

The **STANDARD BEARER**

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Whereas twenty or twenty-five years ago it would have taken a synod about five minutes to point out what was wrong with a given heresy, it now takes the church four years, three study committees, and eighty-page reports, which no one can understand, to settle a matter. It stands to reason that, when that happens, something, somewhere has gone badly wrong.

See "Reformed, Yet Always Reforming"

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MEDITATION

God's Suffering Servant

Rev. C. Hanko

Question: What dost thou understand by the words, "He suffered"?

Answer: That He, all the time that He lived on earth, but especially at the end of His life, 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. Catechism, Lord's Day 15.

"He suffered."

When one of God's saints leaves this vale of tears to join the church before the throne we naturally ask, what uniquely characterized his or her life?

Scripture leads the way in this, for we read of Enoch that he walked with God, of Noah that he was a just man and perfect in his generations, of Abraham that he was a friend of God. We could

mention many more, such as the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Dorcas, Lydia, and others. Compare this to what the Catechism says of the life of Jesus. His whole earthly sojourn and ministry are summed up in the two words, "He suffered." We speak so highly of the departed saints. We speak so disparagingly, it would seem, about our Savior. Who of us stands at the coffin of a dear one and sums up his whole life in just two words, "He suffered"?

Yet, on second thought, how entirely proper is this description of Him Whom Scripture calls the "Man of Sorrows," the "Suffering Servant of God." This becomes evident when we read the Psalms, particularly such Psalms as 22, 42, 69, and 86. This becomes still more evident when we read the prophets, especially the prophecy of Isaiah 53. And this is sealed by the testimony of all four gospel writers as well as by the epistles. In deepest humility and in holy adoration we confess: "He suffered."

Christ's unique suffering.

Our Catechism lays the confession on our lips, that "all the time that He lived on earth, ...He sustained in body and soul the wrath of God against the sins of all mankind."

There are expressions here that we cannot ignore:

He sustained the wrath of God.

He sustained the wrath of God in body and soul.

He sustained the wrath of God all the time that He lived on earth.

This wrath is against the sin of all mankind.

God's wrath is His Self-vindication. God loves Himself as the fulness of all infinite perfections. He cherishes His Name, which is the revelation of all His virtues. He defends that Name over against all the attempts of Satan and his cohorts to belittle and destroy it. He would not be God if He did not do that. God is righteous, also in maintaining His Name, for His own sake, for Christ's sake, for our sake. God is Truth. He cannot deny Himself. He declares, "I, Jehovah thy God, am a jealous God." He is jealous of His Name, jealous of His glorious perfection as God above all, blessed forever. God's Self-vindication is like a powerful electric current. When God's love flows freely and unhindered through the power line of the Spirit of Christ to His people it pours forth blessings continually and abundantly. But when that love of God comes in contact with the opposition of the workers of iniquity it is like a power line that is short-circuited, its current flashes, burns, destroys. Our holy God is the overflowing Fountain of every good and perfect gift to His people in Christ, but He is a consuming fire in wrath against the wicked.

Scripture tells us that we are by nature children

of wrath, even as all others. We are guilty of willful disobedience and rebellion in Adam. This is enough to condemn us before the tribunal of God. Moreover, we are conceived and born in sin, so that the depravity of all mankind is our depravity. We increase our guilt daily, for we are prone to all evil. We transgress all God's commandments. There is not a single sin committed by the human race that we do not commit in some form or degree. Sometimes we sin with forethought, even while our conscience warns us that we are offending God. Sometimes we sin inadvertently. And we are also guilty of a host of character sins, unknown to us, but recognized by others and certainly regarded as sin by God. How abhorrent we must be in God's sight! How abominable our sins! How great is the debt of sin that we increase every moment of our lives!

Do not think lightly of that. Often when we sing the well-known words of Psalm 50 we have others in mind rather than ourselves. Well may we do a bit of introspection when we sin:

Thus speaks the Lord to wicked men:

My statutes why do ye declare?

Why take My covenant in your mouth,

Since ye for wisdom do not care?

For ye My holy words profane

And cast them from you in disdain.

Thus have ye done; I silence kept,

And this has been your secret thought,

That I was wholly as yourselves,

To take your evil deeds as nought;

I will reprove you and array

Your deeds before your eyes this day.

(Psalter no. 138)

We are children of wrath. Christ sustained God's wrath in our stead. At His incarnation He humbled Himself, taking on the form of a Servant. He took upon His mighty shoulders the burden of divine wrath against our sins, which grew heavier as He went, until all the horrible billows of divine wrath had swept over His soul during the three hours of horrible darkness on the cross. He was indeed the Man of Sorrows, the suffering Servant of God.

He suffered physically. He had a human nature like ours, ravaged by the results of sin. He was extremely poor; the poorest of the poor. He suffered hunger, thirst, weariness, and all the frailties of a human being. He had to die, even as we. And He did die.

He experienced intense soul-suffering. Did you ever find yourself thrown unexpectedly in the company of filthy, blasphemous mockers, who offended you with their repulsive talk and music? Then you know a wee bit of the bitter offence that our Lord suffered when He as the Sinless One rubbed elbows day after day with such as we are. He ex-

perienced that in His family, among His disciples, but especially among those who hated Him without a cause. He was not understood by those nearest to Him. He was mocked, falsely accused, condemned as a deceiver and a blasphemer, as one who, mind you, was not fit company for such as we are.

Yet the most intense suffering that He experienced was the daily bearing of the wrath of God. All His life He saw the cross loom up before Him in growing proportions. From us God mercifully hides the future, so that we do not know what awaits us an hour from now. I wonder how many of us would have the courage to carry on if we knew the trials that lie ahead of us. Our Savior knew. He knew that every step He took brought Him closer to the day when He would be delivered into the hands of sinners to be crucified. Willingly He walked that way, veering neither to the right nor to the left, with His face set toward Jerusalem, the city that killed the prophets. He Who knew as we never can know the intimate fellowship between the Son and the Father, also knew the dreadful horror of being forsaken of God and being cast into the isolation of hell.

Our Catechism states that Christ bore the wrath of God "against the sin of all mankind." This is often taken to mean that Christ bore the sins of every individual of the human race, thereby making salvation possible for anyone who will accept the free offer of salvation. The next step must be a denial of the atoning power of Christ's suffering. For when the debt is paid and the sinner is restored into the favor of God, that sinner is righteous in Christ and has the right to eternal life. Then one of two things is true: either all men finally are saved and there is no hell for the wicked, or Christ's death is no atoning death. Both are contrary to Scripture. Yet the Word of God does speak of "all men," "the world," and "all mankind." Whenever Scripture does this it plainly refers to the organism of the human race, including the Jew but also the Gentile from every nation of the earth. After all, the fallen human race is saved, not as so many individuals, but as those who are chosen from eternity and redeemed in Christ Jesus. When

we speak of a tree, we speak of the entire tree, excluding the dead branches which are removed and burned. In a field of wheat both the grain and chaff grow up together, but at harvest time the wheat is separated and preserved, while the chaff is destroyed. Christ sustained in body and soul the wrath of God against the sin of that entire organism of mankind. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Begotten Son, that those who receive the gift of faith, and thus believe in His perfect sacrifice, can rest assured that they will not perish, but have and always will have eternal life. In faith we may humbly add that that includes such a wretch as I am.

A propitiatory sacrifice.

Therefore our Book of Instruction speaks of Christ's suffering as a propitiatory sacrifice, that is, a sacrifice that satisfies God's justice and restores us to favor with God. God's justice must be satisfied.* That justice demands that the transgressor must die both a physical death and the everlasting death of hell under God's wrath. O how our proud nature rebels against that divine justice. Yet every mouth must be stopped and every tongue confess that God is just in all His ways and works. God's justice is a righteous justice. The demands of justice can only be satisfied by atonement; the debt must be paid and we must be brought back into God's favor. That can only be realized by the suffering of death and the curse, obedient suffering that atones for sin and merits righteousness and eternal life. You and I cannot make that atonement. We need a substitute. No creature can satisfy for us. The only possible substitute is God's own beloved Son, Whom God gave as a ransom for our sins.

What an amazing sacrifice He was! In spite of Satan's offer, "Command that these stones be made bread," He hungered. In spite of the challenge of a hissing mob, "Come down from the cross," He remained until all was accomplished. In humble shame and holy adoration we confess with the church of the ages, "He suffered."

*We are reminded of Lord's Day 5, question 12.

EDITORIALS

Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

Impressions of Singapore (3)

When I face the question in this third installment on this subject what are my impressions of the group of young saints which has been gathered

under the preaching and instruction of our missionary in Singapore, the group known as the GLTS, a veritable flood of memories comes back to me; and

the impressions crowding my mind vie for expression. That was the situation last July when we were privileged to have fellowship with the saints there. And though I had thought that perhaps this would change somewhat, so that a few main impressions would stay with me and in a rather orderly fashion, this has really not changed. Hence, I will try to present a few of these impressions in a more or less random fashion, rather than in any order of priority.

Certainly, one inescapable impression I received was that of a tremendous dedication, enthusiasm, and interest on the part of these young converts to the Christian faith. The faith of the gospel of Jesus Christ has become the most important, the central, item in their life. This is evident in many ways. It is evident from the seemingly insatiable appetite for the Word of God and for instruction and discussion centered on the truth both in their numerous meetings, on the Lord's day and during the week, and in private and personal contacts. It is evident from their willingness to come from various quarters of the city in spite of distance and inconvenience of travel and to return home often late at night. It is evident from their many efforts in various ways to labor for the spread of the gospel and to share their new found faith with others. It is evident from their careful attention to the preaching of the Word and to instruction by means of lectures and in various classes. It is evident from their testing of things by the standard of the Scriptures and from their intelligent questions concerning the truth.

