocean of immortal life and bliss? I am at peace with God: He is for me and on my side; this I know through the wonder of the gospel of peace. However, this is not all. Fact is, I am as yet in the battle, in the struggle of the ages. O, this affliction may be light when compared with the endless glory and immortality, but the fact remains that I am as yet in this affliction, and this suffering can be very hard and grievous.

But, there is still more. On the other hand, this peace with God surely means more than that God is for me and that my eternal victory is, therefore, sure and certain. It also means that I am now more than conqueror, that God is for me, also now. It also means that He causes all things, now, to work together for my good, yea, that every attack of the enemy somehow is necessary unto my eternal life and glory. I have peace with God! Then I also have peace with all things.

THEIR APPROPRIATION

The Holland translation is better here. It is better because it reads that we must shoe our feet.

Indeed, this preparedness is not our work. We read literally: "Having shod our feet with the preparedness of the gospel of peace." This preparedness is surely not our work. O, we do not make these thickly spiked shoes. They were surely prepared for us, eternally and upon the cross. . . . And it is only by His irresistible grace and Holy Spirit that we become partakers of this preparedness. God it is Who unites us with Christ by His gift, a true and living faith.

Yet, we must put these shoes upon our feet. That is, we must enter consciously, through faith, into this work of God in Christ. We must appropriate it unto ourselves. We must study the gospel, familiarize ourselves with all that it declares to us concerning this mighty peace-making work of God in Christ Jesus. We must surely know the Scriptures, all the Scriptures, how God made peace with us in Christ, and how true it is that He is for us, always for us, and never against us. We must live near these Scriptures, appropriate them unto ourselves by a true and living faith; and when we are in the thick of the battle and inclined to become discouraged and despondent, we must stand in that gospel of peace, look at our present light affliction in the light of the unfailing promises of our God, and believe that also now everything is working that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (2 Cor. 4:18). Indeed, also in the battle we are more than conquerors.

EDITORIALS

Prof. H.C. Hoeksema

"Our Song of Hope" - A Critique (6)

The next item which we wish to examine with respect to this proposed new confession of the Re-

formed Church in America is its teachings, if any, concerning the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Naturally, in connection with the atonement there are also other aspects of the doctrine concerning Christ which are involved.

First of all, we may note that "Our Song of Hope" seems to emphasize strongly the church's hope — this is the term used, not "faith" — in Jesus Christ. In Stanza 2 we read: "We know Christ to be our only hope." Stanza 3 opens with the words, "Our only hope is Jesus Christ." Again, Stanza 4 begins, "Jesus Christ is the hope of God's world." And even Stanza 5 sounds a similar note: "Our ascended Lord gives hope for two ages."

Superficially considered, this sounds rather good, doesn't it?

However, in the second place, we must not be fooled by the mere use of high-sounding words. We must inquire carefully: precisely who is this Jesus Christ of whom "Our Song" speaks? We may pass by the strange fact that this confession never speaks at all of *faith* and of *believing*. This is in itself, to say the least, very odd in a confession; and it renders suspect even the use of the term "hope," of which this would-be creed seems to be so fond. For, after all, what is hope without faith? But let that be. Who is the Jesus Christ spoken of in this confession? Is He the Christ of the Scriptures? Is He Jesus the complete Savior, in whom we find all things necessary to our salvation? Is He the Savior Who saveth us and delivereth us from our sins? (Heid. Catechism, 29 & 30) Is He our "only High Priest, who by the one sacrifice of his body, has redeemed us"? (Heid. Cat. 31) Is He the One Who has redeemed us, both soul and body, from all our sins with His precious blood? (Heid. Cat. 34) Is He the Mediator Who "with His innocence and perfect holiness, covers in the sight of God, my sins, wherein I was conceived and brought forth"? (Heid. Cat. 36) Is He the Savior Who so suffered that He "sustained in body and soul, the wrath of God against the sins of all mankind: that so, by his passion, as the only propitiatory sacrifice, he might redeem our body and soul from everlasting damnation, and obtain for us the favor of God, righteousness and eternal life"? (Heid. Cat. 37) Is He the Savior Who humbled himself unto death "Because with respect to the justice and truth of God, satisfaction for our sins could be made no otherwise, than by the death of the Son of God"? (Heid. Cat. 40)

You see, I am asking whether "Our Song" believes in blood atonement, whether it believes in vicarious, that is, substitutionary atonement, whether it believes in atonement through satisfaction of the justice of God, whether it believes in atonement through payment of the debt of our guilt, whether it believes in an atoning death of Christ through which all His own are perfectly righteous before the bar of divine justice. And I am asking these questions purposely,

because in Appendix B the point is specifically made that "Our Song" parts ways with the Heidelberg Catechism when it comes to the term "righteousness." Now anyone who has even passing acquaintance with the Catechism will know that it speaks often of righteousness and that it lays great stress on the necessity of being righteous before God. He will also know that our Catechism speaks of being righteous in the judicial, the legal sense of the word, righteous before the bar of divine justice. With regard to our sin and misery the Catechism is concerned, first of all, with our *justification*, whether that be our objective justification in the atoning blood of the Mediator or whether it be our justification by faith and before our own consciousness. In other words, what is really at stake here is that great heritage of the Reformation, *justification by faith* through the meritorious death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But of this kind of righteousness and of the atoning death of our Lord Jesus Christ which is the basis of such righteousness "Our Song of Hope" wants nothing.

One can sense the direction of "Our Song" already in Stanza 3, when it speaks the following language:

He was born of the virgin Mary,
sharing our genes and our instincts,
entering our culture, speaking our language,
fulfilling the law of our God.
Being united to His humanity,
we know ourselves when we rest in Him.

Don't be deceived by the reference to His birth of the virgin Mary. Note, rather, that already here "Our Song" misses the point completely and deliberately. That point is that Christ "assumed the flesh and blood of the children" — our human nature; that He became like unto us in all things, sin excepted; that He did so in order that "through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. . . . Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." (Hebrews 2:14-17) That point is that "when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." (Gal. 4:4, 5) The point is not at all that we are or can be "united to His humanity," and thus "know ourselves when we rest in Him." What kind of jargon is that? No, no, He united to Himself our human nature, in order that by His death and resurrection He might raise it out of sin and guilt and death unto righteousness and holiness and life.

But the entire trend of "Our Song" to present a doctrine of reconciliation much like that being promoted in the Netherlands by Wiersinga, a doctrine of reconciliation which does not acknowledge a Christ Who bore the judgment of God against our sins, Who did not die an atoning death for the satisfaction of God's justice — that trend becomes very evident in the first part of Stanza 4:

Jesus Christ is the hope of God's world.

In His death,
the justice of God is established;
forgiveness of sin is proclaimed.

Note very carefully that it does not say, "In His death, the justice of God is satisfied." This difference of language is deliberate, not accidental. Proof? I refer you to the commentary on this stanza by Dr. Heideman:

"One can say many things about the significance of His death. For our times, we begin by singing about just two points. One is that in His death, the justice of God rather than any other legal, political, or social system is established as the way the world is to live." (page 27)

Notice that the reference is to divine justice as a way of life, something altogether different from the way in which our creeds speak of the justice of God, as well as altogether different from the way in which Scripture speaks of the righteousness of God revealed in Christ.

But if there is any doubt as to whether this language of "Our Song" is deliberate, let me call attention to the fact that in the study questions on page 29 this very difference is broached: "Some persons have suggested that lines 3-4 should read: 'The justice of God is satisfied, the offer of forgiveness is proclaimed.' What would be implied in the change of wording? Would you prefer such a change?"

It stands to reason, of course, that once having deliberately by-passed the truth of atonement through satisfaction, "Our Song" has to follow by corrupting the doctrine of Christ's resurrection. It could hardly view the resurrection of Christ as the seal of our justification, as the power of a new life, and the pledge of our bodily resurrection, as do Scripture and the Reformed confessions. This is what it states:

On the day of His resurrection,
the tomb was empty; His disciples saw Him;
death was defeated; new life had come.
God's purpose for His world was sealed.

More garbage!

And if you wondered as you read the above language whether "Our Song" is fully committed to

the real and bodily resurrection of Christ, you had a healthy suspicion. Read the following commentary (p. 28):

"The words about the empty tomb are important to us. We know that our modern learning has a good deal of skepticism about these words. The accounts in the Gospels do not fit together as well as we might wish; therefore, modern historians as well as scientists would like to have a little more evidence. When we bear witness to the resurrection, we do not know exactly what we mean in terms of biological or chemical processes. Nevertheless, the words about the empty tomb ring true to us because they are consistent with God's love for this world in which we live. We are always tempted to try to escape from this material existence into a more spiritual area; we would like to give up life in this world in order to be in heaven. But these words about the empty tomb keep us firmly within our own space and time. If God is concerned about the dead body of Jesus, then we know that He is also concerned about the bodies of men and women living in the world today. His salvation covers our whole existence — body, mind and spirit. Whatever stands in need of saving can receive His salvation."

How poverty-stricken is "Our Song's" confession! It does not dare confess forthrightly Christ's bodily resurrection. How, then, could it find any real significance in that resurrection? It only means that God is concerned about the bodies of men and women living in the world today!

