

The **STANDARD BEARER**

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

. . . We must never separate grace and faith, as if grace proceeds from God and faith proceeds from us. Faith belongs to grace, is part of it; faith is grace in operation in the heart of the elect sinner. . . . it is all grace, from the beginning to the very end. The Reformation gospel! . . . May we ever hold fast to it!

See "Saved By Grace" — page 50

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Editor-in-Chief: Prof. Homer C. Hoeksema

Department Editors: Rev. Wayne Bekkering, Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, Rev. Ronald Cammenga, Rev. Arie den Hartog, Prof. Robert D. Decker, Rev. Richard Flikkema, Rev. Cornelius Hanko, Prof. Herman Hanko, Mr. David Harbach, Rev. John A. Heys, Rev. Kenneth Koole, Rev. Jay Kortering, Rev. George C. Lubbers, Rev. Rodney Miersma, Rev. Marinus Schipper, Rev. James Slopeema, Rev. Gise J. Van Baren, Rev. Herman Veldman.

Editorial Office: Prof. H.C. Hoeksema
4975 Ivanrest Ave. S.W.
Grandville, Michigan 49418

Church News Editor: Mr. David Harbach
4930 Ivanrest Ave., Apt. B
Grandville, Michigan 49418

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Business Office: The Standard Bearer
Mr. H. Vander Wal, Bus. Mgr. PH: (616) 243-2953
P.O. Box 6064
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506

New Zealand Business Office: The Standard Bearer
c/o Protestant Reformed Fellowship
B. Van Herk, 66 Fraser St.
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

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MEDITATION

Saved By Grace

Rev. H. Veldman

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."

Ephesians 2:8

October 31, 1517, the evening before the church's All-Saints' Day, November 1, Martin Luther nailed the ninety-five theses to the church door at Wittenberg, thereby challenging anyone to debate these theses with him. The church of that day was teaching and practicing a salvation by works, had presented to the people seven sacra-

ments, denied the people of God free and unhindered access to God and His throne of grace, and had also denied them the divine Scriptures, thrusting itself between the child of God and the God of his salvation. The church had denied the truth that we are saved solely by or out of grace, through faith, the gift of God.

For by grace are ye saved. Do not fail to notice this very significant "for" here. We have here the reason for something the apostle had stated in the immediately preceding context. Notice what we read in verse 7. God, according to verse 4, is rich in mercy; He has loved us with a great love. According to verse 5, He has quickened us together with Christ, and already in this verse we are told, in parentheses, that we are saved by grace. God has raised us up together, made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show us the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God. Why is all this true that is set before us in the verses preceding our text? Why? Because we are saved by grace through faith, and this is the gift of God. May we never forget this. Twice in this brief context (also in verse 5) the expression occurs: by grace are ye saved. It is this truth that is impressed most emphatically upon the consciousness of the church. Destroy this truth, ignore or distort it, and you destroy the very foundations of the church of God.

One more thing. To what does the apostle refer when he writes: "and *that* not of yourselves: it is the gift of God"? The form of the words "that" and "faith" indicates that the one cannot refer to the other. The word "that" refers to all that which precedes in this text. The apostle means to say that our salvation by grace through faith is not of ourselves, but that it is the gift of God.

Saved by or out of grace!

How simple is this truth of the Word of God! How clearly this is set before us throughout the Scriptures! Everywhere this truth receives all the emphasis! And, yet, how contrary is this grand testimony of Holy Writ to the natural man. How true it is that man always seeks to distort and to destroy it! How true this was at the time of the Reformation! The church of that day proclaimed a salvation by works. That church actually declared accursed whoever denied the meritoriousness of our good works. Imagine, the church assigned people to hell who believed that we are saved solely out of grace, and who believed that grace, the grace of God, is the exclusive source of all our salvation. They actually persecuted them!

Saved out of grace. What is this grace of God? Is it merely an attitude of divine favor, or a divine unmerited favor? Of course, God's grace to us is a divine attitude, an attitude of love, and it is surely unmerited. But the Scriptural significance of grace is surely deeper than this, and this is true particularly in this text. At the beginning of this chapter we

read that we are quickened, made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins. In verses 5-6 we read that God quickened us together with Christ, hath raised us up together, and made us to sit together in heavenly places through Christ Jesus. All this surely emphasizes the wonderful grace of the living God. That a sinner, dead in trespasses and sins, is saved, made alive through Christ, raised up together with Christ, sits in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, surely indicates that this wonderful grace of God is more, ever so much more than merely an attitude or unmerited favor.

Indeed, the grace of God is a power, a power of God. God Himself is the God of all grace, the God of all beauty, the God Who is eternally attracted to Himself as the God of infinite perfection. And the grace of God to us is the almighty love of God whereby He causes sinners, dead in trespasses and sins, to share in His own beauty and perfection. It is this grace which the Lord would bestow upon His own.