And let me stress the fact that they are not merely interested in the Christian faith in a kind of vague and general sense, but in the *Reformed* faith as we know and preach and teach it. Before we left Grand Rapids last June, the Rev. den Hartog had written me in behalf of the GLTS to invite me to deliver a series of three lectures on the general subject, "The Reformation and the Five Points of Calvinism." He stressed in his letter the fact that this idea had originated not with him but with the young people of the GLTS. Frankly, I was rather flabbergasted at the choice of subject. But when we arrived in Singapore, I learned that the meetings were to be held on three successive evenings, that they had obtained the use of the Life Church for these lectures, and that they had expended much effort in publicizing the meetings. So on the three successive hot and humid evenings (It's always that way in Singapore—the kind of weather in which we would not knowingly schedule special week-night meetings.) we had gatherings of approximately 200—with the audience growing each evening rather than declining. The evening programs were well organized and capably chaired by brother Ong Keng Ho. A book stall was set up outside the

church building, and Reformed literature was made available. After the conclusion of the formal meetings—and I lectured each time for a good hour—the evening was informally prolonged in and near the auditorium to a two or two-and-a-half hour evening. Visitors had to be approached. There were questions to ask. There were informal groups engaged in conversation. Sometimes it seemed well-nigh impossible to bring the evening to a close and to go back to the pastor's apartment. That took care of Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday evenings. On one of those evenings Pastor den Hartog could not even be present, due to the fact that he was starting a class for new converts in the Pacific Mansion apartment complex. On another evening he still had a pastoral call to make after the lecture.

But on Saturday afternoon there had to be another gathering. Can you imagine Saturday afternoon meetings here at home? This time the occasion was a question hour at the GLTS meeting-place. I should say: a question two hours! For we simply had to end the meeting after a couple hours, finished or not. And there was a goodly number of young people present, too!

Sunday is simply unspeakably busy, from 8:30 in the morning until late in the evening. My only duty on the Sunday we spent in Singapore was to substitute in the pulpit for Pastor den Hartog. But the pastor simply seems to go from one class to another meeting all day long, with hardly time for a bite to eat and no time for his family. While there is no opportunity for an evening service at the *kampong* meetingplace, there is a tape ministry at two locations (one of them the pastor's apartment) which goes on informally into the advanced evening hours. But again I want to stress that there is a vital interest in the Reformed faith and a marked receptivity for Reformed—Protestant Reformed—preaching of the Word. While I was warned at my lectures to make things as simple as possible and to explain theological terms carefully—for the sake of visitors rather than for the sake of the GLTS—I found on Sunday that I could preach the Word to the young people of the GLTS for the most part just as I would preach at home. And in the tape ministry on Sunday evenings, too, it is tapes from our home churches that are used: for example, we heard Professor Decker on Psalm 73:24.

This, I trust, will help to give you somewhat of a picture of the situation there. To me it was thrilling, and a cause of deep gratitude to our God.

Another impression I received was that there is a real striving on the part of these young saints to walk in sanctification of life. Admittedly, of course, there was not a long time for me to observe this. But we did have considerable contact and

conversation with a considerable number of the young people themselves, so that we had no little opportunity to observe their conduct, to learn something from them about their lives, and to observe their peculiar problems and attitudes. Besides, in our conversations with the den Hartogs we also had much opportunity to hear from them about these same matters. And what we observed and heard was gratifying in this regard. Singapore is, of course, a large, highly civilized, and thoroughly worldly city, with all the attendant problems and temptations of life in any large metropolis. Besides, of course, there is the additional complication that it is not even in any remotely nominal sense a Christian environment in which you live in such a city as Singapore. These young people go to school and work and live, in other words, in a thoroughly

worldly environment with, as I said, the added problem of the various manifestations of heathendom and its idols and superstitions. Especially the latter, you must remember, are very real. And the young people themselves have not only been called out of the darkness of heathendom, but to no little degree in their homes and in their daily life are still confronted by outright hostility from heathen families and acquaintances and daily contacts. But they take their Christian calling seriously, stand up for what they believe, and strive to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. In this regard they are also very supportive of one another, both in their individual contacts and relationships and in their weekly prayer meetings.

(to be continued)

The GKN on the Nature of the Authority of Scripture

Thus far in our treatment of this significant Report/Decision of the Dutch churches, in which, in our opinion, the entire doctrine of the authority of Scripture is sacrificed on the altar of a new/old liberal theology, so that the whole foundation of our Reformed confession of faith is undermined and destroyed, we have devoted our attention to the crucial introductory chapter. We have seen especially two things. In the first place, the very approach of the Report is dead wrong. It is the approach of philosophy and rationalism, rather than the approach of Scripture and the confessions. It turns to philosophy and current philosophical thought, considers various conceptions of "truth" which have been held, sets forth that today the current conception of "truth" is the so-called relational view, and then applies this to Scripture and to revelation and inspiration. In the second place, we have seen how this so-called relational view of truth is nothing but a new form of subjectivism and relativism, and how, when this is applied to the ideas of Scripture, revelation, and inspiration, it results in a complete destruction of all that the Reformed faith has ever stood for with respect to the doctrine of Scripture.

Now we could continue with this first chapter of the Report, and detailedly enter into the remainder of it. But this would really shed no new light and would probably serve at the same time to weary and confuse the reader.

We therefore turn next to the second and third chapters of the Report/Decision.

Chapters 2 and 3 of the Report are closely related and both are more or less historical in nature. Chapter 2 furnishes an over-view of the history and development of higher criticism. But it does not refer to it as higher criticism, but rather to "Historical-Critical Investigation (or: Research) of the Bible." Without going into detail about the contents of this chapter, let me point out that on the whole this chapter does present a rather accurate and factual account of the development of Bible-criticism and the various kinds, or schools, of criticism which have arisen over the centuries, taking the reader up to the Form-Historical criticism of Bultmann. And while I do not have any criticism of the historical accuracy of this chapter, this does not mean I have no criticism of it whatsoever. About that later.

The third chapter offers a study of "The Developments of the Views of Scripture in the History of the GKN." As might be expected, in the first place, this chapter devotes a great deal of attention to the views of Dr. Abraham Kuyper and Dr. Herman Bavinck and to their "organic" conception of the inspiration of the Scripture. It does not, however, set forth in any detail this organic view. It does indeed acknowledge that both Kuyper and Bavinck were opposed both to a so-called "mechanical"

view of inspiration and to modernistic historical and literary criticism of Scripture. The chapter then takes us briefly and, to my mind, rather inaccurately, through the history of the Geelkerken Case and the Synod of Assen, 1926. It points out that earlier in this century there was a whole school of exegetes who stood in the tradition of Kuyper's and Bavinck's organic conception, mentioning such names as G. Ch. Aalders, F.W. Grosheide, J. Ridderbos, and S. Greijdanus. It even makes mention of the fact that the "earlier" Berkouwer belonged to this school of thought with respect to Scripture. And, by the way, it is true that Dr. Berkouwer at one time defended the traditional Reformed position and that he spoke emphatically of the isolation of the Reformed view of Scripture. Then the Report makes mention of the fact that in the period after 1950 the tide turned, and a new school of exegetes arose. It mentions by name in this connection such men as N. H. Ridderbos, R. Schippers, J.L. Koole, and H. N. Ridderbos. The chapter claims—to my mind, inaccurately—that these men in all respects continued in the tradition of their predecessors. But, so the chapter, at the same time they began to inquire anew into the significance of the human mediation through which God gave us His Word, and they wanted to profit from certain insights and results of historical-critical research. There was interest especially in the various literary genres, for which there was little eye at the time of Assen-1926. Strangely enough, at this point the chapter mentions what I would call only some of the milder representatives of this new school of exegetes. The chapter goes on to characterize this new school in the mildest possible manner, in my opinion, never bringing to the fore some of the more radical views which have been put forth in recent years. In characterizing this new generation of exegetes, the chapter claims that they certainly did not want to break with the preceding generation. But in explaining the Scriptures they less exclusively emphasized their historicity and more explicitly inquired into the purpose of a certain text or section. It is claimed, too, that they wanted to maintain the authority and reliability of Scripture, but no longer would plead for infallibility in the sense of inerrancy.

This brings us down to the present day. And the theologians and exegetes of today are characterized in a most sympathetic and mild fashion. Yet I must say that when this characterization is read with a little discernment, it becomes very plain that their approach to Scripture and its exposition is plainly in harmony with the so-called relational view of the truth. And, by the way, to him who knows anything about modern theological trends, there are plainly here strong overtones of Barthian and exis-

tentialist views and methods. But read for yourself, and compare with what I wrote earlier as to the so-called relational view of the truth. Here is a significant section of description concerning the current approach to Scripture on the part of theologians and exegetes in the GKN (I translate): "Previously...the concern was especially about the coming into existence (*ontstaan*) of Scripture.... At present the concern, however, is in the first instance about the understanding (*verstaan*). There is a play on words here in Dutch between *ontstaan* and *verstaan*; and in the Dutch version the syllables *ont-* and *ver-* are emphasized.) of the Scripture, and the question concerning the right explanation is attacked not so much from the origin of Scripture in the past as indeed from the *working* of Scripture in the *present*. The interpretation of the Bible is never to be loosed from the application of the biblical message in our own life and world. Only he genuinely understands a text who perceives how it speaks to him in his own situation. That understanding does not appear to be simple when one takes seriously the weight of modern-day problems. What has the Bible to say about life and death, riches and poverty, conflicts and relations? We only need to mention the words abortion, euthanasia, atomic weapons, pacifism, liberation-action, environmental protection, homosexuality, and everyone grasps what is meant...."

I will not enter into a detailed criticism of these two chapters. We wish to get to a summary and treatment of the main chapter of this Report. I will only offer a summary criticism, as follows:

1. The Report in these two chapters is tendentious, slanted. It puts the critics of Scripture and the modern-day exegetes in the best possible light. It puts Kuyper and Bavinck and their organic view in as unfavorable a light as possible. It makes abundant use of the "dirty" word "fundamentalism." And while it does not outright call Kuyper and Bavinck fundamentalists—in fact, denies it—it might just as well have done so. In fact, it does not even call the disciples of Kuyper and Bavinck fundamentalists. It only dares to say that they were not "full-blooded" fundamentalists; in other words, half-blooded fundies.

2. At no point in these chapters does the Report offer a word of good, sound, Scriptural, Reformed criticism of critical approaches to Scripture either outside or within the GKN. This is not honest and proper historical reviewing. If a historical review is to be fruitful, it must furnish evaluations; and these evaluations must be soundly founded. It must expose false trends, so that the churches may be warned.

The meat of the Report, however, is in Chapter 4. And let me assure you: that will be a shocker!