It is, of course, wholly unnecessary after all this to ask whether "Our Song" believes in *limited* atonement. The truth so succinctly set forth in Canons II, 8 is farthest from the minds of the composers of "Our Song." Worse than that, however, universalism is not even explicitly rejected. Read the following — and weep:

"The stanza ends by singing about God's purpose for the world. We cannot comprehend all that is included in this phrase. We know that somehow the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ extends to the whole creation, for His work is greater than the sin of man which touches all that we know. When the church has considered the impact of salvation in Christ, it has always been tempted by what is known as 'universalism,' the teaching that in the end all men and all things will be saved. The church has always rejected that teaching because it implies that we need not take the sin of man seriously; Christians then can easily become a complacent people, ignoring God and human need alike. On the other hand, we have been tempted to restrict the impact of that salvation to a few faithful or elect souls who have been plucked from the fire, while the great mass of

mankind together with this world is eternally lost. As Our Song goes on, we will become more conscious of how we stand apart from these two extremes. At the same time, we will wait upon the Lord for His judgment; His boundaries are not known to us. We

only know that He is filled with righteousness and mercy as that has been revealed and accomplished in the death and resurrection of Jesus."

And this is a confession for a Reformed church?

Thoughts For Reformation Day

As I write this, Reformation Day is approaching. The four hundred sixtieth anniversary of the great Reformation of the sixteenth century will soon be upon us. As you read this, that occasion will be just past.

It is not amiss, therefore, that our thoughts should turn to the subject of the reformation of the church.

Those thoughts, however, should not only be thoughts of thankful commemoration of a past event. Nor should they only be thoughts of admiration of such ecclesiastical giants and warriors as a Martin Luther and a John Calvin. They should be thoughts pertinent to the present, pertinent to the present condition of the church, pertinent to our calling to be "Reformed, and ever reforming," pertinent to the question whether we are faithful to our Reformation heritage.

Let me raise some questions in this connection.

In the first place, could and would the Reformation take place today? Or is it true, perhaps, that if a Luther or a Calvin had assumed the attitude of many in the church today, we would all still be in the Roman Catholic Church?

You are inclined to think that is a bit of a melodramatic question?

I think not. On the contrary, it is realistic.

Viewing only what is referred to as the Reformed community, what do we see? Everywhere, but especially both in this country and in the Netherlands, there is sad deformation. To catalogue the errors, cardinal errors, which have made their ugly appearance in Reformed churches only within the last ten or fifteen years, let alone the past fifty, would require more than the space of a brief article. To mention only a few of the outstanding ones, there is the denial of the inspiration and authority and infallibility of Holy Scripture, the denial of the truth of creation, the denial of the historicity of the first eleven chapters of Genesis, the denial of sovereign reprobation, the denial of sovereign election from eternity, the denial of the vicarious bearing of the wrath of God in the death of Christ, the denial of definite (limited atonement), and there is the Arminian error of free-offerism and free-willism —

principally the very same Semi-Pelagianism which saturated the Roman Catholic Church at the time of Luther and Calvin. Then we have not even mentioned yet the rampant horizontalism and social gospelism or the tremendous tendency toward world conformity, and that, too, with the blessing of the church.

And what is done?

Some, indeed, have raised ecclesiastical protests. Others cry about the futility of protest. Still others wring their hands in the public ecclesiastical press, filling page after page with negativistic chronicles of the sore ills plaguing their denomination. Others complain more mildly, even threatening to withdraw financial support for the church's institutions. Others seek refuge in gimmicks such as "emergency congregations" or propose the establishment of "household congregations" within their denomination — because the truth is that they either cannot or will not accomplish reformation through separation. And meanwhile ecclesiastical assemblies hold a protective hand over those guilty of error either through endless discussion (dialogue) or through shunting matters to study committees; or else the assemblies themselves uphold and promulgate the errors.

But is there reformation?

Is there even a genuine willingness to accomplish reformation — either reformation from within the church or reformation through separation?

Is there not only a holy indignation at the God-dishonoring errors, but also a positive seeking and maintaining and proclaiming of the unadulterated truth of God's Word?

Is there the firm and resolute "Here I stand" attitude of a Martin Luther?

And among the ministers of the gospel is there a resolute concern to militate against all errors repugnant to the confessions, to warn against error, but also positively to proclaim the full-orbed "faith once delivered to the saints" and to instruct God's people and cause them to grow in the riches of the truth and to develop in the line of our confessions? Or is there concern for an easy position, for a high salary and fringe benefits, for a comfortable parsonage? Is there a reluctance to "rock the boat"? Is

there fear that one might lose his pension? Is there fear of standing alone? Is there a tendency to "count noses" to see how many might perhaps go along if there were a split, lest one might find himself isolated in a small and insignificant "splinter group"?

And how about you yourself? Where do you stand? What would you do? No, what are you doing? Are you at ease in Zion?

A final question: do you beseech God earnestly that He will bring about reformation? For after all, genuine reformation is His work, the work of His sovereign grace alone. And if you do beseech Him, is your own attitude and are your actions in accord with

your prayer? Or is that prayer a piece of hypocritical mockery?

Would that there would be more of the attitude today which is expressed in Luther's hymn:

That word above all earthly powers —
No thanks to them — abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours
Through Him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill,
God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.

CORRESPONDENCE AND REPLY

Concerning "Life After Life" - Some Questions

*Pastor E. C. Case
Woodville, Mississippi*

In two recent articles the Rev. Mark Hoeksema has discussed the "findings" of Dr. Raymond Moody concerning what is popularly called "Life After Life," which relates to the experiences of individuals who, though declared clinically dead, have lived to tell some strange things which happened to them while "dead." The reader may refresh his memory by referring to Rev. Hoeksema's articles. Briefly, he approached the issue from the point of view of II Timothy 3:5, suggesting that the experiences reported and their interpretation represent something of that phenomenon of the last days — a form of godliness without the power thereof.

Concerning this I have some questions:

1. Do these experiences really manifest a "form of godliness," or is it more likely that here is an example of devilish deception by the one who sometimes casts himself as an angel of light (II Cor. 11:14)? After all, it cannot possibly be maintained that these people were actually dead. "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment." (Heb. 9:27) Thus, their experiences are not those of people who have returned from the "other side." Add the fact that not all those who had these experiences are Christian, and you have a problem explaining why the experiences were almost always pleasant. Does Rev. Hoeksema suggest that God would so mislead the ungodly? Is it not more likely that Satan is deceiving people into a view of death that does not square with Scripture's facts?

2. What does Rev. Hoeksema mean when he asks

in his second article (9/1/'77), "Is it not possible that the descriptions given . . . approach the truth of the glory of which the Bible speaks?" (p. 472) and then, a bit further on (p. 473), ". . . is it not the will of God to encourage His saints by this *revelation* (italics added) be it by means even of wicked men giving them a partial and imperfect glimpse into the future glory of the faithful?" What meaneth this "revelation?" Surely Rev. Hoeksema does not believe in "revelation" in the sense in which pentecostalism speaks of it.

What then? Should we not be warning our people against the deception involved in this "Life After Life" madness, rather than finding good things to say about it?

Please Rev. Hoeksema — some clarification.

REPLY

I would like to thank Pastor Case for his questions regarding my articles on "Life After Life." It is evident to me that he writes in the spirit of a friendly and Christian attempt to further our knowledge of God's revelation especially as it applies to our lives in the end times. I reply in the same spirit, attempting to answer some of the questions he has raised.

The first question implies the necessity of choosing between two mutually exclusive viewpoints: Do these experiences manifest a form of godliness, or are they an example of devilish deception? While I have said the former, Pastor Case seems to take the latter position, and implies also that such a choice must be

made. That alternative I do not accept, because I do not believe that these are mutually exclusive alternatives, I think that rather the point is that both must be taken together, in the sense that this devilish deception is part of the form of godliness. It must be remembered that the godliness concerns form only, and not contents; this in itself implies that there is deception involved, and we know that the father of deception and the lie is the devil. Surely, then, this matter of Life After Life is an example of devilish deception that God allows the devil to practice on the wicked; but it cannot be denied that even this deception comes in the garb of a form of godliness. And is not this the way in which the devil always works?

Regarding the other statements and questions appended to this first major question, I would observe the following. Pastor Case asserts that the people under discussion did not have the experiences of people who returned from the other side, implying on the basis of Heb. 9:27 that this would be impossible. But is it? What about Lazarus and the daughter of Jairus, as well as other Scriptural examples? Why could not the same phenomenon occur today, given the abilities of modern medicine? If these people did not return from the "other side," then from where, being dead in the fullest sense of the word as we understand death, did they return? Pastor Case also refers to a problem of explaining that all the experiences were pleasant, whereas Scripture presents a picture of judgment and damnation. Exactly this problem I raised in my first article, but the problem was solved in Dr. Moody's second book, in which he speaks of negative experiences. Pastor Case wonders whether I mean to suggest that God is misleading the ungodly. My intention in my articles was not to express an opinion on that particular point, but if asked directly, then I reply that that is certainly within the realm of possibility. II Thess. 2:11-12 says (in the context of reprobation) that "God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." To answer the last question, surely Satan is deceiving people into accepting an erroneous view of death, but always under the sovereign control of Almighty God and for His purposes.