This takes place through Christ Jesus. How this is emphasized in our text and context! We read repeatedly of the Christ here. Besides, we read that we are *saved* by grace, and this means deliverance out of the greatest misery, sin, and translation into the highest good. By the grace of God we were reconciled to God. We were dead in trespasses and sins. In Adam we could sin but never pay for sin. In Adam we could die but had no power to regain life in God's favor. We could only increase the guilt of our sin every day. We had become enemies of God, hating Him and hating one another. But we were saved, and saved by grace! God reconciled us unto Himself. We, who were legally objects of divine wrath, have now, legally, become objects of His love and favor, entitled to the life of His everlasting covenant. How necessary was this reconciliation, this paying of all our guilt and this meriting of God's everlasting fellowship, as in harmony with the full satisfaction of God's unchangeable righteousness! Eternally the Lord chose us in Christ Jesus. Eternally He ordained Christ to be the Head of His church, that He should become flesh, assume the burden of all our sin and guilt, enter our deepest woe, become sin for us that we should become the righteousness of God in Him. It was by grace that God sent His Son into the world. Always the Lord was prompted by the desire to save His people, dead in sins, that they should be perfect and beautiful as He is. It was by the power of that grace of God that His Son was born in our flesh and blood, ascended the cross of Calvary, was sustained and empowered to bear God's infinite wrath and to pay for all our sins and trespasses. Indeed, we are saved by grace, in and through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Shall we adopt the Arminian conception of salvation? Reconciliation itself can never save us. If the work of salvation be confined to the cross, we, who are dead in sins by nature, will remain dead in sin. We ourselves must be saved. Shall we say that the work of God was finished at the cross, that then the work by man begins? Or, shall we mix the two, the work of God and that of man, God and man cooperating, working together, God offering salvation and man accepting it?

How impossible is this view!

The Arminian claims to have a richer gospel than do those who preach a Christ only for a few. Does he not speak of a Christ for all? Really, however, he impoverishes the gospel. Really, he has a Christ for nobody. A Christ that died for all really died for none, because a universal Christ never paid for sin. Had He really paid for the sins of all, none could possibly perish. Hence, a universal Christ did not pay for the sins of any.

How impossible is this view also, thanks be to God, according to the text. Are we not saved by grace through faith? Always we must remember that we are saved by grace. We must never separate grace and faith, as if grace proceeds from God and faith proceeds from us. Faith belongs to grace, is part of it; faith is grace in operation in the heart of the elect sinner. Besides, we read in the text: not of ourselves; it is the gift of God. And then we read in verse 9: Not of works, lest any man should boast. Hence, it is all a gift of God, from the beginning to the very end. Nothing proceeds from us. The whole work of salvation is a gift of God.

Through faith.

O, we are not saved because of faith, as if God saves us because we believe. Neither are we saved upon the condition of faith. As a prominent commentator remarked: Grace is God's part, faith is man's part. Faith is then a condition which we must fulfill before God will save us. Indeed, there are no conditions unto salvation at all. Salvation is a gift of God. We make not a single contribution toward it. We are saved *through* faith and by grace. Grace operates through faith.

God's mighty grace.

Faith is the spiritual tie that unites us with Christ. In Him is all our salvation. Faith is the spiritual faculty whereby we know Him, taste Him, long for Him, trust in Him, rely on Him, appropriate Him, live out of Him, as a tree lives out of the rich soil. Saved through faith, God's mighty work of grace, His means of grace, a power that is wrought in our inmost heart by the mighty power of the grace of God. Saved by grace through faith. By this grace of God the Lord unites us with Christ, quickens us together with Christ, makes us new

creatures in Christ, calls us, powerfully and irresistibly and efficaciously and sweetly, out of darkness into the light of the gospel, so that we may sing forever of the glories of our God: saved by grace, that no flesh may ever boast.

Always salvation is of the Lord.

It was solely of God that He chose us in Christ. Then the Lord had no counsellor with Him. It was by the same grace that He reconciled us to Himself through the death of His Son. It was also by sovereign grace that He wrought faith in us, implanting us into Christ. And now it is by that same almighty grace that we are preserved unto the very end, until the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. For by grace ye *are* saved, and the form of this word emphasizes that this work is perfect and that it therefore will be finished.

By grace we are preserved and through it we persevere. Yes, our preservation is all of God. It is never by works, or on account of works, or by virtue of our cooperation with the grace of God. It is all pure grace; nothing of man is ever mixed with it. On the other hand, we persevere. Indeed, we are not simply carried into glory, as in a Pullman sleeper. This work is a power within us, causes us to hold fast to the God of our salvation, so that we fight even unto the end. Indeed, the grace of God preserves and we persevere. And nothing can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, because it is all grace, from the beginning to the very end.

The Reformation gospel!

We are children of the Reformation?

May we ever hold fast to it!

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EDITORIAL

The RES and the WCC — Unresolved

Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

Recently there was sent to me for review a copy of the "Report to RES Chicago 1984 on Ecumenical Relations." A title imposing enough to scare a person! Actually the report deals with a perplexing problem which the RES (Reformed Ecumenical Synod) has faced repeatedly over many years, but never solved. The problem is that of dual membership in the RES and the World Council of Churches. More concretely, it concerns such dual membership on the part of the GKN (Reformed Churches in the Netherlands) and the Indonesian churches which belong to the RES. Further, it is accurate to say that the greatest concern is with such dual membership on the part of the GKN, the largest member church of the RES, ever since 1969.