Editor's Notes

The Lost Is Found! We are happy to report that the 1000 unbound copies of Prof. Hanko's *Mysteries Of The Kingdom* have been found by our binder. They did not go through the shredder after all! This means that this book will be available much sooner than anticipated, as soon as we can prevail on the bindery to finish the task.

New Publications Planned. At a recent meeting of the Publications Committee a large number of future publications were approved, some of which we hope to complete this year if at all possible. I

cannot furnish the whole list here, and at this writing I do not know which will come from the press first. Watch for future notices.

Write Me With Ideas. During the first part of June we will be holding our annual *Standard Bearer* Staff meeting. As always, ideas and suggestions for the improvement of our magazine are welcome. If you have such suggestions, please write me promptly. I cannot promise that all ideas submitted will be adopted; they will receive consideration, and, if the Staff deems them worthy, will be implemented.

SPECIAL ARTICLE

Reformed, Yet Always Reforming (2)

Prof. H. Hanko

It is useless and futile to try to come to some conclusions concerning whether the pulpit or the pew is to blame when decay sets in, in the life of the church. The two go together. The Scriptures tell us, in the letter of our Lord Jesus Christ to the church of Ephesus, that spiritual deterioration begins inevitably with the loss of the church's first love. There is good reason why the first of the letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor is a letter to Ephesus. The reason is that the Lord means precisely to point out that all decay, no matter where it begins, and no matter what form it takes is decay which begins at that point where the church loses her first love. When a church loses her first love she loses her spiritual fervor, her spiritual warmth, her spiritual love for the truth of the Word of God and for the cause of Jesus Christ in the midst of the world. That warmth and fervor and love which characterized her in the early days of her existence she loses. That is the beginning which soon manifests itself in untold evils in the church of Jesus Christ.

When a church loses her first love, then, fundamental to that loss of her first love, there is loss of love for the Word of God, and, therefore, loss of love for God Himself. That loss of love for the Word of God is a loss of love for the Word of God as that Word is proclaimed in the pulpit by the pastors. One hour and a half in church on Sunday is

too much, more than it is possible for the congregation to take. If the minister exceeds his time by even a few minutes, he is long-winded, repetitious, and imposing upon the good graces of the congregation.

But though the congregation may assemble in church on the Lord's Day, this does not mean that the people give faithful and diligent attention to the preaching and to what is being said. There are too many other things to think about, and it is too warm in church, and there are too many problems in life which occupy our attention to concentrate upon what the minister has to say. And if perchance the minister should be some kind of skilled orator so that he can compel, as it were, the congregation to listen, what they hear, even should they hear doctrines expounded and truth explained, they hear intellectually, coldly, abstractly, without the passion and warmth and fervor of a hearing, which, as described in the Epistle to the Hebrews, is a hearing mixed with faith.

And that lack of interest in and concern for the Word of God, that lack of love for the Word of God, manifests itself in every area of life. It manifests itself in the decay of devotions in the home, where the Word of God is no longer central to the life of the family. All kinds of things have replaced that

Word of God as the focal point of the life of the family. Perhaps the television set has become the focal point of the family's life. Perhaps it is the pursuit of fun and pleasure. Perhaps earning money directs all the home's activities and claims the attention and energies of the family. The Word of God may still be read, but it is read in a hurry, only when there is time; it is not read devotionally, prayerfully, carefully, worshipfully, because that love for the Word is gone.

Wherever anyone deals with and concentrates upon the exposition of Scripture, interest declines and wanes. That marks decay, and that has its effect upon the pulpit. Soon, because of that disinterest in the Word of God, the pulpit becomes weak. Ministers cater to what the congregation wants; they have one ear cocked to what the congregation is saying about their preaching, and are not concerned with what God is saying about how they preach. Ministers have their fingers in the wind to test the congregational breezes that blow, to be sure they are sailing along with the prevailing winds. They are more interested in the breezes that come from the congregation than they are in the winds of the Holy Spirit which rock and shake.

As the pulpit loses its fervor, its passion, its force, its doctrinal power, the whole matter begins to feed on itself. The congregation becomes yet weaker. And because something has to take the place of that terrible lack, the congregation gives itself over to the worship, not of God, but of idols: the idols of mammon, of sports, of pleasure, of houses and lands, of automobiles and snowmobiles. In this way worldliness and carnality creep into the church, and the church begins to lose her identity as the church, so that, when those who are outside look at the church, they say of the church, "What is different about her? We can see no difference between those people who claim to be the church and ourselves. There is no difference that is noticeable: they dress as we do, they speak as we do, their lives are precisely like ours in every respect. O, they go to church a couple of times on Sunday, but the extent of their involvement and interest in spiritual affairs seems to be limited to that couple of times they are in church, and they can barely stifle their yawns of boredom while they are there. What is so different?"

It is at that point that the church becomes ripe for heresy. If there should appear in our midst, which may God graciously forbid, a minister who began to preach false doctrine, would you and I have the spiritual sensitivity to detect it for what it is? Would we have the *courage* to see it for the threat that it is in the church of Jesus Christ and to combat it? Or would we rather say that we can not be fighting all the time; we can not be bothering our

heads about such obscure and minute points of doctrine; we can not be tearing the churches apart with another split because someone happens to say something just a bit different from the traditional way of saying things? The result is not only that false doctrine begins to be taught in the church, but as false doctrine makes headway and becomes more and more accepted and the people continue to lose their courage to fight against it, those who come under the influence of false doctrine more and more begin to gain positions of power and leadership, so that the direction of the church is determined by them. In the ecclesiastical assemblies, whether consistories or classes or synod, the lie is openly approved. Whereas twenty or twenty-five years ago it would have taken a synod about five minutes to point out what was wrong with a given heresy, it now takes the church four years, three study committees, and eighty-page reports, which no one can understand, to settle a matter. It stands to reason that, when that happens, something, somewhere has gone badly wrong. And men who are of the carnal seed have determined the doctrinal and moral direction of the church.

Are the people of God simply outnumbered, outvoted, though they fight fiercely? No, not always. Things have come to such a pass in the church because people of God are spiritually lethargic. They are too spiritually weary to do what they know has to be done. And the very sins which are prevalent in the church become a part of their own lives, so that they too, go along with the crowds, and their voice of protest is no longer heard.

That is the history of the church. It has never been any different. It is for that reason that Reformed Churches have said that a truly Reformed church is the church which is always reforming. And the church that ceases to be a reforming church ceases to be a Reformed church.

How are reforms brought about?

In the first place, it is extraordinarily important to emphasize that reform is not brought about by way of mysticism and subjectivism. Someone said once that every heresy that rises in the church is the church paying her unpaid debts. That is true of the rise of Pentecostalism too. Pentecostalism has the power in the church which it does because of the unpaid bills of the Twentieth-Century church. Pentecostalism has rushed in to fill a vacuum which has been created by the declining spiritual character of the church of Jesus Christ. Pentecostalism says, "Look at the church: dead, guilty of world-conformity, perfectly capable of knowing and explaining her doctrine, but the life is gone; the church is a corpse; it looks nice, but there is no life."

But this is true of all mysticism. It finds the solution to the problem in an emphasis on godly life and Christian piety. The inner life must be emphasized. This is, in itself, true. But all mysticism, subjectivism, and pietism emphasize this to the exclusion of doctrine. Those who teach this become suspicious of doctrine. It is doctrine that has harmed and killed the church; and, therefore, doctrine must go. Let us forget doctrine and emphasize the inner life, the life of piety, the life of fellowship, conscious, meditative fellowship with God. In this way the objective revelation of the Scriptures is de-emphasized and even denied so that the individual is left to sink in the quicksands of spiritual subjectivism.

In connection with this, mysticism becomes suspicious not only of doctrine, but of the church itself as an institute. It thinks very little or nothing at all of the organizational aspect of the church as she is in the world to preach the gospel, to administer the

sacraments, to exercise Christian discipline through her ordained and called ministry, her elders and deacons. Of that institutional church the mystic becomes suspicious, and he says that the true inner life cannot be found there; to attain to the true inner life you must have small groups of people who come together for devotional purposes, to edify one another, to encourage one another, to strengthen one another to study the Scriptures together, to cultivate spiritual life and to come to a true understanding of the Word of God. There was even that tendency at the time of the Reformation, and there was a segment of the Reformation which went in the direction of a distrust of the church institute. This was the Anabaptistic movement. To this the Reformers objected. They insisted that the church needs reforming after the pattern of the Holy Scriptures. The church must return to the Word of God, but it must remain Church.

(to be continued)

THE DAY OF SHADOWS

Another Garment, and More Injustice

Rev. John A. Heys

Although we find his name in the chapter which lists the giants of faith, Joseph is not listed with these giants in Hebrews 11. He is simply mentioned as one whose sons Jacob blessed leaning on his staff. This, however, in no way minimizes the great faith that he had, even though it may come as somewhat of a surprise to us. We may have expected to find his name with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with Moses and Rahab, Gideon and Barak. Where do we read of Barak doing anything in the way of walking by faith that compares with what is written of Joseph in Genesis 39 when he resisted powerful temptations of Potiphar's wife? How brightly Joseph's faith shines on the background of his father's weakness and his brothers' carnality. But let us beware lest we in conceit sin by thinking that our choice of candidates for the display of saving faith is superior to that of the Holy Spirit Who gave the list which we have.

There are several other amazing facts recorded concerning the life of Joseph. His father, who is listed as such a giant of faith, also displayed some tremendous spiritual weaknesses; and his mother likewise set a very pathetic example for the children. If she had faith in God, nothing recorded in Holy Writ underscores it or calls it to our attention.

And yet, here is a son, born to these parents, who stands up in faithfulness to God in most powerful temptations. Let it be remembered that what our parents are will determine whether we will be taught the truth, and to what degree, and whether we shall be taught His law, and how strongly. But it will not determine whether we will believe that truth, and whether we will keep that law. What God gives us will determine that. What the Spirit of Christ does in us will determine whether and to what degree we will walk in truth and in good works. Not the faithfulness of the parents produces faith in the children, but the faithfulness of God to His covenant promise to give to the seed of the woman hatred of the devil and all his works, and a love toward God.