Regarding the second main question and its connected items, Pastor Case questions my application of this whole matter to the people of God, and wonders

if we should be busy in warning our people against such evils. Regarding this matter of warning, I agree, and the whole tone of my articles, as well as specific statements, reflect that spirit. I admit that I did not state this warning directly, but rather implied it, even in the titles of these articles, which spoke of form without power. Is that assuming too much on the part of our people? And most emphatically, Pastor Case, I do not believe in any Pentecostal conception of revelation. Perhaps that word was ill-chosen because of its wrong use by many today, so I am open to the suggestion of a better one. I do, however, stand by my interpretation of the significance of this whole matter for the people of God. I do not mean at all to deny that there is a large negative element of the lie, deception, and wickedness involved, against which God's people must be warned. But is the meaning of this limited to a negative application? If we believe that God does all things for the sake of His elect church, and that *all* things must, in one way or another, serve the redemption of the saints, then does not the matter of life after death do this also? I do not mean to suggest that all that has been reported is fact, but implied the opposite in asking in my second article, "Assuming that even a small part of what Dr. Moody reports is true, why does God in His sovereign control choose to reveal these things?" Surely God does not use unbelievers to instruct the church in the truths of the kingdom of heaven, for unbelievers cannot even perceive the spiritual realities of the kingdom. Nor, as I stated in my second article, must we view this matter as proof to faith, since faith rests upon the Word of God in Christ alone. Faith, then, does not view this matter as an extra-Scriptural form of God's revelation. But do all these negative truths preclude the possibility that God's people see some positive purpose in all of this? Perhaps there is no positive significance, or perhaps the positive significance is not what I implied in my articles. That, too, is exactly the reason why I put the matter of any positive application in question form; I did not take any hard and fast position, exactly because matters of life after death are deep waters in which to swim. But if the positive significance is not what I implied it could be, then what is it?

I hope that these answers satisfy the questions, Pastor Case, and that I have corrected any mistaken impressions you might have. Again, thanks for your interest!

Rev. Mark Hoeksema

About the Legitimacy of Drama

From the Rev. Alastair McEwen, pastor of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Frankston, Vic-

toria, Australia, your editor received a letter several weeks ago concerning Rev. Bekkering's May 15 guest

article about the legitimacy of drama. This letter I forwarded to Rev. Bekkering shortly before he moved to Houston, Texas; and I suggested that he reply to Rev. McEwen (whom we met during our Australasian tour), and also that perhaps he could write further on this subject when next he was scheduled for a guest article.

Rev. McEwen's concern in his letter was that Rev. Bekkering's article was unbiblical because the Scripture references were selective and because important Biblical data were not considered. He suggests that the topic of drama be dealt with again, this time with a more thorough examination of Scripture.

Because his letter is too long and because it is not even clear whether it was intended for publication, I will not quote the entire letter, but only the sections pertinent to Rev. Bekkering's reply:

"And what Scriptures have not been considered? Remembering that Rev. Bekkering states that 'the fundamental error in drama is impersonation,' what are we to do with the example of David — David who 'did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord and turned not aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life' (I Kgs. 15:5) — when he 'feigned himself mad amongst the Philistines' (I Sam. 21:13)? Perhaps this is not an example to follow. But what about Ezekiel who, under the Lord's instruction, acted out the part of an exile (Ezek. 4 & 12)? Was not this impersonation? Certainly it was acting designed to convey truth (see Ezek. 12:3). Isaiah was also under the Lord's instructions to perform similar actions (Isa. 20).

"But is not the classic example, which, if I understand Rev. Bekkering correctly, ought to be condemned out of hand, that of the man from the sons of the prophets who, 'in the word of the Lord,' gained an unnecessary wound and acted out the part of an unfaithful guard? Was not this to convey truth? Certainly we cannot condemn all impersonation when here we see that it was directed by the Lord.

"Let me make it clear that I am not maintaining that all drama is right nor even that any drama of today is right. What I am saying is that we cannot conclude anything until all the relevant Biblical data are taken into consideration. We who are responsible to shepherd the flock of Jesus Christ run the risk of leading them astray when we neglect to examine all the relevant Scriptures when dealing with any topic. This is all the more important when dealing with one with such wide implications as drama."

Next follows Rev. Bekkering's response.

REPLY

Dear Mr. Editor,

I would like to respond to the letter of brother

McEwen as follows: First I would like to thank the brother for his interest in and concern for the *Standard Bearer*.

His letter arises in connection with an article written by the undersigned which appeared in the May 15, 1977 issue of the *Standard Bearer* entitled "Is Drama a Legitimate Means to Convey the Truth?" (I ask the readers to dig out that issue of the *Standard Bearer* and reread the article in question.)

As I gather from the brother's letter his primary concern is for the proper method of reaching a Biblical conclusion on any matter and secondarily is he concerned with the subject of drama.

Now, I too am concerned with proper method, and I agree that all the important and relevant Biblical data should be examined before one comes to a conclusion on any given matter. The problem arises because brother McEwen supposes that he finds in the Bible instances where impersonation is used and directed by the Lord to convey the truth. Upon the basis of his unproven suppositions brother McEwen makes some very strong statements and draws some unwarranted conclusions. I must caution the brother that such a method is not proper. If the brother is going to label one's treatment of a matter as unbiblical and presenting half the truth it seems to me that it is uncumbent upon him to do more than refer to a number of passages from Scripture. He should show clearly upon the basis of the passages referred to that the Bible indeed teaches what he supposed it does.

Brother McEwen has not at all convinced me that he has struck upon passages that are relevant to the subject of drama and impersonation. I believe that the brother commits the logical error of "circular reasoning" or assuming what needs to be proved. He makes the assumption that the acts carried out in the passages cited are in the same class as the drama of today. I believe that they are not at all in the same class, but are as different the one from the other as apples are from ostriches.

The point of distinction between the two can be seen in light of the premise that "the fundamental error in drama is impersonation." In the passages referred to by brother McEwen I do not believe that we find impersonation at all and therefore no drama in the ordinary sense of the word as we use it today.

I believe what we find in the passages referred to (with the exception of I Samuel 21:13) is what may be called symbolic or prophetic acts. M.S. Terry in his *Biblical Hermeneutics* calls the account of the wounding of the man of the sons of the prophets an Old Testament parable, but I believe that it is at the same time a symbolic or prophetic act.

Now turn with me to the passages referred to and let us consider them in order. I ask the reader to look

up the passages and read them as we consider them. They are in themselves interesting as well as important for a proper understanding of the matter under discussion.

The first passage referred to is found in I Samuel 21:10 ff., and has to do with David's feigning madness before the gates of the city of Gath. When brother McEwen quotes part of I Kings 15:5 to show that David was a godly man he certainly does not mean to imply that David was without any personal sin and weakness. In fact the account of David before the gates of Gath does not show him in the strength of his faith, but at a time of sin and weakness. I do not believe that we have an example of impersonation here, but an example of a saint acting foolishly and sinfully. There can certainly be actions that are not good examples to follow, apart from impersonation.

Secondly there are the passages from Ezekiel 4 and 12 referred to by the brother. He states clearly that he believes that here we have drama as impersonation commanded by God and designed to convey truth. Here he believes is an example from the Bible that disproves the thesis of my former article in which I took the position that drama is not a legitimate means to convey the truth.

Now I grant that in Ezekiel 4 and 12 we have some strange and unusual actions commanded by God to convey the truth; but it is not drama. What we have can be called more properly symbolic or prophetic acts to distinguish them from what we call drama today. When I say that, I am not just calling the same thing by another name, but I mean to show a fundamental difference between the two.

When God commanded His prophets to speak in His name and when they did so then we do not say that the prophets impersonated God, but that they properly carried out the office and function of the prophet. They were God's spokesmen and not His impersonators. The same is true today from a little different point of view. When God commands fathers today to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, as He does in Ephesians 6:4, then the fathers who obey that command of God are not impersonating Abraham or any faithful father in Israel of old, but they are doing what God says and acting in a way pleasing to Him.

As we read Ezekiel 4 and 12 we find the prophet

commanded by God to perform a number of symbolic or prophetic acts. What is stated matter-of-factly in chapter 4 concerning God's command is emphatically set forth in chapter 12. In verse 1 of chapter 12 we read "The word of the Lord also came unto me, saying, . . ." and in verse 7 Ezekiel says "And I did so as I was commanded." God further tells Ezekiel, in verse 11, to tell the people the exact reason why he acts as he does. "Say I am your sign: like as I have done, so shall it be done unto them. . . ." On the basis of the express testimony of both chapters 4 and 12 we do not come to the conclusion that Ezekiel is dramatically acting out the part of an exile or impersonating anyone, but that he is functioning as a faithful prophet of God and carrying out prophetic acts exactly as God commands him.

Turning now to Isaiah 20, especially verses 2-4, we find the same principle of the prophetic office and acts being obediently carried out by the prophet.

Brother McEwen cites finally the "classic example" of drama and impersonating, found in I Kings 20:35 ff. What we find there, however, is another instance of a man's functioning in the office of prophet, carrying out prophetic acts just as God commanded, with the purpose of making known the word of the Lord. Verse 35 tells us that the man was "of the sons of the prophets" and that he spake to his neighbor "in the word of the Lord." By these statements I understand that the man was officially functioning in the office of prophet, being "of the sons of the prophets," and that he was obediently walking "in the word of the Lord."

Brother McEwen speaks of an "unnecessary wound" that the man gained as he acted out the part of an unfaithful guard. I find nothing in the text to indicate that the wound was unnecessary but rather come to the conclusion that the wound was exactly necessary for the man to carry out his prophetic purpose and to be in a position to bring the word of God to Ahab the wicked and disobedient king of Israel. Here again I do not find impersonation but faithful obedience to the word of the Lord on the part of the prophet.