This is not to say that the RES has not dealt with the subject of membership in the WCC nor taken decisions on the matter. The record will show that ever since 1949 the matter of the World Council has been on the agenda of the RES repeatedly, and that in 1968 especially there was a lengthy report on this subject—and, on the whole, a fairly good report, too—just one year before the Dutch churches decided to apply for membership in the WCC. The record will also show that repeatedly the RES has taken decisions frowning upon and advising against membership in the WCC on the part of member churches of the RES. But the record will also show that none of these decisions has had any "teeth" in it, so that the GKN was compelled to choose between the RES and the WCC.

And even as this matter has been brewing in the RES for many years, so it was inevitable that some of the more conservative member churches began to insist that there had to be a showdown on the issue. All this apparently came to a head at the RES Nimes (France) 1980. Churches began to withdraw or to threaten to withdraw from the RES if such membership in the WCC continued to be permitted. The result was that RES Nimes attempted to initiate action which would result in a definitive decision by the 1984 RES concerning WCC membership. Part of this decision reaffirmed the "advice given by every meeting of the RES from 1953 onwards to member churches not to join the WCC." A significant point of this decision was the

following: "8. That the Synod determine that a final decision whether or not member churches of the RES may also be members of the WCC, must be made by the RES 1984 and not delayed beyond that meeting."

And part of the decision at Nimes was to appoint the Study Committee which produced the report now under discussion. This Study Committee was "to make a comprehensive study, from Scripture and our confessions, of the Reformed concept of the church and its implications for current and future ecumenical relationships." The committee was also instructed "to include in its study the question of the membership of RES Churches in the WCC." It should be added that this report was to be prepared and distributed well in advance of RES 1984, so that the member churches would be able to consider it and to send their reactions and recommendations to the RES Secretariat by April, 1984.

And so this 60-page report has been prepared and distributed.

I will not trouble the reader with a detailed review of the contents of this booklet. Most of the report is a repetition of the report of 1968. There is nothing substantially new in it. Besides, there is a lengthy review of all the anti-WCC decisions of the RES over the years, a report of responses from member churches and from regional conferences during 1982. And then follows a section of "Observations" and a section of "Recommendations" by the Study Committee.

Among these "Observations" the following appear to be crucial in their influence upon the "Recommendations:"

7. The crisis in the RES centers mainly on the WCC membership of the GKN, applied for in 1969, shortly after the important decisions of the 1968 RES in connection with the first major study report on the WCC, and is increasingly complicated by the doctrinal and ethical developments and decisions in the GKN concerning H. Kuitert, H. Wiersinga, homosexuality, Biblical authority, etc.

9. The RES has lived with the Indonesian WCC membership for two to three decades and with the GKN WCC membership for more than a decade.

10. Four of the five Regional Conferences of the RES in the spring of 1982 appear to have favored toleration of dual membership and no one of these conferences recommended termination of RES membership for a church also holding WCC membership, on that ground alone, although that position was strongly held by some members of some of the regional conferences. (Note. On this statement we make the following remarks: 1) The suggestion of termination is indeed made or implied in two of the eleven suggestions made in various Regional Conferences. Cf. p. 54 of the Report. 2) It must be kept in mind that the other evils of the GKN, mentioned in "7" above, were not within the mandate of this committee. This is the implication of the words "on that ground alone" in this observation. In other words, termination on the ground of WCC membership *plus* other grounds may well have been favored. HCH)

11. The critical nature of the decision facing RES 1984 is evident from the withdrawal of five churches from RES membership and the threatened withdrawal of others. On the other hand, the forced withdrawal or termination of one or more RES churches which hold membership in the WCC may well lead to a significant reduction in RES membership. In fact, either way, there appears to be a serious, long term loss for the RES—perhaps a threat to its very existence!

When I look at these observations, it appears to me that Number 11 gives expression to the suggestion that the Study Committee found itself and the RES between the proverbial "rock and a hard place." Either way, the RES is threatened with such a significant loss of membership that the very existence of the RES may be threatened. At the same time, it may very well be that all the other problems with the GKN may very well tip the balance in favor of terminating its membership in the RES. The latter would be a severe blow to the existence of the RES indeed!

The "Recommendations" of the Report we will quote in full:

1. That the RES reaffirm its previous decisions on the World Council of Churches [e.g., ACTS 1968, Art. 95 and 105 with grounds].

2. That in the light of the Scriptural and Reformed doctrine of the church and its implications for ecumenical relations, the Reformed churches maintaining their Reformed confessions should give priority to the RES in fulfilling their ecumenical responsibilities internationally (Constitution III, 1).

3. That in addition to a Reformed church's ecumenical responsibility to other Reformed churches within the RES (III, 1), RES churches have an ecumenical responsibility to all other churches according to the RES Constitution (III, 2), that is, "to give united testimony to the Reformed faith in the midst of the world living in error and groping in darkness, and to the churches which have departed from the truth of God's Holy Word."

4. That the ecumenical methodology or strategy by which a Reformed church and/or the RES carries out wider ecumenical responsibility (Constitution III, 2) is of great significance since *membership* in organizations involves co-responsibility while *witness and contact* do not necessarily do so.

5. That the RES has therefore correctly advised against membership of RES churches in the WCC and wisely warned against the possible negative influence of such membership.

6. That the RES, while advising against WCC membership, has up to now not given adequate attention to how the RES Constitution III, 2 is to be carried out by member churches and/or by the RES itself.