And the most wonderful statement in Genesis 39:1-3 is that "The Lord was with him." Joseph was obedient, and he was faithful in most amazingly trying circumstances. Consider that he had no human supervision of his spiritual life at all in Potiphar's house. Potiphar was an unbeliever who demanded of Joseph only faithfulness to his whims and wishes. Joseph was far removed from his father's eye. There were no elders or deacons to observe his going in and coming out so far from home.

Children like to leave their parent's home to be free to follow their flesh without rebuke or frown. That was not Joseph. Given his wishes he would be back in his father's presence. All he had was the eye of God upon him as far as supervision goes. But above and beyond that he had the love of God in his heart; and that kept him in the narrow way, even in most powerful temptations by a scheming and bold sex-pot. But the hand of God was with him.

O, yes, that means that God blessed him and prospered him in what he set out to do. But it also explains why he stood so strongly in a walk of faith and obedience to God and man. With His hand God works for His people, but also upon and in His people. And this hand of the Lord *with* him, was not simply with Joseph's hand in his works to prosper him in what he did, but with his soul, his mind, his heart. God is first with us, and His hand first takes hold of our hearts and minds before He prospers us in our way. Blessings come only in the way of a walk of faith. And a walk of faith comes by the gracious hand of God that is not against us but with us so that we walk with Him.

Let all shut-ins and afflicted children of God take note. Joseph was a slave, was in exile, was a lonely young man completely cut off from those he loved and whose fellowship he desired. But this was not because God's hand was against him. That hand of God was working all things together for Joseph's exaltation and restoration to his father, yea to undreamed of exaltation. Let no child of God in his sufferings and miseries think that God has forgotten or forsaken. Let that child of God wait until God's work with him is finished. In heavenly glory all the saints shall see that God's hand was with them for good and not against them for evil. Even in the way of misery and suffering the child of God prospers. His way is always upward and forward to unheard of joys and blessings.

In that light we must see the imprisonment and debasement of Joseph because of a deceitful siren. She is God's tool as well as Satan's. And she is God's tool first; and Satan as well is His tool. God is behind all this history; and because His hand is with Joseph, Joseph prospers through his sufferings. As David wrote in Psalm 23, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." He shall reach that heavenly joy because mercy and goodness follow him in this life. And that these follow him does not mean that he does not enjoy them now but will in the future. It means that these are powers of God that are behind him to direct him and impel him toward that glory. They pursue him. They follow him, not like a wagon follows the horses, but as a man is behind the wheelbarrow to push it ever onward and forward

till the work is finished.

It was that mercy and goodness that was under and behind Joseph; it was that hand of God that was with him, that sustained him in the powerful temptation of this bold, sensuous woman. We read that Joseph was a goodly person and well favoured. He made a very pleasing appearance, a clean-cut young man, not at all hard on the eyes, a manly youth. And then in the next breath we read that Potiphar's wife "cast her eyes upon him." He was sexually attractive to her, even though he made no attempt to be such. And after lusting after him for a time she made bold advances and came with a command, "Lie with me!" This did not happen only once or twice; for we read that it happened day by day. She sought in every way to wear him down. And Satan was working harder than she was. But behind it God was working all things together for Joseph's good and for the good of His Church. And God's hand was with Joseph to prosper him in his battle against his own lust.

You must not forget that! Joseph was not a cold, abnormal child with no body chemistry like that of his brother Reuben who went in unto his father's concubine, or his brother Judah who turned in unto one who he thought was an harlot. What young man today would have stood as Joseph did? He had gotten in the good graces of Potiphar. Now he could do the same with his wife, to be needed by her and protected by her and sought by her every time that Potiphar went on his many trips as officer in Pharaoh's army. Joseph did not resist because of fear of being caught. He did not refuse because he had no emotions and had no desires whatsoever for what she wanted him to do. Nor did he try to put her off with, "Not today, maybe sometime in the future." He did not stall for time. He set an example for our young people. He called it SIN, and let it be known that he had no interest in sinning against God. Try to put the tempter or temptress off in any other way, and he or she will come back. Fight with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and the enemy will hate you. Put on the whole armour of God, and you will be protected from his fiery darts.

It is true, this sex-pot did not take No for an answer. And in spite of Joseph's use of that sword of the Spirit, she came back day after day. This was only because she did not know what the word sin means. She knew not God. She knew no sin against Him. But young people in the church, tempted by young people in the church, should by all means fight with that sword of the Spirit of the whole armour of God. And they should never date with those who know not God. They should not play with fire!

In all our trials there is that hand of God with us

and under us that gives us the courage to say No to sin and Yes to righteousness. No temptation is greater than His grace. When His goodness and mercy are behind us, no force can come up against us to push us back into sin and unbelief. And whereas we live in a day and age when sensuous men and women abound, and lewd magazines—to say nothing of lewd, enticing dress, or better undress—married and unmarried alike need that whole armour of God. Even as Potiphar's wife did not let up or give in, so the wicked world around us today multiplies its attacks on the church. Satan is out to get us and our youth. Fight him, and the hand of God will be with you.

Crafty this woman was. When Joseph fled and left his garment in her hand, new devilry arose in her heart. Him whom she lusted so strongly after in what the world calls love, erotic love, she now hates vehemently and plots his undoing. And Joseph was handed over to the keepers of Pharaoh's prison on circumstantial evidence and without even a word which he might speak in his own behalf.

We would be inclined to ask, "Did Potiphar not know what kind of wife he had?" He must have known her and her ways. She was no foreigner to him. That she was a liar may not have been impressed upon his mind. He might not have found her lying to him or around him. But he certainly knew her sensuous nature, and her aggressiveness therein. But we must not forget that hand of God upon Joseph. It was after all His hand with Joseph that handed him over to the keeper of the prison. This could not have happened without His hand directing all those who served this purpose. And that hand of God went with him into the prison where soon enough he is once again exalted in ser-

vitute. We read, "But the mercy of the Lord was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison." God had not failed him. He had not withdrawn His hand. It was His hand that brought Joseph into the king's prison. Long before this it was the hand of God that brought him into the service of Potiphar who was captain of the guard, a man who could throw his enemies into the king's prison.

But lest we conclude that Joseph was having coat trouble—first the coat of many colours that made his brothers envy and hate him; and now the coat Potiphar gave him, which his wife used to get revenge upon him for snubbing her in her carnal cravings—let us consider that God's people do not have coat trouble. Fig-leaf aprons that men make cannot help us; coats that men may give us, coats that men may snatch from us and use to condemn us to death, cannot hurt us, because we have robes provided by God, robes of righteousness washed in the blood of His Son. Joseph's coat was soaked in animal's blood and brought Jacob great grief. Christ's robe was taken from Him and His blood was shed that we might have robes that justify us before God, even though we have sinned against Him over and over again. And these robes of the righteousness of Christ will not testify against us and cause us to be thrown into the pit, but cover our sins and bring us to unspeakable exaltation in that day when, the hand of God being with us, He will with His hand send back that Son, Who was also falsely accused and nailed to a tree, but rose on account of our justification. In the days of the Antichrist the world may strip us naked, and falsely accuse us. But we have garments of righteousness that make us exceedingly rich.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

War with the Remnant

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

The joy found in the hearts of godly parents when covenant seed is brought forth!

The Psalmist in all his wisdom and as prompted by the Holy Spirit sang these words: "Lo children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. . . . Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them" (Psalm 127:3-5).

Why does the Psalmist speak in such glowing

terms of bearing children—"an heritage," "a reward," "happy"? He is mindful of the same wonderful truth that we are mindful of today—God's covenant. Every child of God believes that the Son of God gathers, out of the whole human race, from the beginning to the end of the world a Church chosen to eternal life (see the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21). And he believes too that God does this in the line of generations, that is to

say, that God "hath commanded that what He hath done be passed in tradition from father to son." All godly parents, therefore, are convinced in their hearts that the Lord chooses to gather His Church by means of the fruit of their womb. They are of the firm conviction that the promises of the forgiveness of sin, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting are not only for them but for their children too. That gives to those covenant parents joy unspeakable. And in that joy they feel compelled in all gladness to propagate that covenant line. It is not a matter of being forced to do something they really care not to do. But it is a matter of their love for God and for His covenant. Because they realize that God gathers His Church in their generations, a man and his wife out of all joy feel the urge to bring forth children. Thus the words of the Psalmist: "*Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them!*"

Perhaps a prime example of this sincere desire to bring forth covenant seed is the action of Tamar, Judah's daughter-in-law. In the events recorded for us in Genesis 38 we are at first apt to condemn her as a wicked, immoral, and perverted heathen. But we must not misconstrue her strong desire for seed by Judah's family. Surely her actions can never be condoned. They were very, very wicked. Yet it was her sincere desire and longing to bring forth covenant seed. She used the wrong means to fulfill that longing; nevertheless, the longing itself was righteous. In fact it was because of that desire that she is specifically mentioned in Matthew 1:3 as a mother of Christ. But the point in this example is that this is exactly the longing which every godly man and his wife experiences. They are filled with joy and gladness before God in their duty of bringing forth covenant seed. And we might add, they are extremely saddened when they find this impossible (e.g., Sarah, Hannah, and Elizabeth).

Such a joy and longing on the part of God's children, however, enrages Satan and his host. He hates to see the continued gathering of God's Church. He hates it when godly parents bring forth covenant seed. How can he destroy Christ's Church and ruin God's eternal plan if parents in that Church of Christ continue to supply the ranks with young Christian Soldiers? He must stop this if he is at all to succeed! So he tries too!

In Revelation 12 we find that the great red dragon which, according to verse 9, is "that old serpent called the Devil and Satan," was cast out of heaven and into the earth. Satan had failed to destroy the cause of Christ in this world by devouring the Christ-child Who was brought forth out of the loins of the Old Dispensational Church. That failure of Satan to destroy Christ took place when on the cross Christ achieved the victory over sin

and death. At that time that "great red dragon" was cast out of heaven and into the earth. No longer could he stand before God accusing the brethren; now he could dwell only on the earth. Being cast out into the earth Satan in all of his fury turned once again on the Church of Christ—the woman, but this time as she became manifest in the New Dispensational Church. In the fury we are told that, "he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child." So angry was Satan over his defeat that he turned in all his fury upon the Church of Christ and began to persecute her. In verses 14-16 of Revelation 12 we are told how that the Lord not only gathers but also defends and preserves His Church.