I hope that this answer helps brother McEwen and is also interesting and helpful to other of God's people as well.

Rev. W. Bekkering

Know the standard and follow it.
Read the

THE STANDARD BEARER



TRANSLATED TREASURES

A Pamphlet Concerning the Reformation of the Church

Introductory Remarks

Before we actually begin the translation of this work of Dr. Abraham Kuyper, a few brief remarks are in order.

It was not a very long time after the Synod of Dordrecht that the State Church in the Netherlands entered a period of doctrinal and spiritual decline. As the years passed, this decline increased in seriousness until, in 1834, Henry De Cock was instrumental in leading a number of churches out of the State Church in what became known as the Afscheiding. This Afscheiding movement was a genuine reformation of an apostate State Church. However, not all those who were faithful to the truth departed from the State Church in the years following the Afscheiding. The result was another movement of secession from the ex-State Church which took place in 1886. This movement, known as the Doleantie, was led by Dr. Abraham Kuyper. A few years after this latter secession Dr. Kuyper was instrumental in bringing together the churches of the Doleantie and of the Afscheiding into one denomination known then and now as the Gereformeerde Kerken. This pamphlet, written in 1883, was prepared just three years before the Doleantie with a view to explaining the need for this reformatory movement. It was written, therefore, to explain the need for reformation and to explain how, in Dr. Kuyper's mind, this reformation was to take place.

It is the historical background of this pamphlet which makes the work important enough to be translated and presented to our readers. Many people today find themselves in a position similar to that in which Dr. Kuyper found himself in the latter part of the 19th Century. Today, too, many historically Calvinistic and Reformed churches have gone the road of doctrinal and spiritual apostasy, and faithful people of God who are troubled by this apostasy find themselves confronted with the question of church reformation. What Dr. Kuyper had to say to the people of his day is therefore of relevancy in many respects to the times in which we live.

This is not to say that this is the only value of this

pamphlet. Dr. Kuyper, in his own way, included in his work a great deal of information, especially concerning church political matters, which are of interest and importance to all who love the Reformed faith and who are interested in sound Scriptural Reformed church polity. The pamphlet is therefore worth the effort of translating and it is our hope that it will be of interest and benefit to our readers.

The fact that we make this pamphlet available in the English does not and is not intended to imply that we agree with everything which Dr. Kuyper has written. The presentation of this material in our *Standard Bearer* must not be construed as complete approval of every idea which Dr. Kuyper presents. The material must therefore be read with discretion comparing the ideas presented with the teachings of Scripture. In some instances where there is disagreement we have made some brief comments by way of a footnote. Dr. Kuyper himself had an occasional footnote in this pamphlet and the two will be distinguished from each other. Our footnotes will be indicated by means of arabic numerals while Dr. Kuyper's footnotes will be indicated by means of an asterisk.

With these remarks we present to our readers a translation of this pamphlet.

PREFACE

Commemorative days are always by all people, in every age, and in all areas of human life reverently respected.

They also often bring with them a blessing.

Above all, mighty acts of faith, results of which have ceased, are brought to our consciousness in an edifying manner by such commemorative days. As men and people re-live such an event of faith by way of recollection they often experience a sense of shame as they are reproached by their own spiritual degeneration. They seize new courage in the contemplation of what the resiliency of faith is able to do. And, with warmer enthusiasm than they have been able to give for a long time, they give praise and

commendation and honor to Him Who willed to work this power of faith in men, and still remains the same faithful God to work also in us.

Rightly, therefore, the German-Protestant people prepared themselves this Autumn to celebrate on the 10th of November in all the lands of Christendom Luther's fourth centenary.

On October 31, 1917 will be a yet more solemn day of commemoration for the one who lives to see it. But also Luther's birth is more than worthy of such a day of commemoration.

Indeed the act of reformation entered the outside world first at Wittenberg's castle chapel. But he who confesses with us that the Lord our God prepares already in His mother's womb the instruments for His church knows that already with Luther's birth in the quiet town of Eisleben the man was given through whose courage of faith the light would again be put on the candlestick, and who would again open the way to peace with God for all those who are without comfort and driven about by storms.

Also we, Reformed, Reformed also in this land, join with our German brothers in their shouts of jubilation.

Luther is not only the hero of faith in the Lutheran churches, but is equally the man of our sympathies, the confidant also of our hearts, for whose word and work all the churches of the Reformation, and thus also the Reformed Churches of Western Europe, have to give a great deal of thanks. But especially they have to thank him for the inspiring principle of their reformation.

Although in Lutheran lands men might be able to think of the complete Reformation without Calvin, the thought has never risen among Reformed to think of Calvin without the broad shoulders of Luther upon which Calvin's slender figure rested.

Calvin worked out the idea of the Church of Christ for us in a more detailed way, more exquisitely, more purely than the hero of Wittenberg; but Luther was the one who took the granite out of the rock and with broad strokes brought the figure forward into an image.

Also in this land the first impulse towards reformation proceeded not from Calvin — that first blossomed only later, but proceeded instead from Luther. And it also quickly became evident that the German-Lutheran Reformation could not grow here without a firm root. On the other hand, though the Genevan-Calvinistic Reformation immediately created order out of chaos, it must never be forgotten by our true-born Reformed people that Luther's appearance put the match to the tinderbox and that Calvin, only secondarily and coming after Luther, perfected what Luther began.

As strongly therefore as the Reformed maintained the purity of their doctrine and the uniqueness of their ecclesiastical regulations, they have not forgotten the bonds which bound them to Luther and his successors. Luther is still read by the Reformed even though Calvin is forgotten in Lutheran lands. People have reviled Calvin in Lutheran lands, but Luther is never mentioned in Calvinistic lands in any other way than with praise. On the German-Lutheran side men have often refused us the hand of brotherhood, but from the Reformed side the hand of brotherhood is still warmly desired with the Lutheran churches in Germany. And even though those on the Lutheran side glory in their liberality and broad-mindedness of ideas and claim to take offense at our Calvinistic narrow-mindedness, it still remains an incontrovertible testimony of history that in their mutual relation the entertaining of a sense of brotherhood proceeds always more from the Calvinists, and exclusion for the most part comes from the theological Lutheran school.

Indeed our Reformed people never go so far from home as nowadays many "ecumenical theologians" go to greet Luther with enthusiasm as a friend of their heart, while these ecumenical theologians, with dignified greetings, pass by the cold marble image of Calvin as they call it. Calvinists cannot do this because he who drinks better cannot return to a lesser draught, and each good Reformed man does not hesitate to testify that Calvin brought the reformation of the church further than Luther.

But even though Calvin has and holds our most grateful homage, yet we continue to honor Martin Luther as the man of God's appointment to break the bands under which His church lay bound; to celebrate as the theologian who in the first freshness of his youth was as resolute a Calvinist as ever Calvin was; and to remember him thankfully as the one who established a number of Protestant sister churches who, although less purely Reformed, yet as genuine churches of Christ, carry out the Word of God, and with a sincere sense of brotherhood, are recognized by each in our circles as "members of the mystical body of our Lord."

Therefore let one Reformed man of our day be permitted to give a public token of this thankful inclination towards Luther's person and work on the commemoration of his four-hundredth anniversary.

If to me be granted the privilege to revive somewhat by a limited effort the historic Calvinistic tradition in this land in our people, our theologians, and our citizens, it is also true that frequently this sharply defined influence arouses in others the notion that narrow-minded jealousy of non-Calvinistic brothers keeps step with this love for the Reformed principle.

Not seldom it has been whispered to me that no one other than Calvin appears worthy of homage to me and to my colleagues.

Well then, because it must be evident how unjust this idea is and how men now again unjustly ascribe to the Reformed of these days a narrow-minded smallness of spirit, it seemed desirable to me that Luther's 400th anniversary must not go by without a public acknowledgment of unfeigned homage being presented from the side of the Reformed to the memory of a great reformer!

And when the commemoration of great men seems among every people in all circles to be most worthwhile, when men revive the memory of that which has been most important in their life, so that men honored artists for the skill of their paint brush, poets for their songs, ruling princes for the skill of governing, why would it be taken amiss of me if I attempt to honor the memory of a great reformer by writing a pamphlet of the reformation of that same church which finds the origin of its reformational life in Luther's brave stand.

Luther has always been the national hero of our German neighbors. He is also the fighter for freedom of thought and conscience. He is also the theologian with a subjective tendency in his theology. But above all Luther is reputed in history to be the Reformer of the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Although I do not deny to the German nation the right to honor Luther as one of her greater sons, and although I do not dispute the right of free thinkers to thank Luther for keeping them from chains, yes although I grant to our "ecumenical theologians" without any evil intent the pleasure of leaning on Luther's subjective side for their theological preference, yet I assert that Luther's full memory is repudiated by the one who only retains his reformational influences as part of his image and who forgets his breaking with the existing church institute.

A German can rejoice in Luther's memory even if he is a Jew or Roman Catholic. A free thinker can honor Luther even though he denies all the holy truth

for which Luther strove and wrestled. And also a legitimate opponent of every schism in the church institute can rejoice in Luther as theologian. But the true Luther, Luther from the soles of his feet to the top of his head, i.e., the Luther who appeared as reformer — these men do not honor him.