7. That the RES Interim Committee be instructed to propose ways by which RES ecumenical responsibility to the WCC and its member churches may be carried out in more significant ways than is possible through the Interim Committee alone.

8. That the fact that some RES member churches in their particular situation have joined the WCC is perhaps understandable historically, although in regard to the advice of several RES synods, and proper ecumenical strategy or methodology, such membership is regrettable.

9. That the RES, while reaffirming its advice against WCC membership, decides not to terminate the RES membership of those churches now holding WCC membership on that ground alone.

10. That the RES once again call upon the RES churches holding membership in the WCC to reconsider that membership in the light of the above recommendations and the entire report of the Study Committee, and whatever their action be on that question, urge them to clearly give evidence that they are authentically Reformed both in faith and practice (Constitution III, 1 & V, 2).

A reading of these ten points should make it plain to any reader that if these recommendations are adopted, the RES is not one whit farther with the whole question of WCC membership than in 1968. Repeatedly the RES has advised against WCC membership, and repeatedly the RES has advised RES churches holding membership in the WCC to reconsider that membership. What progress is represented here? None! And if you add to this the fact that now a recommendation is made "not to terminate the RES membership of those churches now holding WCC membership on that ground alone," there is, in fact, retrogression here. This certainly implies that churches are guaranteed safety *in spite* of the fact that they hold WCC membership.

But this brings up another question. What about Point 8 of the RES Nimes decision? That point was: "That the Synod determine that a final decision whether or not member churches of the RES may also be members of the WCC, must be made by the RES 1984 and not delayed beyond that meeting." It

seems to me to be plain:

- 1) That the Study Committee studiously avoids recommending any kind of "may" or "may not" decision.
- 2) That these recommendations do not provide any guidelines for a "final" decision. Why should these recommendations, if adopted, be any more—or less—final than all the previous decisions of the RES, decisions which were essentially the same?
- 3) That if these are indeed intended to constitute a "final" decision at RES 1984, this can only mean that the RES would take a "final" decision to leave the matter unresolved, so that from now on the

question, *though unresolved*, will not be discussed. Put in other words, the RES would then decide that though WCC membership is wrong, ill-advised, warned against, nevertheless the RES will do nothing against it, but will tolerate it.

- 4) That the churches which have complained against WCC membership and have already threatened withdrawal—if they have the courage of their convictions—cannot tolerate such a "final" decision to leave the matter unresolved. And I certainly hope they have such courage of their convictions!

I also hope that the RES will not dodge this issue by expelling the GKN on other grounds.

MY SHEEP HEAR MY VOICE

Letter to Timothy

November 1, 1982

Dear Timothy,

After a rather long break, I want to resume our correspondence on the subject of the relation between pastoral work and Biblical psychology. It was almost a year ago that we interrupted our discussion of these things, but we did break off the discussion at a point where we can now pick up a new subject.

The subject I want to discuss with you in this letter is the subject of the personality. While it is possible to become very technical in such a discussion and while I want to avoid such technical discussions, there are certain aspects to the question which are important as a pastor in the Lord's flock comes to grips with the problems which he faces in his congregation.

The question of the "person" is, from many viewpoints, an important question. I recall that Rev. Hoeksema used to insist in class that it was always better to make a distinction between the "person" and the "nature," and that, indeed, this distinction was more important and more significant even than the very common distinction between "body" and "soul." By way of illustrating this point, he would often remind us that the doctrine of Christ could only be understood in terms of the distinction between "person" and "nature" while the distinction between body and soul had little importance in understanding the incarnation.

It is true that in the controversies which plagued the early church over the doctrine of Christ, there was at least one controversy in which the distinction between body and soul was important. I refer to the so-called Apollinarian heresy according to which Apollinaris believed that Christ in our flesh possessed a human body, but not a human soul. He taught that the soul of Christ was divine. Nevertheless, when the Council of Chalcedon finally formulated for all time the Scriptural doctrine of the incarnation, it did so in terms of a distinction between person and nature. And, because we believe that Christ entered into our flesh and became like us in all things except for sin, the distinction between Christ's person and nature is important for us also. Christ did not have a human person such as we do; but He did have a nature such as ours in every respect except sin.

It is clear why Rev. Hoeksema considered this distinction so very important.

It seems to me that it is not far from the truth to say that when an infant is conceived in the womb of its mother the nature of the child comes from its parents, while the person is directly formed by God. We cannot, I think, be sure about this formulation of the idea because we know so little about the conception and birth of a child. But there seems to me to be no doubt about the fact that at the moment of conception, God impresses the individual mark and stamp of the person upon each nature. Certain it is that the child conceived in the

womb is a person from the moment of conception. This is clear enough from many different passages of Scripture. David, e.g., says in Psalm 139, in speaking of his own conception in the womb of his mother: "For Thou hast possessed my reins: Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise Thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are Thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from Thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in Thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them" (vss. 13-16). This passage so clearly teaches that personality is part of the infant from the moment of conception because David speaks throughout of himself as "I." And that "I" is a reference to his person. "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." "I was made in secret."