Now, however, Satan's fury has cooled somewhat. He is still wroth with the Church of Christ, but he realizes that persecution really only serves to strengthen and purify the church. His tactics are different now. We are told that "the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed which keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." This war with the remnant is not the same warfare as persecution. Instead it becomes a spiritual warfare, a warfare whereby he uses many sly and deceiving ways to destroy the covenant seed which yet remains in this world.

If only Satan could annihilate completely the remnant of the seed, then Christ's return to this world would be needless. If only Satan could stem the continued growth of God's Church, then God's plan to glorify His name would fail and he, Satan, could rule the world. But how?

Ah, yes, destroy the joy and the longing in the child of God's heart to bring forth the covenant seed! That is how! So Satan sets about his task.

In the first place he works in the hearts of men and women within the church of Christ a desire for freedom. They enjoy being able to pick up and go whenever and wherever they please. Then, of course, in connection with this, Satan provides so many pleasurable places to go—you name your desire and he will see to it that there will be a place provided to accommodate you. But then there are the children. How they seem to get in the way! Either one has to drag them along or he has to pay through the nose for a baby-sitter. Maybe one or two children do not seem to steal away so much of that freedom but any more becomes cumbersome.

Then naturally there is the financial burden which they cause. If we take them along with us in our pleasure escapades then our wallets are empty by the end of the night. But if we were instead to leave them home, then the baby-sitter walks away with a broad smile as she tucks five or ten dollars

into her purse. Then, too, there is the cost of covenant education. I make enough money on the job to send one or possibly two through school but I could never afford a third. Strange, but we never think of using the money which we spend on pleasure as being a means to send another through school—but then, that is the way Satan works.

Of course, the women's liberation movement seems so distant from us. It's never a drag to sit home with the kids every day. We never say to our husbands, "Why don't you take care of them? They're your kids too!" Or do we? How those children can be a burden and a sorrow!

Hello, Tamar? Where are you? Where is your joy and your longing to bring forth covenant seed? Where is your desire to propagate the cause of Christ in this world by bringing forth recruits? All gone? God forbid!

How easy Satan makes it with all the modern technology of this world at our disposal. All kinds of contraceptives are available. All we have to do is take our pick. And that wicked world makes it sound so noble too—family planning is for the good of society, they say. Or how about abortion? We are

alarmed and stunned with the murders taking place in Atlanta at present. Are we alarmed and awe-struck by the fact that thousands of unborn babies are murdered *each year*? Maybe that has become so common place already that in a generation or two it too will be accepted among the people of God. If Satan has his way it will!

The day and age in which we live is evil. As we are made aware of these attempts of Satan to destroy the remnant of the seed we resist. We do not give in to the tactics of Satan, as shrewd as they may be. We see in those tactics the swift return of Christ. And as we look forward to that return our attitude will be one of joy and gladness in bringing forth covenant children. We hear Peter's warning in II Peter 3:17, "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led astray with the error of the wicked, fall from your steadfastness." We hear that warning and take heed. And as we obey it we are comforted by the fact that the Son of God gathers but also preserves His Church, and that, from the beginning all the way to the end of the world. The cause of Christ will prevail and His Church shall endure unto all eternity.

IN HIS FEAR

The Theology of Discussion

Rev. Wayne Bekkering

It has been remarked to me that Protestant Reformed ministers do not discuss together very well. I believe that this is true of all of us generally.

To be able to discuss things together profitably is a good gift that God gives His people. It is a gift through which we can learn things from each other. It is also a good means of fellowship and encouragement. It is important that we use this gift correctly.

Within the life of the church there are many opportunities to exercise the gift of discussion. We discuss in our homes as families or when we have visitors. We discuss informally in our various societies and study groups. We also discuss more formally in our meetings of consistory, classis, and synod.

Discussion is premised on the fact that all truth does not reside in one person. God gives the truth to the church, and He reveals that truth unto us by

His Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God (I Cor. 2:10). All believers are partakers of the Holy Spirit as a real enlightening power. The anointing which you have received of God abides in you, and you need not that any man teach you, but the same anointing teaches you of all things, and is truth (I John 2:27).

I would like to review some of the Biblical principles that I believe speak to this point.

First of all we must discuss as brethren. This sounds very elementary, but it is not so easy to do. We need to make the conscious determination that together we are God's children. Really we are not above one another, but we are all servants of God in Christ. "But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:10 & 12). "Who art thou that

judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand" (Rom. 14:4).

Secondly we must speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). Speaking the truth in love means speaking the truth according to the characteristics of love in I Corinthians 13:4 & 5. "Charity (love) suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil."

With respect to discussion this means that we will be patient with our brother—even our brother who differs with us or who is slow to understand. We will try to understand where he is coming from in his remarks. If a brother approaches a matter from a different perspective than we do, so often we jump to the conclusion that he is wrong. We can easily become provoked with the brother and fail to suffer long with him or be kind to him.

We ask the question why this happens so often in our discussions. The reason is that we are all beset with the sin of pride. Too often we discuss to vaunt ourselves; or we are puffed up with our own ideas or ability, and therefore behave ourselves unseemly, seeking our own.

Why do we discuss together in the first place? Do we want to learn something from our discussion? Or do we want to share with others some things we have learned, i.e., to teach? In both cases we ought to be clothed with humility.

We should always be ready to learn something from a discussion. We should be ready to acknowledge that on any given subject there is something that can be learned, no matter how old we are or how much education we have, and no matter how much we have studied the matter. If one will not acknowledge these things then he ought not discuss.

When we discuss in order to share something we have learned, two considerations ought to be before our minds. The first is the truth of God; the second, the welfare of the brother.

There is more than one way to teach others. One can make a forceful presentation that brooks no opposition so that by bluster he blows over the brother. Remember we are teaching by discussion. After a blustery blast no one may dare raise a word of opposition. But does that mean that all are convinced and that he has brought forward the understanding of God's truth? Is there not an old proverb that goes something like this, "One who is convinced against his will, is of the same opinion still"? Even more seriously, a brother may be grieved and offended by such a blast. "A brother

offended is harder to be won than a strong city" (Prov. 18:19). "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger. The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright" (Prov. 15:1 & 2a).

Other ways to teach in discussion are more suited for those governed by Christian love. Wisdom will tell us that there are different kinds of people. Some are quiet, mild, and reserved. Others are more bold and open. In our discussions we ought to be able to have an atmosphere that will encourage even the mild to participate.

If love for the brother motivates us, then we will act brotherly. When someone says something that we do not understand or agree with, we will not overreact. First we will try to find out what the brother means. Too often we respond to a brother as if he were an enemy of the truth. Sometime our response to a brother is so severe that one might think his position was coming straight from hell.

Love for the truth and love for the brother demands a strong answer—no doubt about that. But what is strength and what is weakness? Sometimes we think that the stronger we react the stronger we are. It is possible, you know, to wound or kill a brother with misguided love.

Is not our strength to be standing upon the foundation of God's eternal infallible Word? If someone opposes us we do not have to fluster and bluster, but we simply stand. If God be for us who can be against us? God sovereignly maintains His cause and truth. We have responsibility in the defense of the truth. Jude exhorts the saints that they should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto them. There is a difference, however, between defending the truth and being defensive about the truth.

Is it not really our weakness that causes us to overreact in the face of opposition—weakness, i.e., in that we fail to trust the promises and the power of the Word? If we think that somehow the defense of the truth rests with us, then we will overreact when opposed. But as we stand on the unassailable foundation of God's Word we are strong.

We need to convince each other with the Word, because there is a correspondence between the Word and the Spirit within us. It is a clear testimony of that Word that moves us and convinces us. Man's word by itself is powerless; but when we draw our arguments from the Scripture, then we have the aid of the Holy Spirit to bind our words upon the hearts of the hearers. There is our strength and power!

Arguments from precedent, tradition, and history have their value, but we do not consider any writing of men, however holy these men may have been, to be of equal value with the Scripture.

We must labor diligently, for the welfare of the church and of one another, to make clear the truth from the Scripture. I believe that oftentimes we assume too much in our discussions. We expect that everyone knows our line of thinking, or ought to, so that we omit steps in proving our position out of the Word. We must be careful in our discussion to bring out the specific passage or principle of the Scripture that underlies our position.

One could object that if we always cited the specifics of our position then we would never have time to develop our points. We must be wise in this, of course, but it is never a waste of time to show how our position relates to God's Word. We must be sure that our arguments are built upon the solid foundation of Scripture.

As churches God has given us many benefits and strengths, and for these we are thankful; but we have not yet arrived at perfection. We have many things yet to learn from God's Word.

We have exercised ourselves in precision of doctrinal understanding and in clarity of expression. These things are good, but I am afraid that this has led us to be more defensive than we need to be. This is reflected in our discussions among ourselves and with those around us.

Let us now practice ourselves in the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law (Gal. 5:22-23). In doing this we will increase our benefit from the gift of discussion that God has given us.

ALL AROUND US

Rev. G. Van Baren

Berkhof and the Virgin Birth

The RES News Exchange, April 7, 1981, gives an updated report on one of the doctrinal developments in the Netherlands. Nothing, of course, sounds strange from that source any more. Yet we ought to be reminded of the developments—and be on our guard. The report states:

Centraal Weekblad, whose Chief Editor is Prof. Dr. K. Runia, every month carries a rubric "Views in discussion." Contributors to this rubric are from outside the Editorial Committee but hold views that are considered to be significant for the information of the reader. The contributors, themselves, feel that their views, though disputed, are legitimate within the Christian Church.

In the issue of 4 March 1981, Prof. Dr. Hendrikus Berkhof, who teaches systematic theology in Leyden and whose major work *Christian Faith* appeared in English last year, writes on the virgin birth. Lately Prof. Berkhof has been in the news because of his contention that the virgin birth may not be regarded as being of the same weight as the resurrection. *Reformatisch Dagblad* published an article with the heading ("misleading" in Berkhof's judgment): "Berkhof Doubts Virgin Birth."