On the other hand I wish to maintain that he who presently pleads Germany's rebirth without Christ or also freedom of conscience without being bound to the word, pleads for the recovery of the church without breaking away from human ordinances, is unfaithful to Luther's spirit, and denies his courageous appearance rather than honoring him for his holy principle.

Luther's name must go forth on his 400th anniversary as a testimony of God in our midst.

It is a testimony of God for all those who are anxious of soul to seek their perfect peace in no other way than in the Christ of God as their Security and Mediator.

It is a testimony for the doubtful mind to oppose as error all ideas which in any way rob God's Holy Word of its complete infallibility in a moral or in a historical sense. It is a testimony to oppose this error with the words: "that word you shall allow to stand."

It is a witness for him who loves his fatherland never to separate his politics from his faith but always to seek the revival of the fatherland and people out of Christ.¹

But then also it is a witness for those who cherish the Church of God with the love of their hearts, not to shrink back from any break with the church federation as the cancer eats more deeply, and not to rest until Zion revives.

1. Although a sentiment such as this arises out of the peculiar situation in the Netherlands where the State Church was an accepted ecclesiastical principle, we have an indication here of Kuyper's deep commitment to the calling of believers to enter politics. It is this aspect of Kuyper which has appealed particularly to such organizations as the A.A.C.S.

TRIUMPH THROUGH TRIALS

Our Hairs Numbered

Rev. J. Kortering

Jesus was comforting His disciples.

He had told them to expect trials.

These trials would come from men who would

attack them: "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake, but he that endureth to the end shall be saved," Matt. 10:22. This attack would involve persecution, verse 23, and name calling, verse 25. The

Lord Jesus tells His disciples that, rather than being discouraged by all this, they must be bold and preach the gospel from the housetop, verse 27.

How could they triumph through such a trial?

By being fearless: "Fear not!"

Why no fear? "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are numbered," Matt. 10:28-30.

Our hairs are numbered!

And that by Almighty God. How precious is the truth of divine sovereignty! God is the Creator and thereby the Owner and Sustainer of all things. The cattle on a thousand hills are His. He formed the dry land. He causeth the sun to rise on the just and unjust. His mighty hands span the oceans and reach up to the highest star. How great is God!

So great is He, in fact, that He knows the number of the hairs on your head. That is more than you know — in all likelihood, it is even more than you *care*. The point that Jesus is making here is that our Father is so great that even the littlest details of our life (the number of our hairs) are of His concern. The sparrow cannot fall, but by His will. Not a hair can come out of our head, but He knoweth it altogether.

What amazing control! He cares for every detail of our lives.

What peace this affords at the time of trials!

If this were not true, we would be torn within trying to understand the cause of our trials. We would as Christians be no different from the world of unbelievers who can find no peace in the time of trouble. They attribute trouble to natural causes. If one gets into a terrible accident they see no more than human error or just plain bad luck. If they are in the hospital or at home with a serious disease, it is blamed to virus, bacteria, or cancer cells that invaded the body. Some time or other it happens to everyone. *Chance*, that's the only explanation. Blind force is moving upon the face of the earth afflicting people and nations.

Still others don't like the idea of chance. They think, more deviously, that there must be some sinister force operating behind the scenes. There must be a vengeful deity who would send such troubles

upon us poor mortals. Strangely, even some within the sphere of Christianity explain the trials as coming from Satan, the prince of this world. They view the scene of history as the stage on which the two great powers fight, Christ and the devil. The devil uses disease, war, sickness, accidents, to assault the children of God. Jesus wants us to overcome these, to be financially rich, to be healthy, to live a long life in prosperity. So if you are a Christian and have faith, you may claim the power of Christ and overcome such an assault, be healed through the power of faith as you touch the Holy Spirit. If you want to be rich, give liberally. If you want to be safe from accidents, lean upon Jesus.

If you suffer trials, these people would have you believe that it is of the devil, not of God.

Foolishness!

God is even sovereign over the devil, see Job 1:12, 2:6.

Unless we see God in our trials, we will never triumph.

Your hairs are numbered!

So sovereign is our God.

If this is true of our hairs, surely He determines the condition of our lungs, the number of our heartbeats, our whole body. He is Lord over our life, including all the events that take place. Nothing is by chance.

Rather, we confess in faith, "He will make whatever evils he sends upon me, in this valley of tears, turn out to my advantage for he is able to do it, being Almighty God, and willing, being a faithful Father," Heidelberg Catechism Answer 26.

Are you experiencing the trials of life, persecution, suffering, dying? Don't look to yourself. Don't look to your fellow men. Don't look to the demon world. Don't study the stars to learn your fate. Rather look to Jehovah, Almighty God.

He rules all things by His power.

If you are to be fearless, you must be reconciled to Him.

While you look to Him by faith, remember, "The very hairs of your head are all numbered," Matt. 10:30.

"Lord, thou preservest man and beast;

Since Thou art ever kind,

Beneath the shadow of Thy wings

We may a refuge find." *Psalm 36*

The STANDARD BEARER makes a thoughtful gift for a shut-in.

STUDIES IN ISAIAH

Isaiah's Cleansing and Commission

Rev. Robt. C. Harbach

What is the end and aim that God has for this earth? That it "be full of His glory." The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof. The Lord God omnipotent reigns and must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet. The victory is His all along the line. We do not say that the gospel will effect a gradual conversion of the world to God. We do not believe that the Spirit of God, largely, fails until feeble men set up an earthly kingdom for the Lord Jesus. We do not hold that Christ is to come on a world with Gog and Magog conquered, the false prophet(s) done in for good, and the Beast beaten to defeat. No, but we do believe that in every battle in history, God and His church triumph over the devil and his hosts. We do believe with all our hearts that the church militant is always the church triumphant from the beginning to the end of the world. So in all past battles in the present conflict, and all down the line! By His Spirit, His Word, and His Church, God always gains the victory. Covenant theology is a history and chain of victories!

1. *The Cleansing Fire.* As for the preacher of the gospel, there must first be victory over sin in his own life. "Then flew unto me one from the seraphim, and in his hand a hot stone; with tongs he took (it) from upon the altar. And he touched upon my mouth and said, 'Lo! this touched upon thy lips and gone (is) thy iniquity and thy sin (is) covered'" (6-7).

It is not our (Reformed) view that the whole world is a sort of lump of dough, and the Gospel or Church a little leaven which gradually leavens the whole lump until the Church converts the world. Nevertheless, we believe the church always has the victory over the world, and will have the final victory. *We* do not sing, "We shall overcome — some day." For we *have* overcome and are more than conquerors through Him that loved us! That it does not look that way, we are well aware. To all appearances, the church is not converting the world, but the world is converting the church to its corrupt way of life. Still we believe in the vanquishing of the world as conquered by the church. We believe that because we believe in the

omnipotence of God. In our confession, prayers, and service to the Lord we believe in nothing short of, "Christ shall have dominion over land and sea! Earth's remotest regions shall His empire be!" Idols shall utterly be abolished; heresy, error, apostasy, and sin shall be destroyed; the salvation of our God shall exclusively prevail. The whole earth must be filled with His glory. The whole creation, including all elect mankind, shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption unto the liberty of the glory of the sons of God. This shall become a reality in the New Heaven and the New Earth.

This is the outlook of the prophet Isaiah as he contemplates his call to the ministry. At this contemplation, including his own deep sense of unworthiness for the task, Isaiah fell apart. He was undone. God is not yet done with us and will never do anything with us until first of all He has undone us. So Isaiah went to pieces. Then Jehovah built him up into a new, mighty man of God. Isaiah felt as though he could not go on with the work of the Lord, mourning his incapacity, his failure, his unworthiness. This mourning in itself is not to be mourned. It's a repentance not to be repented of.

But "what minister is there that God has ever sent who does not when he surveys his ministry feel that he is a man of unclean lips? Often and often does our soul say, 'Oh that these lips had language! Or that instead of flesh, they were flame, that we might let fall a burning torrent . . . which would run amid multitudes of men like fire in dry stubble!'" (C.H. Spurgeon).

With tongs one of the seraphim took up a red hot coal from the altar, yet in his hand brought it to Isaiah. Certainly a seraph's hand can hold a live burning coal. For the very word *seraphim* means burning ones. They are burning spirits (Ezek. 1:13), before the burning throne of God (Rev. 4:5; Ezek. 1:26-28). They burn with energetic zeal, ready to fly in the Lord's business with lightning swiftness (Ezek. 1:14). With lightning speed the seraph flew and with that live coal touched the prophet's lips, burning away his iniquity and purging his sin, i.e., covering his

sin, smothering it, to extinguish it, destroy it, blotting it out of existence as far as the righteous judgment of God is concerned. The seraph, then, lived up to his name. However, he did this cleansing not by means of his own fiery nature, but by means of the fire divine taken from God's altar. That is the fire, not of Purgatory, no such strange fire (Lev. 10:1), like the heathenish superstitions of Persian and Egyptian mythology, but a fire of "Love divine, all love excelling." So that connection with God's altar, as here, means fellowship in the great sacrifice on the altar, that is, fellowship in the blood and satisfaction of the Lamb of God. Apply one hot coal from that fire of "a merciful wrath" which consumed our Savior on the cross, and lips and mouth are cleansed, sanctified and readied for preaching the gospel of the King eternal. This means that the preacher's lips will be blistered with the griefs of the man of sorrows, of Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and burning with love for the gospel of Christ and the Christ of the gospel.