Those who favor abortion of unwanted infants deny all this. They do not want to read the text the way it is in Scripture. They would read these two passages somewhat along these lines: "A mass of protoplasm which after four or five months or more in the womb became me is fearfully and wonderfully made." You see the point here. If an infant is a person from the moment of conception, then induced abortion is always murder because a person is deliberately destroyed. Those who favor abortion and want to get away from the charge of murder have got to insist that up to a certain point that babe in the womb is not a person. But this they can never do in the light of Scripture. Just one more passage. God says to Jeremiah in 1:5: "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee...." It ought to be clear that persons are sanctified: not trees, not animals, not blobs of protoplasm. If Jeremiah was sanctified before he was born then obviously he was also a person.

But we digress a bit.

The personality of a man is unique to *man*. Trees are not persons. Flowers are not persons. Animals are not persons—not even the highest of them. Only man is a person. That is probably why we do not even speak of the "face" of an animal. Probably the face of a man most clearly reveals his personality, his personhood. Animals do not have faces. They have snouts and muzzles. They have mouths and jaws, noses and ears and even eyes. But they do not have faces, and we do not use the word "face" to describe the front of their heads. People have persons. People are persons.

The person is that "I" in a man which is the subject of all the activity of the nature. That person,

formed by the delicate and almighty power of God, remains essentially unchanged from the moment of conception to all eternity in heaven or hell. The nature changes as *I* am born, grow up, live my life, and finally die. The nature changes both in body and soul as *I* am educated, acquire a certain amount of knowledge, learn from experience and pass through the whole of life. But that deepest core of man's being which is his person remains the same always—even through the resurrection and into everlasting glory. That unchangeable "I" is the subject of all that one does. I am born. I cry. I eat. I learn to walk. I am angry. I love or hate. I am a sinner. I am redeemed. I am justified. I am sanctified. I marry. I grow old. I die. I go to heaven. I live forever with God. Whatever happens to the nature has as its subject the person, the I.

Now this person is a marvelous creation of God. It is very difficult to say enough about this.

For one thing, you will recall that when we are discussing the nature of man we talked about the fact that man has a *rational* and *moral* nature. That is, he has a nature with a mind and a will. He has a nature which can think and know, which can desire and want. He has a nature which can know the difference between good and evil and which can do the good and evil. Now it is important to understand that only a *rational* and *moral* nature can also be a *personal* nature. That is why a star or a rose or a centipede or a chimpanzee cannot be a person. None of these creatures has a rational, moral nature. Man was given such a nature and only man can be a person.

Yet when God forms the person at the moment of conception He does so in such a way that the person exactly fits the nature. Every man's nature is different. It is, of course, essentially the same. Every man has a body and soul. Every man has a mind and a will. But this nature differs with every individual. It differs in appearance—in color of the hair and eyes, in facial and bodily features, in size, shape, and color. It differs in power of the mind—in ability to memorize, to do mathematics, to compose music, to write and understand poetry, to play the piano, to speak, to understand and comprehend, etc., etc. This list of differences goes on and on and on. These are all differences in the nature. But when God puts the stamp of the personality on the nature at the moment of birth, that personal stamp exactly fits the nature. The work of God is not of such a kind that the person is created apart from the nature, arbitrarily and mechanically attached to the nature, and assigned a given nature through which to function. That is absurd. The person is formed along with the nature itself, but in such a way that God stamps that nature individually with a personality that exactly fits the nature with all its charac-

teristics and gifts. In this way the person and nature are so formed by the hand of God that the individual is one, perfect, unified whole.

And yet each person is also different.

I can remember being told as a child that every snowflake is different from every other snowflake, that every leaf on the tree is different from every other leaf—on that tree and on every other tree. This was a very great wonder to me and impressed me greatly with the almighty power of God. But the same is true of persons. There are living now and have lived over the course of history billions of people. Consider all the throngs and multitudes

which populated the earth from the first moment of time. Consider all the babies that died before the moment of birth or soon after. Consider the masses of humanity which populate the earth today. Of all these billions, there have never been and there will never be two persons alike. They are all different. God makes each one different. And only God can do this.

But I must bid you farewell for the present. We shall come back again to this in the future.

Fraternally,
H. Hanko

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

The Days of Noah (1)

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

A wise man once said, "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun." That wise man was Solomon; and the words which he spoke were not merely words of wisdom but the Word of God (Ecclesiastes 1:9). It is true therefore; there is no new thing under the sun. What we see happening today in the world and church has happened many times over. It is for that reason that the apostle Paul, for example, could write to the Corinthian church in I Corinthians 10 concerning what the nation of Israel encountered while journeying through the wilderness and then add (vs. 11), "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."

The same can be said concerning the events surrounding the great judgment of the wicked world in the Flood. The events of the days just prior to the Flood are recorded in Scripture for our example. God by His grace made sure that these events were recorded in Holy Writ for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come. In fact, the days prior to the Flood are not only an example of events which recur in history but they are exactly a *type* of the days in which we now live, the days just prior to the final judgment of this world. In other words, the days of Noah are but an Old Testament shadow which points us to the days in which we now live. That is why Jesus, when teaching His

apostles the signs of His second coming, stated in Matthew 24:37-39, "But as the days of Noe were, so shall the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." Because this is true we receive from Scripture a profound and illuminating insight into what is occurring in our day simply by studying those events which occurred prior to the Flood. That is our intention in this installment and in those to come, the Lord willing.