In the *Centraal Weekblad* article, "The Specific Gravity of the Narratives about Jesus' Virgin Birth," Berkhof carefully yet forthrightly articulates his view. The term "specific gravity" he derives from Prof. Koole's 1965 essay on "The Specific Gravity of the

Historical Parts of the Old Testament." Berkhof feels that the distinction introduced by Koole is also useful for the New Testament.

Of the four evangelists, only Matthew and Luke talk about the life of Jesus prior to the beginning of His public ministry. Mark and John either did not consider that part of Jesus' life important or were not familiar with it. Both Matthew and Luke wrote late and were dependent for their material on oral and written tradition.

Berkhof considers it noteworthy that from Chapter 3 on, when they could make use of Mark and the so-called *logica*-source, Matthew and Luke make no more mention of the events concerning Jesus' birth, not even where one might expect this, as for instance in Matthew 13:46-50 and Luke 8:19-21. In contrast, it seems important that in their use of Mark 6:3 they have the hearers say: "Is not this the carpenter's son?" (Matthew 13:55); "Is not this Joseph's son?" (Luke 4:22), without correcting these hearers. Apparently, except for what is found in the synoptic gospels, the birth narratives did not gain wide currency (see Rom. 1:3; Gal. 4:4).

Berkhof concludes that the birth narratives are an incidental part...in the New Testament. More significant is that they are not found in the earliest brief confessional summaries of the gospel message. These confessions, also those in the New Testament, are centered in Jesus' coming, His death, and His resurrection.

Do the narratives of the virgin birth rest on historical fact? Berkhof says that this can neither be proven nor disproven. In his present judgment, the evidence is, however, against it. If the virgin birth rested on historical fact, if, for instance, Mary would have told the apostles about it, the New Testament would have been full of it. Moreover, in antiquity it was quite customary to authenticate the supra-human nature and work of heroes and religious leaders by ascribing to them a birth in which the deity assumed the place of the human father.

Could that have led to the confession: Conceived by the Holy Spirit? Berkhof expresses full agreement with that confession and calls it a confession with which the Christian faith stands or falls. However, in that case the birth narratives are to be considered as attempts to express this confession in biological terms. An additional consideration is that in antiquity it was thought that only the male was regarded as having an active part in the begetting of a child; the mother was only an instrument and a channel. We know better today.

The systematic theologians have never quite known what to do with the virgin birth. For the Roman Catholic theologians it did not offer enough to serve as a basis for the incarnation of the Son of God. For Protestant theologians the exclusion of marriage and sexuality in the birth of Jesus was not necessary as a basis and explanation of the incarnation.

Berkhof's final verdict is: allow freedom of opinion.

Such teaching sounds still extremely strange and heretical in the ears of Reformed people of God. Yet it is being heard increasingly in Reformed circles.

What would our objection be to the above presentation? First, what a horrible thing is done to Scripture! It is treated as neither inspired nor in-

fallible. Because only Matthew and Luke speak of this virgin birth of Christ, does that make it less trust-worthy? Because they do not elaborate upon this in later chapters, does that mean that likely they were not too convinced? Because these writers may have written many, many years after the event, because they may have been "dependent for their material on oral and written tradition," is that reason to question the truthfulness of the account? To answer "yes" is to deny the infallibility and inspiration of Scripture. Shame on a "Reformed" professor for even suggesting this. Shame too to say that one should have "freedom of opinion" when Scripture states this matter so clearly.

There was a time, not too long ago, when "Reformed" men questioned certain historical events of Scripture—insisting that they firmly believed in the infallible revelation concerning the work of salvation in Christ (including the accounts of His conception and birth). Now, the theories which used to be applied only to the Genesis account, are being applied also to the gospel accounts. It points out the fact that questioning of the infallibility of Scripture inevitably leads to a questioning of the wonder of salvation in Christ.

Berkhof's position too ignores the effect of his view on the sinlessness of the nature of Christ. Does not the Matthew and Luke account exactly present the truth which can account for the sinlessness of Christ in our human nature? Though we may not understand all of this wonder, we know that Christ was not tainted by the original sin of Adam—and this must also be by virtue of the fact that He had no human father. But then, Berkhof probably also does not believe in the historical character of Adam either.

Also: Report 44 and the Infallibility Question

The Christian Reformed Church has been increasingly troubled by the same insidious views which have arisen in the Netherlands. They have had their "Verhey" case and others. Nor has the difficulty been solved. Report "44" appears to allow what it also condemns. It is two-faced. It has not settled the "infallibility" question in the C.R.C. Rightly, there is deep concern about this by many members of the C.R.C. We too, though another denomination, are likewise concerned. We are concerned what this view of infallibility, adopted

by many in C.R.C. leadership, must do to those weak in faith or of limited spiritual understanding. What happens when a generation arises who have been taught and encouraged by leaders who have forsaken the old and Scriptural paths? And, how will this affect our own churches in the future?

The Banner, April 6, 1981, gives a brief indication of the seriousness and spread of the error of denying infallibility as historically confessed by the church. In a report from the Calvin College and

Seminary Board of Trustees report, the following is briefly presented (without further remarks or clarification):

Professor John Stek was instructed by the board, "in his teaching office, to correlate the findings of his research and the event character of Genesis 1-11, with a view to doing full justice to the church's confessional view of these chapters as elucidated in point E of the *Acts of Synod 1972*, p. 69: Synod warns against the use of any method of biblical interpretation...which calls into question...the event character...of biblical history, thus compromising the full authority of Scripture as the Word of God."

Some of the same concern is expressed by that prolific letter-writer, Rev. J. Tuininga, from Lethbridge, Alberta C.R.C. In a letter to the editor, he writes in the *Outlook* about this same problem:

...There is more to be said, however. One problem is the "frustration" that you mention. One senses and knows that there is something wrong, but how do we get to the bottom of it, and how do we go about correcting it? The fact that Calvin College and Seminary are so far removed from a large part of the church is a complicating factor. Who really knows what is going on in Grand Rapids? Some of the things that should be known by the whole church are never reported on in the church papers. Executive committees and boards try to insure that nothing "wrong" gets out. At the very present an issue is being dealt with "secretly," more or less. And this is often done with an appeal to Matthew 18. But such an appeal misses the point. Matthew 18 deals with *private* sins; but matters which are taught in the college and seminary are anything but private—that's for "public consumption." What a professor says in class he should be able and willing to defend publicly before the church. These professors are, after all, appointed by and are responsible to, the church. So let's quit appealing to Matthew 18 when it doesn't apply.

As to what *is* wrong, the whole church ought to know about Verhey. And that matter has never really been definitively dealt with by the church. It's still somewhat of an "open case." Synod never spoke

clearly on the issue. And everyone knows that some of our professors are at least very sympathetic to his views.

But now I want to become more concrete yet. In the last (Aug. '80) issue of the RES *Theological Forum* dealt with the problem of creation vs. evolution. Dr. Egbert Schuurman of the Netherlands presented the main paper, and a number of participants responded. One of these respondents was Dr. Sierd Woudstra of Calvin College. He makes clear in his response that he holds to a radical, unReformed view of Scripture. He says among other things that "many Christian scientists" now agree that "many species of animals had become extinct long before anything like a human being appeared on earth, and that the human race is far older than even the most flexible reading of the Bible would seem to allow for." Well, that's still somewhat debatable, I would guess. But what does one make of this: "I venture to say that one who holds that the universe is a few billion years old and that also the human race is of fairly high antiquity (30,000 years? 50,000 years?) must in principle concede the hermeneutical validity of the view of those who honestly question whether today one can still maintain an actual Garden of Eden, etc. etc. That in turn has immediate consequences for the approach to the whole of Scripture." (That last statement deserves an Amen!, J.T.) He then goes on to say that the "bridge of the traditional conservative reading of the biblical passages on creation, notably Genesis 1 & 2, is perilously creaking under the combined weight of what Christian scientists believe their studies tell them about the origin of the world and the human race."

Well, that's language difficult to misunderstand. And that is precisely the issue under discussion at present in the seminary. Was there a garden of Eden? Were Adam and Eve really "our first parents" as the Catechism says?

Tuininga hits the "nail on the head" when he treats this sore point. One would hope and pray that the C.R.C. might return wholeheartedly to its old stand—but the prospects do not appear bright in that regard.

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

John—The Gospel of the Son of God (1)

Rev. J. Kortering

As we approach this fourth Gospel, we notice immediately that it is not just another account of the ministry of Jesus. It is unique in many respects

from the synoptic authors (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). Some of these differences we must consider in this article.

THE AUTHOR

Apart from recent attempts to claim that the Gospel of John was written by a group of scholars that lived at Ephesus, almost all Christian tradition holds that John, the beloved disciple, wrote this Gospel.

Quite naturally, we turn first of all to the Gospel account itself to see if there is any evidence as to who the author might be. In chapter 21:24, 25 we read, "This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen." In the immediately preceding context, the disciple is further identified. There Jesus said that Peter would be carried where he didn't want to go, indicating that Peter would die a martyr's death. Thereupon Peter turned to John and we read, "Then Peter turning about seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on His breast at supper and said, Lord which is he that betrayeth Thee? Peter seeing Him saith to Jesus, Lord and what shall this man do?" The answer is that this other disciple will live to an old age. The designation, "disciple that Jesus loved," is a personal reference to the author, who is John, and who was reclining close to Jesus during the last passover.

Other evidence that can be gathered from the Gospel writing itself is as follows. The author was a Jew, familiar with the Jewish expectation of the coming Messiah (1:19-28), and with the Jewish insistence that the only proper place for worship was Jerusalem, (4:20). The author was acquainted with Jerusalem. He identified the Pool of Siloam at which the blind man had to wash his eyes to remove the clay (9:11). He also points out that Bethany was about 15 furlongs from Jerusalem (11:18). He freely identified Bethsaida and Cana as cities of Galilee (1:44; 2:1). Further, the author shows knowledge of Jewish tradition: "Then cometh He to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there" (4:5, 6).

There are references made to the fact that the author was an eyewitness to the things that took place. We read, "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth" (1:14). Referring to the blood and water that came from the pierced side of Jesus, he wrote, "And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye

might believe" (19:35). There are particular details that the author could not have known had he not been there, e.g., the hour at which Jesus sat by the well (4:6); the size of the pots that contained the water which was changed to wine (2:6); the weight and value of the ointment that Mary used in anointing Jesus (12:3, 5); and the detail in the trial of Jesus (chapters 18 and 19).