2. *The Challenging Commission.* "And I heard the voice of the Lord (Adonai) saying, 'Whom will I send? and who will go for Us?' and I said, 'Behold me! send me!'" (v. 8). Notice how the Lord, speaking for the first time here in the vision, speaks of Himself both in the singular, "I" and in the plural, "us." Why is this? On this plural we do not agree with Delitzsch, but do agree with E.J. Young, who refers to the "time-honored interpretation of the church and to regard the Lord as using the plural . . . to indicate that in the Speaker himself there is a plurality of persons." Prof. Young calls this passage "an adumbration of the doctrine of the trinity, which in the New Testament receives its fuller revelation" and which we should not fear to acknowledge. Here we have a foreshadowing of the trinity in unity fully revealed in the New Testament. Isaiah is here taught a great lesson in the profoundest depths of theology, in the very nature of God's Being! So ministers are ordained in the same name in which they, and all the church, have been baptized.

"Who will go?" Who wants to go? Not any one! There are multitudes of men in the church of God, but are they all unfit to be sent under the Lord's great commission? They are; and they never offer to go. No man, of himself, as to the flesh, will volunteer to go over lands, across waters, through the air, to sacrifice all for the sake of the gospel and for the sake of God's elect. Thousands within the professing Christian church are working at high paying jobs, owning their own homes, making money, doubling, even tripling their incomes with burgeoning investments, getting richer, increasing with goods; but is one of them qualified to go at the behest of Christ's commandment? Some of them travel all over the world. Do any of them go for God? They risk their lives in the vastnesses of Alaska, but are they heroes

of the Cross? They secure to themselves the natural resources of the earth and the treasures of the world so that they will not fall into other hands. But what one of them is ready to "endure all things for the elects' sakes"? (2 Tim. 2:10).

The question does not go forth to mighty, six-winged, willing seraphim, but to weak, unwilling men. Whom shall I send? Who will go? God has ordained strength out of the mouths of babes. Weakest means fulfill His will, mighty enemies to still. It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. But how shall they believe without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent? Whom shall I send? Men! not angels, but sinful, unworthy, weak men like the rest of mankind. Who will go? Who wills to go? Yet the man who does go must go "not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind" (1 Pet. 5:2). Whom shall I send? . . . *Send* me! It must be a man called and sent, a man who has behind him the authority of God, the authority of His Word and the authority of ordained office-bearers. It must be a man who knows he cannot go on his own, but must be sent of God. So his emphasis is not "send *me*," but "*send* me." For there are many false prophets, but the Lord says, "I *sent* them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them. They prophesy unto you a false vision . . . and the deceit of their heart" (Jer. 14:14). That man must know Christ's word to him, "even so send I you."

Here is the heavenly vision. There is the Lord above all. His train fills the temple. Lightning like beings are around His throne. There is no other human being beside Isaiah. No other saw or heard what here occurred. When the Lord spoke, it was not a call to all men indiscriminately, but to Isaiah directly and personally, as though there were no other man in all the world. The prophet was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. He immediately jumped up, responding, "Look at me! send me! I am debtor to the Christ of God, I am ready to preach the gospel! Here I am, Lord! a man of unclean lips, but Thou hast cleansed me! The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses me. I have not made my own mouth, nor did I create myself with my infirmities; here I am. Lord, before I know Thy bidding, I am ready to do it."

Why are so few, or none, willing to serve God? A man must be regenerated, made a new creature in Christ, raised from his spiritual death, and then come to a knowledge of the misery of sin. Renewed, he must know that he is not his own, nor is he, like men of the world, a slave of the devil. But he is bought with a price; he belongs to Jesus, his faithful Savior. He knows and must know that Jesus has taken his sin and guilt away and made him an heir of glory. Then he will be ready joyfully to serve God at His call!

GUEST ARTICLE

The Interpreting of the Bible

Rev. R.G. Moore

Dearly Beloved, the reformed Christian is in danger of losing all that he has held dear in faith. There is an attempt to take from God's children the Scriptures as the Word of God — normative for faith and walk. This is being done today by those professing a need for and a desire for a "new hermeneutic." These are strong charges, you might say. Is this really true? Is there really such a danger with the desiring of a new way of interpreting the Bible? (Hermeneutics is the study of the principles of interpreting the Bible.) Recently in Edmonton, Dr. Gordon Spykman, respected chairman of the Department of Religion and Theology at Calvin Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, stated in a speech that often those who make the biggest ado about inspiration, infallibility, and the authority of the Scriptures live the worst with respect to that which the Bible teaches. Perhaps this is a time to change our way of viewing the Scriptures? And maybe when interpreting the Scriptures we make too much ado out of inspiration, infallibility, and their authority? God forbid that we should ever say this! To do so would be to walk down the road of apostasy!

It is said by those embracing the "New Hermeneutic" that the creeds say nothing of the interpreting of the Bible. They do not speak to the question, "What kind of book is the Bible?" It is further said that the Reformers (Calvin, Luther, etc.) did not take into account the historical movement of the church and the age when interpreting Scripture. Therefore they did not speak out concerning, "What kind of Book is the Bible." It is also said that one can overload the Bible, one can place too much emphasis upon it as a guide in our lives as Christians. This language ought to sound very strange to you as a child of faith! The faith view of Scripture is far too restrictive for our

history — our day and age. Therefore when the Word of God says, that the women in the church shall learn in silence, it does not play well in today's society that is glutted with "women's lib." Thus by turning to a new hermeneutic many have chosen a way to make Scripture fit our day, but this at the expense of the truth.

The proponents of the "new hermeneutic" teach generally that the Scriptures are not in their entirety the Word of God. The general tenets of faith are expressed by secondary authors. Thus the Bible is authoritative only insofar as the main message goes — the salvation of the Church in Christ, but according to this position there are many details of Scripture that cannot be assumed to be inspired — an example being the narrative of Genesis one through three. According to this view Scripture *contains* the Word of God, as opposed to faith's view that Scripture *is* God's Word. They maintain that, because of the secondary authors, errors of science and theology are present in Scripture; and this ought not to be surprising, according to them, because the writers reflect the learning of the age as well as the cultural conditions of their age. Therefore it is maintained that the Bible must be approached like any other book, and must be interpreted and evaluated solely on historical-literary grounds. The truth in the Bible can be considered truth only when the historical evidence verifies it to be the truth. But then, don't you understand, reason, science, the cultural conditions become the instructors to lead us into the interpretation of Scripture. Faith is relegated to the background and in effect discounted all together.

Such a view of interpreting Scripture is really not so new. It can be quite easily traced back in time to about two hundred years ago. The "New Hermeneu-

tic” really comes out of the age of higher criticism, which in turn finds its roots in the rationalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was in this age that reason came to rule the day. However, higher criticism found no room in the mainline conservative Bible-believing churches until the last thirty or forty years. James D. Smart (professor of Biblical Interpretation at Union Theological Seminary, New York) in his book, *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church*, states that today higher critics are no longer maligned except in the most backward of churches which have allowed themselves to be the victims of cultural paralysis. It is this fear of being called backward that has caused many a mainline church to embrace the “New Hermeneutic.” This, however, is utter foolishness! It leads to having the candlestick removed from the Church.

Let us take some time to consider what is being said in the church world about the interpreting of Scripture. We do this that we might be made alert to the inroads that this method of unbelief in interpreting Scripture has made in the church. At the same time we do so that we may be warned against another attack of Satan upon our faith! Dr. Lindsell in his book, *Battle For The Bible*, gives an outline, in his opinion, for the fall of Union Seminary from a conservative Bible-confessing Seminary to that of modernism. He traces the rise of higher criticism under the labors of a Prof. Briggs to the modernism that is inevitable with the denial of inerrancy of the Scriptures. The “New Hermeneutic” by its very nature denies the inerrancy of Scripture and shall just as surely lead to the road of modernism. Dr. Lindsell states, in the section in his book concerning lessons we can learn from the case of Briggs and Union Seminary, the following: “the first and most obvious is that the institution went on from the days of Briggs to become and remain one of the most liberal seminaries in the United States. At no time since Briggs’ day has the institution reversed its position. Instead, it has moved farther and farther away from historic orthodoxy.” This, of course, is not surprising, for once there is room left in the Bible for error, there is no way in which one can truly fight heresy. One doctrine can stand no better than another.

It is plain from the above that if one reads from an author such as J.D. Smart (mentioned before), he hears what the modernist has to say about interpreting the Scripture. Smart agrees with Bultman and Barth, who, while they disagreed on theology, agreed that a venturesome approach was needed in interpreting the Bible — one that would let the word of God hidden in the human words of Scripture have its freedom and power in the modern world. This modernist points out that science and our own eyes teach

us that parts of the Scripture are in error; examples are the creation narrative, and the teaching of Scripture that the world is flat, etc. Further, we read that the Bible can only be said to witness to revelation, but it may never be equated with God’s revelation. Of course, from such a perspective in viewing the interpreting of the Bible, the modernist can but make fun of anyone holding to a creation of six twenty-four hour days. And further they find it impossible to expect anyone to believe unquestioningly as history the report of every miracle of Scripture, for example Elisha’s floating axe head, or the sun standing still in the day of Joshua. Hence too, the modernist will not speak of the Bible being the Word of God as is the traditional practice, but rather more properly according to the modernist, one says the Bible contains the Word of God. As we hear it today, the word of God is *in* the Bible, rather than saying the Bible *is* the Word of God. This is the voice of modernism!