The first point of similarity between the days of Noah and the day in which we live is the breakdown of the separation between the church and the world. There is a large-scale amalgamation between those within the church and the wicked world. The true church of Jesus Christ becomes smaller and smaller. We are able to say that this is true not only because we who have been given spiritual eyes can see it happening today but also because this is exactly what happened in the days of Noah. In Genesis 6:1-4 we are given an account of that mixing of the church and the world. "And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. And the Lord said, My spirit shall not

always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years. There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown." Such is the account given us of the unholy alliance between the church and the wicked world in the days of Noah.

We cannot help but be struck by the fact that the basic way this amalgamation of church and world took place was by means of mixed marriages. And what we mean by mixed marriages is marriage between two people of different and opposing *spiritual* races: the sons of God and the daughters of man. We reject, of course, the contention that the sons of God referred to here in Genesis 6 were in fact angels instead of human beings. Those who claim this explain this passage to mean that these angels saw earthly women that they were fair, and as a result became involved in a strange sort of intercourse with them. The result of this relationship was that these women produced offspring which were mutations of human kind: giants and mighty men of renown. Such an interpretation of the term "sons of God," however, destroys the entire point of the passage. Although it is true that there were men of large stature and undoubtedly of great physical strength in those days, nowhere does this passage speak of them as the fruit of some kind of intercourse between women and angels. Besides this, nowhere does Scripture support the fact that angels came to earth, married women, and lived with them. No, the plain teaching of this Scripture cannot be avoided: there was a synthesis between the church and the world.

The sons of God were those who belonged to God's church and who claimed to be God's people. They were those who confessed to be Spirit-led children of God who could address God as their Father in heaven. The daughters of men, on the other hand, were the ungodly, unbelieving children of darkness. These despised God and His commandments and were characterized by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. From a spiritual point of view, then, there should have been a day and night difference between these sons of God and the daughters of men. Whereas the wicked use all the good things of creation as well as the knowledge and skill God has given them in the service of sin and darkness, the people of God use all this in the service of God. The daughters of men, *i.e.*, the reprobate, live for the day; they eat, drink, and make merry. They strive after the fulfillment of their own sinful desires and their own self-gratification. They look for an earthly kingdom where man is supreme and can do anything he wants to

do. The adornment of the ungodly women is the outward adorning of plaiting of the hair and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel. They seek to look "fair" by appealing to the passions and lust of men. Their conversation is unholy and unchaste. And ungodly men are no different. This too is what they look for in a woman. They look for it exactly because these same things are the very desires of their own life.

The sons of God, on the other hand, are those who live out of a hope and longing for a heavenly kingdom. In them Christ has so worked by His Spirit that as a result they yield their members as instruments of righteousness to do the will of God. They no longer dwell in the darkness and bondage of sin. They receive God's command, "Be ye holy as I am holy!" They know their calling to be separate from the world and never to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers! And because of that work of the Spirit within their hearts they strive with all their being to be a distinctive and a peculiar people who show forth the praises of Him Who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light! These truly are the sons of God. Certainly, we understand as well as did God's people of Noah's day that there remains this great spiritual gulf between these two spiritual races.

Yet, in the days prior to the great Flood we find that a great synthesis transpired between these two spiritual camps; and that it did so by means of intermarriage between those of God's people and those of the wicked world. Young men who called themselves believers, who claimed to be sons of God, looked upon the outward beauty, the sex-appeal, of the wicked women of this world and lusted after it. Instead of walking the life of the antithesis and heeding God's command to come out from among them and be separate and touch not the unclean thing, they took them wives of all which they chose. Young women too who outwardly confessed that they were children of God gave themselves in marriage to ungodly men because they desired the strength and the ways of these men.

No doubt, these intermarriages were the result of a deeper spiritual problem. The sons of God, though going through the outward motions of faith and walk, no longer lived out of the longing for the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. They no longer hoped in the coming of a heavenly kingdom. Their desires had become earthy, sensual, devilish. The ways of this wicked world and all it had to offer were more desirable to them than fellowship with the ever-blessed God. The daughters of men could offer them the pleasures and the "fun" of this world. The riches and power, the artistry and industry attracted them. The fashion and entertainment of the wicked appealed to their earthly, sen-

sual pleasure. This became the spiritual basis for the many intermarriages that took place between the sons of God and the daughters of men. Thus the great fusion of the church and the world took place.

The result was devastating!

The children of these marriages became mighty men which were of old, men of renown. And certainly the Scripture does not mean that these became men of great *spiritual* strength and stamina. God's children never become in this world men of renown. Of course not! Simply because their affections are set on the heavenly they remain weak and despised according to the standards of the world. Paul writes in I Corinthians 1:26-29, "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: no flesh should glory in His presence." No, the children of these "mixed marriages" did not become great spiritual leaders of the church! They became the mighty and the noble of this world, men who developed this creation of God in the service of sin! We will write more on this later.

As these men increased in the world the people of God decreased, until there were only eight souls in *all the world* that remained as sons of God at the time of the Flood. Wickedness had increased and the church had almost completely disappeared. All this was true in the days of Noah because of that

unholy coalition between the church and the world.