This all leads us to conclude without doubt that the disciple of John wrote this Gospel.

What then do we know of John?

From the Gospel accounts, we learn that John was a son of Zebedee. His brother James is usually mentioned first, since he was older. Zebedee was in the fishing business and employed his two sons along with other hired servants. Perhaps among whom were Andrew and Peter (Matt. 4:21, 22 and Mark 1:20, John 1:40). This would indicate that he was a man of sizable wealth. This may also explain why John was acquainted with the high priest in Jerusalem. He may have represented his father's business interest there (John 18:15, 18). John was a disciple of John the Baptist prior to being called by Jesus (John 1:39). This first call to leave John the Baptist was followed by a more permanent call to become fishers of men (Mark 1:16, 17). John's mother, the wife of Zebedee, was Salome. She too gives evidence of wealth in that she is mentioned among the women who ministered to Jesus of their substance (Matt. 27:55, 56). It is quite well established that she was the sister of Mary, Jesus' mother (John 19:25), which would make Jesus and John cousins. This explains from a natural point of view why Jesus commended the care of His mother to John (John 19:26, 27).

Being disciples of Jesus, he and his brother James developed close fellowship with Peter, and the three of them became an inner group with Jesus. In all honesty, John referred to himself as the "disciple whom Jesus loved." He was the closest to Jesus at the last passover (John 13:23). All three of them assumed a prominent role in Jesus' ministry. Examples of their being along with Jesus at special moments include the transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-8) and the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:37).

John and his brother James were called by Jesus, Boanerges, or sons of thunder (Mark 3:17). One asks, why? There are certain incidents which give us a clue as to the meaning. When Jesus travelled through Samaria and the people refused ordinary hospitality, James and John asked Jesus if they should call fire down from heaven to consume them (Luke 9:14ff.). Their mother Salome, requested for her two sons that they might sit in the kingdom, one on the right side of Jesus and the other of the left (Mark 10:35ff.). Also, when John

saw one cast out demons who was not a follower of Jesus, he forbade him; but Jesus corrected him for this conduct (Luke 9:49ff.). From this we learn that sons of thunder describe their fiery nature, their unsanctified zeal for Jesus, that had to be controlled and submitted to the will of God.

After Jesus' death and resurrection, John is seen often in the company of Peter. They must have stayed together during the time when Jesus' body was in the tomb and they were among the first to come to the open grave and "see and believe" (John 20:8). He was with Peter when the lame man was healed by the temple (Acts 3:1). John and Peter are both mentioned in Acts 8:14 as having been sent to Samaria after they heard that some had received the gospel. According to Galatians 2:9ff and Acts 15:6 Peter and John, along with James the brother of Jesus, are mentioned as being in Jerusalem during the great synod that decided whether the gentile converts should be circumcised. We might note here that by this time his brother James had been killed by Herod (Acts 12:2).

The church fathers, Irenaeus, Theophilus, Ignatius, etc. agree that John left Jerusalem, probably around 66 A.D., the beginning of the Jewish War, and resided in Ephesus for many years. During this stay in Ephesus he preached and taught, thus influencing the early New Testament church. Later he was banished to the Isle of Patmos (Revelation 1:9) during the reign of the Roman monarch Domitian (81-96 A.D.), was allowed to return to Ephesus during Nerva's reign, and died sometime during the reign of Trajan. By this it is evident that the words of Jesus proved true, that he outlived Peter and lived to be an old man (John 21:18-23).

DATE AND MESSAGE

The Gospel of John was written by the Apostle John toward the end of the first century, the later 90's A.D. It was written during the latter part of John's residence in Ephesus. The significance of this can be appreciated if we remind ourselves that the other Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, were all written sometime during the 60's A.D. John was written some 40 years later. By now John was an old man. He was eyewitness to the events of Jesus' ministry, he led the early church at Jerusalem, he outlived his brother James, Peter and even Paul. The church was going through great trials, the threat of heresies from within, the blood-bath of Rome from without. The Holy Spirit moved the old veteran to take up his pen and write yet another Gospel.

This leads us to consider the unique character of John's Gospel. It stands in contrast to the other three. Let us hear from the pen of John the purpose

he had in writing, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name" (John 20:30, 31). The Holy Spirit calls us to believe that Jesus is the *Son of God*!

In developing this theme, John is not interested in the details of Christ's ministry. Other Gospel accounts have already done that. Rather, John writes on the main subjects that Jesus taught, and he considers only the events that show that He is indeed the Son of God. It is interesting to observe that, apart from the passion week events, there are only two events recorded in John's Gospel which are also mentioned in the other Gospel accounts: the feeding of the 5000 and Christ's walking on the water. More than one third of the Gospel concerns itself with one 24 hour period, that prior to and including the crucifixion (chapters 13-19). Of the 1000 days of Christ's ministry on earth, John touches on only twenty.

The Gospel of John reflects maturity. This is in two ways.

First, it shows that maturity in the subject matter chosen. From the opening words this is evident, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God, the same was in the beginning with God" (John 1:1, 2). Christ Jesus is the WORD! Long before He was born of the Virgin Mary, He existed with the Father, He participated in the creation, and now is the true light that shineth in the world. The miracles He performed, the instruction He gave, the suffering and death He endured, all point in one direction to show that Jesus is the Son of God, and that as such He is indeed Savior.

Secondly, this Gospel reflects maturity in the manner in which John handles the material. He sets forth the truth as objective reality. He is a faithful chronicler of events that have indeed taken place. He sets forth the facts of Jesus' ministry as real history. In addition to that, John does it in such a way that he leads his readers in joining him as he grows in understanding these great truths. From the beginning he inserts, over and over, the honest observation that they saw His glory but did not understand many of these things at the time (see John 2:22 and 12:16). This is a meaningful teaching aid to assist the reader in order that he may believe that Christ is indeed the Son of God. When we first read of this, it seems impossible. We can identify with John in this lack of understanding. But, we must not stay there, the Gospel leads us ultimately to the resurrection and the Living Lord Who instructed Peter and all the disciples to "Feed my sheep" (John 21:17).

TRANSLATED TREASURES

A Pamphlet on the Reformation of the Church

Dr. A. Kuyper

(In the last paragraph Kuyper has explained that the deformation of the church is due to three causes: the destructive work of Satan, the sins of individual members, and the sins of the fellowship of the church as a whole. He continues this discussion in the following paragraph.)

38. How Such Deformation Commonly Breaks Out In the Church Of God.

All deformation in the church of God is likely to begin with this, that faith loses its animation. The church depends on Christ. Branches, half cut off from the vine, begin to languish and wither. In its inception, as the fruit of fearful struggle and oppression, Christ clearly lives in the church, the throb of His life is felt, the warmth of His divine love shines through her, there is enjoyment of His salvation and manifestation of His power. The Holy Spirit works thus through the children of God to make them receptive, to adorn them with spiritual adornment, and to make the purchased of the Lord live near to and tenderly with their God. But then an unnoticed laxity comes (one scarcely knows by what cause) a leaving of the first love. The church becomes less receptive, less intimate, less spiritual, and presently others see that the inner fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and by this the inner life of love with the Bridegroom, begins to fade from the heart of the bride. Then really the deformation of the church has already happened, even though it is not yet manifest. But this condition does not last long. Indeed, "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door." And so it is also here that the work of the Holy Spirit is scarcely stopped and the door scarcely opened, and sin creeps in, and the ungodly heart, released from its holy connection to Christ, begins to howl in its own devilish lust. It begins with the smallest and most insignificant—trifles which could indeed be tolerated. So sin breaks out more strongly. And finally one finds in the church of God different cliques for whom the mask of piety becomes burdensome, and they openly commit adultery with the world. In this stage by no means all the church is poisoned. On the contrary, in her greater majority, she is still zealous against evil. But

zeal already lacks the necessary energy and is too weak to banish the evil. People still judge sin, but no longer dare to condemn it openly. The moral working of the faculty of faith for punishment with discipline is absent. This then makes sin and the service of the world yet bolder. The roles are quickly turned around. Instead of being able to rise with moral might against the slaves of this world, the children of God themselves come under the pressure of the world. They are almost ashamed themselves to keep up the old way of life. They begin to excuse themselves instead of condemning the world. No longer does discipline proceed from godly people to the sinner, but sinners proceed to exercise discipline over the godly by intimidation and mockery. Thus the standard of spiritual life gradually fades and finally disappears. And the end is that the Lord, in His righteous judgment, punishing such faithlessness, gives His church over into the power of her adulterers so that she shall again learn to recognize guilt and shall again find the way of prayer.

In this development of sin the turning of the tide comes sooner or later. It is like a balance. The scale of holiness first rests firm and solid on the foundation of the Word, and high in the air hangs the almost empty scale of ecclesiastical unrighteousness. But that is now changed. Everything is taken from the scale of glorious things and everything put on the scale of unrighteousnesses. Thus the one side rises and the other falls. Finally, the original balance is turned about and the power of unrighteousness robs the balance of all that is holy and firm. Then the church is disturbed and evil proceeds to take on greater proportions, even finding its way into the shepherds. In the church of Christ one is always able to recognize the turning point. If the church in her official capacity knows, in spite of the evil which creeps in, to hold high her holy character, there are always shepherds who are examples to the flock and who, with priestly concern, supplicate for the rescue of the flock and admonish conversion with the trumpet sound of penitence. But if that sound ceases and the circle of the

shepherds itself becomes sick, and worldliness also creeps in among the shepherds, who, as witnesses of God ought to fight for the sheep, then also the hour of spiritual decay has struck irrevocably for the church, and corruption begins to affect her organization and begins to change her public manifestation as church into something unholy.

Then lies creep out of the ailing congregation into the shepherds; and now, as a third stage, these lies creep out of the ailing shepherds into the doctrine and worship of the church so that the church abandons her confession and brings into the Lord's house a self-determined worship. Heresy rises and in all kinds of ways begins to bring about a new devastation. Doubt comes in the place of faith. Things once firm are loosened. And everything pressures and prompts the church to combine her confession with the confession of the world.