The Roman Catholic Henri Daniel-Rops writes in his book, *What Is The Bible*, that one is left somewhat baffled when reading the prophets or the Apocalypse, but that, “We must remember then that in Israel there was a sort of moral fable, which was expected not so much to report accurately concrete facts, but to exemplify some inner transcendent truth. Thus strictly we cannot consider the events historical.” Thus stated in this book is the following: “The stopping of the Sun by Jousee is told in a miniature epic poem, and looks very much as though it is only eastern hyperbole.” This is a voice of Roman Catholicism!

The sad thing today is that the voice of modernism and the voice of Roman Catholicism does not sound different from the sounds coming from the reformed church world! The Netherlands Reformed Church in Holland has published a work of a committee of its General Synod under the Title, *The Bible Speaks Again* — Kare Wijn, in the Dutch. Quoting the book, “One gets lost, however, with the following line of argument: God is truth and therefore we will find in the Bible, which is the Word of God, only true and trustworthy sayings, no contradictions or mistakes, nor any sagas, legends or myths, because it would mean that not everything has taken place.” Mind you one gets lost if he maintains the Scripture has no contradictions or errors. What does this say of the church of the ages gone by? They were lost? The book further points out that Dr. H. Bavinck spoke of inspiration in such a way to allow for the human factor in the Bible. But according to the Committee he did not do so in a “forceful enough or convincing enough” way. Thus they complain it was possible that the sad event of the deposition of Dr. Geelkerken took place in 1926 for doubting that the serpent spake to Eve.

The church with the new hermeneutic as its guide would have no difficulty today with such a view of Genesis. This has even become evident in the case of Dr. Verhey in the Christian Reformed Church. Because of the strong influence of the "New Hermeneutic" within the church (as evidenced in Report 44), Dr. Verhey could be ordained to the ministry and continue undisciplined therein, while denying the serpent spake to Eve, as well as denying the miracle of the earthquake in Matt. 28:2. If this continues, and historically it does, is there any heresy that can be kept from the church?

The new hermeneutic is the product of man's reason and is utter foolishness. It stands opposed to faith and must not be embraced! The foolishness of such a view of interpreting Scripture is obvious by the very words of those who embrace it. The modernist, Smart, states that preachers who were untroubled by historical and literary analysis were much freer in their use of Scripture. Of course, when in faith the minister goes to the Scripture and in faith receives its testimony as the Word of God he is sure of that which he preaches. But when one must face the Scriptures with critical eyes, searching what is God's word in the Bible — when one must rely upon reason, then of course there is reluctance to say anything too specific. For one might appear to lack scholarly ability or he might be too narrow, or this or that. The foolishness is that as there has been a so-called increase in scholarly study of the Bible in the last years, there has become a growing lack of understanding of God's Word, less true exposition of the Scriptures, and a growing darkness in the members of the church. This same thing became evident in a speech by Dr. Gordon Spykman in Edmonton, Alberta. He told his audience in his speech setting forth a "new hermeneutic," that no longer in the Seminary is it possible to use the same books as it was ten years ago — the reason being that there is not the same level of Biblical knowledge today. The students do not have as great a background in the Word of God. This is where the modern day hermeneutic leads us!

But it is said we must be scholarly, intellectual; there must be historical or scientific or cultural reason given for our interpreting of Scripture. This, beloved, is the sinful nonsense of Satan. Reason must be our lord. Believe it not! I thank God that I belong to one of those backward churches that was mentioned earlier. For this means that by God's grace I trust in that which is foolishness to the world. But understand, it is the foolish things of the world that God has chosen to confound the wise. "And God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea and the things which are not to

bring to naught things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence." I Cor. 1:27-29.

We do not have to find scientific fact to prove the Scriptures we believe. We do not have to explain with reason's power the tenets of our faith. Then our flesh would have whereof to glory.

Faith does not stand on wisdom of men, but in the power of God, cf. I Cor 2:5. It is written, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God." I Cor. 2:9-10. It is a matter of faith when one comes to the Bible. Faith hears the Scriptures own testimony and believes it. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." II Tim. 3:16. Scripture is God-breathed; faith believes this! Faith trusts the Bible's testimony of its own inspiration and infallibility. We hear the Scripture say, "that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." II Pet. 1:20-21. So absolute was this inspiration that the holy writers of the Old Testament searched their own writings to discern the truth that the Spirit of Christ revealed to His people there. Cf. I Peter 1:10-12.

Thus, on the basis of Scriptures own testimony, the believers have maintained the Bible to be the inspired Word of God. We believe it to be the infallible written record of God's own self-revelation. When we go to the Scriptures, we go to God's Word, and we hear our God speak to us! Further, we believe that Word to be infallibly given — that is, that the Bible is without error. The Spirit so guiding the holy writers that they set forth exactly the Word as God in truth would reveal it to His children. And this in every word! But then also understand that the Scripture is clear — so clear that your children can understand its basic instruction, its testimony, its commands, and its promises when they come with the eyes of God-given faith. And thus, too, as the Bible *is* God's Word it is authoritative for our faith and life.

This is the confession of reformed Christians who hold precious the historic creeds of the reformed faith. Our creeds are relevant and teach us that it is in faith that we approach the Word of God, and that indeed it is authoritative for our doctrine and life, cf. Belgic Confession Articles three and seven. In faith we come before God's Word and He fills us! And as we are led by the Spirit of Christ out of our sin and darkness into God's marvellous light, our God receives our praise and humble thanksgiving. Unto Him is all praise alone and forever!

ALL AROUND US

Rev. G. Van Baren

“Huisgemeenten”

Within Reformed churches there are groups of concerned Christians who are very disturbed at the inroads of heresy in their midst. There is commonly evident a division between so-called “conservatives” and “liberals.” The Netherlands has seen much of this, too. Recently in the *R.E.S. News Exchange*, Sept. 6, 1977, a report was given of one proposed solution to this difficulty. The Rev. H.J. Hegger proposes “Huisgemeenten”:

An interesting proposal has been aired in various issues of *Waarheid en Eenheid* (Truth and Unity), the periodical of the Verontrusten (Concerned) in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN). The proposal, which has attracted considerable attention and discussion, is the brainchild of Rev. H.J. Hegger, who, however, claims to find biblical support for it. Rev. H.J. Hegger became a Reformed minister after having studied for the priesthood; in recent years he has become a leader among those radically disillusioned by developments in the RCN. He has been one of the proponents of the so-called “congregations-in-distress.”

Hegger’s proposal, submitted to the RCN Synod, is that the church order be amended to allow for “huisgemeenten” (literally: home or household congregations). Many of the RCN churches, he argues, are too massive, too impersonal, too juridical; he would like to see the formation within these churches of small groups of Christians with ten to seventy members who would meet together for worship, fellowship, Bible study, prayer and the breaking of bread. He suggests that the formation of these groups be allowed to occur spontaneously, not imposed from above along territorial lines. The larger unit would continue to function, but perhaps Sunday afternoon worship could be done in these smaller “households.” There is also no good reason, continues Hegger, why those who experience Christian communion together in this smaller circle would not be able to partake of the Lord’s Supper together.

Leadership in the “household” units, Hegger argues, need not be created through a formal voting process; elders are supplied by the Holy Spirit and the community itself will intuitively recognize leadership

talents in its midst. Such a structure, according to Hegger, would allow for greater participation and involvement, on the principle that every member of the church has been anointed by Christ and is therefore equally responsible. Unity, communion of the saints, church attendance would all be served by such a restructuring.

Hegger admits that there is a danger that the “household” groups would serve to promote the formation of cliques. “Household” congregations, he says, may never be formed to set themselves up against the church as a whole or against other groups within the church. But they may be founded on different attitudes or spiritual emphases that are found in the church. But elsewhere he says: “It is too bad that now Christians with different perspectives, experiences and accents live apart in different churches which often stand over against each other. What an enrichment it would be if all these Christians were united and that through the “household” congregations they could all make their biblical contribution to the one local church.” Hegger’s proposal has generally (and obviously) been seen as a way to create breathing room for those “Concerned” who feel smothered by pastors and consistories which, in their eyes, are exchanging the biblical gospel for a politicized version. But it also seems to go hand in hand with a certain ecumenical vision.

The above represents a strange method indeed of remedying a sorry situation within the churches. This suggests, in effect, a “church within the church.” There would be “communion,” “Spirit-appointed elders” who are apparently not elected nor serve officially in office, one home “worship service” to replace that normally held in church. The whole proposal has a very strange sound — hardly Reformed nor Scriptural it seems to me. Though one hesitates to label such a suggestion, it smacks of “playing church.” Hegger’s “cure” to the ills of the Reformed churches appears to be worse than the “sickness.” These “Concerned” ones ought to take great care not to lead the disillusioned children of God in wrong paths.

Reactions to “social dancing” at Calvin

There was a strong response to the proposal at the C.R.C. to allow for “social dancing in a Christian

manner” at Calvin College. One response was found in the *Outlook* of Sept. 1977 in an editorial by Rev.