Not *only* was this true of the days of Noah. Remember Solomon's wise words: "There is no new thing under the sun." Repeatedly this also happened in the history of Israel as a nation. What do we find concerning the nation of Israel in Judges 3:5-7, as soon as they had been given their possession in the promised land? This: "And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites, and Perizzites, and Hivites, and Jebusites: and they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and forgot the Lord their God, and served Baalim and the groves." Such sin never departed from this nation either. Ahab married the wicked Jezebel who led Israel into the worship of Baal. It was also Solomon himself who married many heathen wives and led Israel into sin by worshipping the gods of the heathen. So this sin continued until there was but a small remnant left in Isaiah's day; and that remnant was "left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, and a besieged city." In fact, so much had Israel become a part of the world that for the sake of those few "sons of God" left in Israel God led the nation into the judgment of the captivity.

But what is striking in all this is this: "the thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done." The days of Noah are a type of the days in which we live now. What is happening today? We consider this next time.

GUEST ARTICLE

A Minister-Rabbi Conversation

Rev. Robert C. Harbach

II. About Christianity and Judaism

At a popular restaurant in a southern city the Reformed pastor, Rev. Nathanael K. Russo and the Rabbi Nathan Klug met over a mid-day repast to resume a friendly conversation centering around the Being and nature of God. On the center of the dining table was a pyramidal folder imprinted with a Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish "grace." The rabbi and the minister, paying no attention to this,

each bowed his head and prayed a silent word of thanks and asking of God's blessing, the rabbi in his heart addressing Jehovah alone, and the pastor also addressing Jehovah, but in the name of His Son. The only thing their prayers had in common was the Hebrew "amen."

The rabbi opened the conversation with "Nathanael, I've been wanting to ask you: Why do you Protestant ministers continually refer to your faith

as 'our Judaeo-Christian religion' or 'our Judaeo-Christian heritage'? Is this sort of a 'cover' for a guilt-feeling, say, for having blamed the crucifixion on the Jews? Or is it an ecumenical ploy by which you would convey to the Jewish community that Christians no longer sprout 'anti-semitic' horns? Or what? Pardon my being so frank."

"I appreciate your frankness, Nate; let's by all means continue in that vein. In reply to your question, we in our churches do not think of Christianity as 'Judaeo-Christian.' The term *Judaeo-*, to us, means 'relating to the Jews, their language and their religion,' which is Judaism (a religion, by the way, as I know you will admit, quite in contradistinction to Christianity). It would be a legitimate usage to speak of something as Judaeo-German, for example, referring to a German dialect written in Hebrew consonants with Slavonic words and idioms, known popularly as Yiddish. (However, Yiddish is not at all popular, as you also know, with Orthodox Jews preferring to read and speak Hebrew.) There is also a Judaeophobia, an aversion to Jews, or a morbid dread of Jewish ascendancy. Antipodal to this would be Judaeophilism, a regard for Jews or Judaism. But Christianity, the term itself unquestionably implies, is derived from Christ. Christianity fundamentally has nothing in common with Judaism. Besides, it is not a question of determining blame for the Crucifixion. Yet on that score, please read the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 53. There is better counsel than what you will get from the modernist metropolitan ecumenical councils.

"But Rabbi, it is of the greatest of interest to me to know your answer to this question: What is the foundation and highest authority of Judaism, as the Jewish leaders conceive of this?"

"Reverend, undoubtedly that authority is the Talmud."

"Clarify this point, Rabbi; let me understand it clearly—not the Tenach is that authority, but the Talmud?"

"That is correct. The authority of Judaism lies not in the documents of the Torah, the Prophets and the Holy Writings, but solely in the Talmud."

"Thank you, friend. That honestly puts this issue in proper perspective. But did you know that our Lord, ha-Moshiach, the Messiah, if you please, or even if you don't please, Himself referred, in contradistinction to Christianity, to Judaism and its foundation of authority? He did. In His time, and among His disciples, this authority of Judaism was known as 'the tradition of the elders.' This tradition was regarded by some of the Sadducee and Pharisee factions as of equal authority with the Holy Scriptures. Many others went farther to claim that

the Tradition was of greater authority than that of the Scriptures. Since the Tradition of the Elders was said to interpret and clarify the Law, it, and not the Law, was regarded as *the* authority (of Judaism). Therefore traditional Judaism is Talmudic Judaism. Isn't that so?"

"Oh, yes! You are so right! In fact, it was our own late Rabbi Stephen S. Wise who put it in words I could never improve on when he said, 'The return from Babylon, and the adoption of the Babylonian Talmud, marks the end of Hebrewism, and the beginning of Judaism.'"

"Well, Nate, I have to agree with that modern rabbi on that remarkable statement. Then isn't it true that the religion of the Old Testament was the religion of the *Hebrews*, and could, indeed, properly be called Hebrewism, which, however, was abandoned by the *Jews* when they adopted the Talmud as their religious authority? You say you agree with that one hundred per cent. I see. And does not that adoption constitute the beginning of Judaism?"

"It certainly does, my Protestant friend; so that those Protestant ministers who are ever speaking of 'the Judaeo-Christian ethic,' and the like, don't know what they are talking about!"