Thus the worship services, no longer satisfied with their simple, spiritual character, seek their refuge in sensuous means which appeal to the eye and the ear, thus grieving the Holy Spirit.

Thus tension and opposition arise; the limitations of church government, now too narrow, are no longer to be borne. And so, finally, the corruption which has crept in destroys church government, and this corruption does not rest until regulations are so deformed that everything which rejects Christ is accepted and everything which attaches to Christ is ensnared in a maze of regulations.

Thus corruption runs its course. It begins with the forsaking of the first love. It proceeds to world conformity. This world conformity creeps out of the flock into the shepherds. Through those shepherds it finds its way into the doctrine; from doctrine into the worship services, in order finally, to seize the whole system of the church's government, and to alter the church so that she becomes an instrument of Satan which attacks the people of God, and, in the people, attacks God Himself.

39. Three Deviations Which Ought To Be Noticed In Connection With This Rule.

The general rule described above does not always apply. This rule is that the corruption of the church begins with the cooling of love; then in the form of world conformity appears in the members; and creeps from the members into the shepherds, and thus through the office in turn it affects the confession, the worship service, and the ordinances of the church. But there are three kinds of exceptions which ought here to be considered.

The first exception is that in many cases in the spiritually happy times of ecclesiastical life, but out of a wrongly-conceived spirituality, insufficient attention is paid to the great importance of a pure

church government. This happened, to mention only two examples, in Germany after Luther's work of reformation, and in England after the breakthrough of the Reformed religion under Edward VI. In those days men respected spiritual essentials but judged that externals could do little evil even though they remained in the church in a corrupted form. The result was that the purity of the worship services was not carried out, that the shepherds did not stay closely connected to the sheep, and that the confession moved into the background. In all such conditions tension and strife arose between those impure forms of the church and the pure Word. In that strife most shepherds chose the part of the corrupted form of the church against the people of God who rose up in defense of the Word. And the deformation of the church which originated in this way, having causes in other reasons, worked as a sickness which, rising not from the lower body (laity), but in the brains (the leaders), soon stupified the consciousness and created a hopeless situation in the church. The second exception to which we referred exists in the impure formation of the church as it concerns her members. Not by any means rarely have our churches originated from gradual gatherings of believers. Far and away the most were first under the Romish hierarchy and had come out from under it at the time of the Reformation. The result was that people in a number of places took along large crowds into a purified church, but crowds in whose confession and walk there was much that was defective. Then, when later these churches received civil privileges, this condition deteriorated further because many came into these churches with their eye on offices and positions of honor. And this evil became greater when the idea of a people's church began to muddle the spirits, and men, making national concern a line of action for ecclesiastical conduct, opened wide the floodgate for all the waters which wanted to stream in. As a matter of fact, therefore, the condition in these churches has never been pure and men have maintained alongside of the actual confessing part of the church a non-confessing part, an irresponsible and worldly segment in the church, which from the beginning has reacted against the health of the life power of the church.

An exception of which again distinction can be made, is the third or last exception which we must mention and which arises where corruption exists not in the church itself but slips in from outside. This happens in all kinds of ways. In one instance the evil crept in from a neighboring or related church, as happened in the German reformed church, and, in another occasion, in the Lutheran church. At another time this corruption came from

the schools, as was the case in this country with the Leiden seminary in the days of Arminius, and in the churches of the Huguenots by means of a harmful influence of the school of Saumur. Then again this corruption sprouts from general literature as in the days of the English Diests. Then again this corruption has its origin in the magistrates outside the church, who intentionally seek to break the unique spirit of the church. Or finally, this seed of corruption is sown with lavish hands in the acre of the church by revolutionary and mystical fanatics who wrest loose the fixed ordinances in the conscience and, by doing this, undermine the character of the church.

Already these three exceptions warn us never to measure, in connection with the deformation of the church, all the circumstances according to a definite standard as if the matter is decided already by mentioning some of the marks of the church. But it must induce us always to judge every church by itself, reckoning with her historical past and the

different influences which work upon her.

We emphasize this truth very strongly because most of the sicknesses of our churches are not susceptible to such a simple diagnosis, but they present what medicine calls a very complicated ailment, that is to say, a kind of process of sickness in which two, three, or more causes work through and on each other. The result is that it is always difficult to measure separately in how far these harmful influences are the causes of the ailment.

He who is led by the Spirit finally ceases, in his moments of deepest concern, from all analysis, and confesses that the only cause of the misery of his church is the unfaithfulness of the children of the Lord, which unfaithfulness is connected to and reflected in the ungodliness of his own heart. But when one is called to judge these things by means of analysis let him guard against all superficiality; let him beware of all generalities; and let him say nothing at all until all the varied symptoms of the sickness are clearly understood by him.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On May 9, 1981, our parents and grandparents, MR. AND MRS. JOHN TOLSMA celebrated their 35th wedding anniversary.

We, their children and grandchildren thank our heavenly Father for the years of love and Christian instruction they have given us. It is our prayer that our Covenant Father will continue to bless them in His care.

Their children,

Sid and Emma Top
Michelle, Melanie, Rachel, Stephen,
Julia, Theasea, David

Jerry and Henrietta Kaptein
Debra, Ron, James

Harold and Winnie Tolsma
John, Edward, Esther

Dick and Olga Vander Kooy
Jason, Jonathan, Eric, Jennifer,
Matthew

Frank and Sheryl Tolsma
James, Rebecca

John and Carolyn Tolsma
Michael, Mark
Lynden, Wash.

NOTICE!!!

According to the decision of the Synod of 1980, the Consistory of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan, was appointed the calling church for the 1981 Synod. The Consistory of Holland hereby notifies our churches that the 1981 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Wednesday, June 3, 1981 at 9:00 A.M. in the First Protestant Reformed Church of Holland, 290 E. 18th St., Holland. The pre-Synodical service will be held Tuesday evening, June 2, 1981 at 8:00 P.M. Rev. John A. Heys, President of the 1980 Synod will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the Consistory before the service. Delegates in need of transpor-

tation from Grand Rapids or lodging in Holland should contact Mr. Erv Kortering, 253 E. 19th St., Holland, Michigan 49423. (Phone 616-396-4966).

Erv Kortering, Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On May 4, 1981, our beloved parents, MR. AND MRS. FRANK DYKSTRA, SR. celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary.

We thank our Heavenly Father for the many years of Christian love and instruction they have provided us. It is our prayer that God may continue to bless them through their walk in life together.

"If thy children will keep My covenant and My testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon thy throne forever." (Psalm 132:12).

Their children and grandchildren,

Frank and Dawn Dykstra
Michael and Matthew

Hilbert and Beverly Kuiper
Rosanna and Hilbert

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On May 16, 1981, the Lord willing, our parents, MR. AND MRS. KENNETH BYLSMA will celebrate their 35th wedding anniversary.

We, their children, would like to express to them in this small way the gratitude we feel in our hearts for the many years of love and sacrifices in providing us with a Christian home and Christian instruction. It is our prayer that the Lord may continue to bless them together in the years to come as He has so richly done in the past.

"For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting; and His truth endureth to all generations." (Psalm 100:5).

Ken Bylsma, Jr.

Rich and Kathy Feenstra
Steven

Kevin Bylsma
Grand Rapids, Michigan

News From Our Churches

From a trio of Reverends Bekkering, Bruinsma, and Van Baren, the latest Redlands' call has been extended to Rev. Van Baren; and Isabel, South Dakota has called Rev. Slopsema from a trio including also Reverends Koole and Bekkering.

As you know—some from firsthand experience—the building committees of many of our churches have been kept busy with various expansion projects. Some of the latest information of this kind that I have received include the following: 1. The plans for Redlands' new church building are ready for approval by the City of Redlands, and they are now looking for a "qualified man" to oversee a crew of "mostly volunteer help." 2. Southwest of Grand Rapids is in the process of building a new parsonage on the north side of "seminary hill." Those of our readers who know the lay of the land in that area will know what I mean; everyone else will have to come and "take a look see." 3. Whether or not these Loveland items qualify as "expansion projects" must might be debatable, but I'll throw them in anyway. On a Loveland bulletin we read, "The consistory expresses thanks to Mr. George Joostens for the new collection plates that he made and to Mr. Ray Ezinga for the new communion trays that he made." If in the future you visit Loveland, don't forget to pay special attention to these works of art. It might be best, however, to delay your inspection until after the service, rather than while collection is being taken.

We recently received something new from our First Church in Grand Rapids, namely a bimonthly newsletter to the congregation. As stated on the first page, "The purpose of the newsletter will be to stimulate the common bond we possess as the body of Christ and also as a congregation. The committee will look forward to receiving bits of information from societies and individuals that will be of an interest to us all." Also, "The format will include missionary information (letters, reports, etc.); schedules of ushers, nursery attendants, and transporta-

tion; birthdays and anniversaries (as this information reaches the committee); church activities and special interest items."

It's going to be difficult, if not impossible, to do justice in this column to the recent program commemorating two thousand Reformed Witness Hour broadcasts. If you listened to the May 10 Reformed Witness Hour broadcast, you know a little bit of what happened that night; and if you were able to obtain a copy of the commemorative booklet that was handed out at the program, you have a good idea of what transpired; but nothing could possibly serve as a substitute for actual attendance. If I had to select a part of the program that would most merit a few lines in the S.B., I would choose the "Time Capsule." For many of the older generation in attendance it triggered fond memories, and for the others the glimpses into the early history of the Reformed Witness Hour were refreshing. These "glimpses" included an excerpt from the first broadcast, with Rev. H. Hoeksema speaking on the Topic, "God is God." Following that, numerous other excerpts of radio sermons, from Rev. Ophoff, Rev. Heys, and Rev. Schipper in English to Rev. Vos in Dutch, were played over the public address system. Incidentally, if you want to hear more of what you missed, copies of these tapes are available at a cost of \$4.00 per tape by sending to: The Reformed Witness Hour, P.O. Box 1230, Grand Rapids, MI 49501.

Though we would never want it said that this is a gossip column, some wedding congratulations are in order, I think. Within the last few years many of our readers have had opportunity to meet and fellowship with Johnson See of Singapore and John Steele of Australia during their visits to the United States. From what I hear, they must have sent nearly as many wedding invitations to the United States as they have sent to prospective guests in their native countries.