J. Vander Ploeg. He wrote:

When signals are flashing and bells are ringing at a railroad crossing to the danger of an oncoming, speeding train, a motorist or pedestrian must be blind, deaf, drunk, or bent upon suicide if he fails to take warning. CRC constituents are no less to be pitied if they now refuse to pay attention. Consider then a few of these signals:

1. Signal number one that should come through loud and clear to those who have long supported Calvin is that "onze school" and the C.R.C. have changed radically. The social dance, by a synodical decision of 1928, was branded as being disreputable and a worldly amusement to be shunned. But now it is being advocated as something to be made "Christian" and as having a potential for the fulfillment of "the cultural mandate". . . .

2. Signal number two in all this is to the effect that as members of the CRC we may be conscience-bound to make an agonizing reappraisal of our practice of automatically paying the Calvin quota year after year. . . .

3. Signal number three is the message conveyed by the foregoing to Dordt and Trinity Colleges, to our Christian high schools in the U.S. and Canada, to Calvinist Youth United, and to all young people (and also to those who are older) throughout the CRC. If social dancing is to be acceptable and even encouraged at Calvin by decisions of the Calvin Board and the 1977 CRC Synod, why should it not be allowed now elsewhere and to others? . . .

4. Signal number four, as I see it, is one that comes to the conscientious student who wants no part of what the Board and the Synod now encourage. . . .

5. Another signal — number five — says something to the discerning student who is not misled by the Board's attempt to justify the social dance as they intend to have it at Calvin. . . .

6. Signal six is a message to godly parents to the effect that they should be aware of the wrong influence to which their sons and daughters will be exposed even when they entrust them to Calvin for their college education. . . .

7. Signal seven — and that should suffice — we profess in our Heidelberg Catechism re the seventh commandment in Lord's Day 41 that "God condemns all unchastity. . . ."

We will let the sophisticated wiseacre say what he will. However, the born-again, Spirit-filled person cannot feel at home or be assured that he is in the company of the redeemed unless he still follows old-fashioned guidelines like that as it comes straight from the Word of God — the Book by which we still profess both to live and also to die.

Editor Vander Ploeg does state that he will still pay his "Calvin quota," though under protest. He insists that "at least I will then be able to live with myself and with my conscience." One might wonder, however, with all of these "signals" whether this action of "support under protest" is sufficient to soothe a conscience which seems to be so very troubled — and troubled with good reason.

Another reaction to the Synodical action appears in the Calvin College *Chimes*, Oct. 7, 1977. There appeared a report, rather factual, of the CRC Synod of 1977. The article suggested that the most interesting subject of Synod was this which dealt with dancing at Calvin. It continues to describe the action taken at Synod. But with the article appears also a picture of couples dancing in the basement of one of the college dorms. Underneath the picture is the "tongue-in-cheek" caption: "Social dancing still in basement." One could almost laugh — if the whole matter were not so deadly serious.

Response to a "United Reformed Church"

Clarion, the magazine of the Canadian Reformed Church, contains a response to an editorial of Rev. J. Vander Ploeg in the *Outlook* of July 1977. In the *Outlook* Vander Ploeg suggested a "United Reformed Church" but conceded that he did not know how that would come to be. The editor of the *Clarion* responds:

I am . . . a reader of *The Outlook*, and am usually grateful for what I read. I do not pretend to give the ultimate advice to those "concerned" members of the CRC. But an outside contribution might help, if only as an expression of a sincere viewpoint. I stand to be corrected if I am grossly beside the point.

These matters cannot be left unconsidered:

1. Those involved should not only voice their concern and criticism about the apparent deformation in their Church, but should faithfully examine and clearly promote the way which God has given in

His Word to reformation, even if this means inevitable, sad secession. Search the Scriptures and the Creeds!

2. Edifying contact should be relentlessly sought with those churches which by God's grace *are* faithful to the Reformed faith, so that when secession becomes real, unity in faith can be pursued without delay. One cannot be content "to remain by himself" (Article 28, Belgic Confession) but must seek and maintain the *unity* of the true Church of Christ. The inspiring example still is the Union of 1892.

3. Emphasis should be placed on understanding deformation not as an isolated incident, but as a historical process, resulting from dated derailment. The "concerned" in the CRC should re-examine their stand on the happenings of 1939-1944 and subsequent years and give due recognition to those who in the past — again by God's grace! — stood firmly *only* for the Reformed faith.

O! The mercy I've received,
From the covenant of grace;
Called in youth — I have believed,
In the morning of my days,
Jesus owns me,
With His ransomed chosen race.

Early rescued from temptation;
Taught to shun the fowler's snare;
Blest with knowledge of salvation,
And employed in praise and prayer:
Jesus owns me,
And His glory I'll declare.

Early conquered — melted — pardoned,
By my Saviour's powerful voice;
Not in love with sin and hardened!
But, as His eternal choice
Jesus owns me,
And in Him I must rejoice.

Far away, begone for ever,
Vain, beguiling, sinful, mirth:
Lord, uphold me — let me never
Once degrade my heavenly birth.
Jesus owns me,
Let me honour Him on earth.



Deep calls to deep within my soul,
Thy waterspouts I dread;
Yea, all thy waves and billows roll,
To overwhelm my head.

Did Jesus thus pour out His grief,
Enduring wrath Divine?
Was He of sufferers the chief?
Then why should I repine?

The depths of wrath and sorrow move,
And to each other call,
The Saviour's faithfulness to prove,
He triumphs over all.

He stemmed the billows, stilled the waves,
He dried up all the deep;
He now in lovingkindness saves
His own redeemed sheep.

His lovingkindness He commands,
In visits day and night,
To warm our hearts, uphold our hands,
And fill us with delight.

Then why art thou cast down, my soul?
Christ is thy Rock, He says;
And He will ev'ry wave control;
Begin thy songs of praise.

REPORT OF CLASSIS WEST

September 27, 1977

The meeting of Classis West on September 7, 1977 in Pella, Iowa was brief. Classis finished its agenda shortly after noon on the day it convened.

Rev. J. Kortering led the Classis in the opening devotions. He read I Peter 5 and addressed Classis on verse 14a: "Greet ye one another with a kiss of charity."

Report of Classis West (cont.)

Eleven ministers and thirteen elders represented the twelve churches of the Classis. Rev. D. Kuiper, pastor of the Lynden, Washington congregation, presided over the Classis.

Classis heard and acted on the reports of its standing committees, stated clerk, and board of trustees.

Two consistories asked Classis' advice regarding erasure of baptized members. After hearing the details of the cases, Classis advised both consistories to proceed with erasure.

Accepting Randolph's invitation, Classis decided to meet next in Randolph, Wisconsin on March 1, 1978, the Lord willing.

As is always the case, the delegates enjoyed each other's fellowship, as well as that of the host congregation. Opportunity for this was enhanced by Pella's scheduling of a lecture the evening before Classis. Rev. R.G. Moore, pastor of the Edmonton congregation, spoke on the "New Hermeneutic."

Rev. David Engelsma
Stated Clerk

News From Our Churches

Our missionary pastor, Rev. Robert Harbach, now has a more 'permanent' address. The Harbachs have rented an apartment at 55 Bay Street, Victoria, British Columbia V9A 6X9 Canada. Rev. Harbach is holding regular church services, a mid-week Bible study class in Reformed Doctrine and two catechism classes on Friday evenings, with a third class planned to begin soon. The missionary also visits with those who have expressed an interest in our churches.

First Church in Grand Rapids held a special congregational meeting on October 10 to call a minister from a trio consisting of Rev. David Engelsma, Professor Herman Hanko, and Rev. Ronald Van Overloop. Professor Hanko received the call. The consistory informed the congregation prior to the meeting that Prof. Hanko, were he called and were he to accept the call, would be obliged to complete the year of instruction at our seminary. A farewell program is scheduled for Rev. Van Baren and family on Friday, October 28. The plan at this writing is to hold the installation for Rev. Van Baren in Hudsonville on November 6. Hudsonville is rushing their new parsonage to completion in order that their new pastor may have a place to live.

According to a note in the Isabel, South Dakota, bulletin, the Mission Committee of our churches has decided to ask the consistories of Redlands and Kalamazoo to release their pastors for 4 to 6 weeks in order that they may labor in Jamaica.

Soon after Labor Day in September most of our churches resumed society meetings which had been recessed for the summer months. Some of the

churches, including Holland, Michigan, held an inspirational meeting to mark the beginning of the society season. This year, Seminarian De Vries was the speaker. One of the reasons for society attendance listed on the Holland Bulletin was: "We are called, young and old, to redeem the time for the days are evil. And before our covenant God we have an obligation to be busy with the things of His kingdom, building one another up in the faith."

Holland scheduled a special congregational meeting on October 6. Decisions were to be made concerning the financing of the new church addition and in regard to covering the floor in the auditorium.

The first Sunday in September our church in Hull, Iowa, switched from an evening service they had scheduled during the summer to an afternoon service at 1:30.

The Hull Protestant Reformed School began with a half-day of classes on August 29 and a Convocation Service in the Hull Church the same evening. Rev. Hoeksema spoke on "The Beginning of Wisdom."

Another special congregational meeting was called — this time in South Holland on October 3. The Council brought a proposal that the church parking lot be repaved.

Our annual Reformation Day lecture in the Michigan area is scheduled for October 27 in Hudsonville Church. Prof. Hoeksema plans to speak on, "Reformation — Option or Mandate?"

K.G.V.