Then that K. Russo fellow, keeping silent a moment, thought to himself, "They surely don't. For there is an antithesis between Judaism and Christianity. All the opposition our Lord suffered, up to their murder of Him on the Cross came from Judaism as represented by the scribes, chief priests, and elders of the Jews. We could say that the gospel as expressed in the Old Testament Scriptures might conceivably be termed 'Hebrew-Christian,' but they may not, and especially the New Testament Gospel may not, properly be called 'Judaeo-Christian.' Christianity is no way 'Judaeo' because it is in no way Judaistic. Aloud he said, "Rabbi, tell those clergymen who think John the Baptizer got his religion from Judaism and the Talmud to read the third chapter of Matthew's Gospel; and if they think Christ Himself owed any of His teaching to Judaism, tell them to read Matthew 15:1-9, and, above all to read Matthew's 23rd chapter. Oh, sure, right! You'll have to first read all that yourself. But you will find nothing 'Judaeo-Christian' in either John's or Christ's theology!"

"Pastor, I'm learning more from you about the Bible and the Christian faith than in all the years I've attended the 'rap' sessions of the metropolitan council of churches with ministers, priests, and rabbis present! If I understand these words of Jesus correctly, then in them He flatly condemned Judaism and rejected it with the same vehemence as in His cleansing of the temple! Am I right? You solemnly nod your head in answer. Then when we

Jews make this discovery, how can you expect us to listen any further to your Christianity?"

"Christ does not condemn true Hebrewism (after all He was the Hebrew of the Hebrews), nor does He condemn any true Jew. Do you know that according to the divinely inspired prophet to the Gentiles, the apostle Paul, we *Christians* are Jews in the strictest spiritual sense of the word? He wrote, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, 'For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose *praise* is not of men, but of God' (Romans 2:28-29). Now suppose, just for a moment, that Jesus Christ *is*, according to the Hebrew Scriptures, the promised Messiah. Then wouldn't you have to listen to Him, even to His most heart-searching and flesh-withering language?"

"I suppose, assuming the way you just put it; and Orthodox Jews would likely concede an affirmative answer."

"Yes, I should think they would. For Moses prophesied of Messiah in the Law, 'The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto Me. To Him ye shall hearken' (Deuteronomy 18:15). Indeed then you would have to listen to Him, for 'every soul which will not hear that Prophet shall be destroyed from among the people' (Acts 3:23)."

"You seem to have a lot of reverence for the Jewish, or as you would put it, the Hebrew Messiah. From our former conversation I gather that you Christians believe that Jehovah has a son, and that

the Messiah is that son. Is that correct? and if so, how can that be?"

"That is absolutely correct, and your own Hebrew Scriptures, the very oracles of God (Romans 3:2), state this literally. Surely you remember the words of Agur, 'Who hath ascended up into heaven or descended? Who hath gathered the wind in His fists? Who hath bound the waters in a garment? Who hath established all the ends of the earth?' (Any child of the synagogue could answer that!) 'What is His name?' (Why, you immediately answer, Everybody knows His name is Jehovah! Right!) 'and what is His Son's name, if thou canst tell?' (Proverbs 30:4). Here is the proof, not from the Talmud, but from the Hebrew Scripture, that Jehovah has a Son. From these same Hebrew oracles you, or any one else, ought to be able to tell, with the help of the great prophet, Isaiah (chapter 7:14), that His name is *Immanuel*! Now, since it is getting late, perhaps at another time we could look into Sepher Tehillim, at Psalm Two, where Messiah is further identified as Jehovah's Son."

Both men arising from the table shake hands. The rabbi bids farewell with "Shalom lekah! Peace to you! As a reformed Jew I must say the ham was delicious! Next time, it's my treat and I request that we share our views on the touchy subject of 'anti-semitism.' You agree? Wonderful! I'm looking forward to it." On his way homeward the Protestant preacher lifted up his heart in prayer and song to the triune Jehovah in the words, "Praise the Lord, for He is good, For His mercies ever sure From eternity have stood, To eternity endure; Let His ransomed people raise Songs to their Redeemer's praise!"

TAKING HEED TO THE DOCTRINE

God's Providence and Sin (1)

Rev. H. Veldman

In this rubric, "Taking Heed To The Doctrine," we wish to call attention, first of all, to the doctrine of God's providence in sin. We believe this subject to be pertinent. It is surely a fact that the doctrines of the sovereign government of the Lord over all things and sin have been a "bone of contention" throughout the ages. The Pelagian would solve this problem by simply denying God's absolute sovereignty and maintaining the will of man as

wholly independent of the Lord. He confuses man's freedom with man's sovereignty. He denies the organic connection between Adam and the human race. He has no eye for the headship of the first father of the human race. According to the Pelagian conception of things, the will of man, as far as its root is concerned, is good. That will is not affected by the sin of Adam. The sinner can will to be good. He can will to be regenerated or not to be

regenerated. This also explains why Arminius was compelled to interpret Romans 7 as if the unregenerated man is speaking in that chapter. The will of the sinner is inherently and essentially good. All things, therefore, are dependent upon this will of man. However, with this conception we simply lose God as the sovereign Ruler over all things, and have no eye for the stern and undeniable reality that all men sin and that only few are saved. Let the Pelagian try to explain the absolute corruption of the whole human race and that only a few choose the way that leads to life and glory everlasting. Is it not an amazing phenomenon that, if all men are born with a will that is inherently and essentially good, only a few choose the way that leads to everlasting life and glory? Besides this Pelagian conception, we must also deal with the deterministic conception of things. This conception goes to the other extreme. It explains this problem simply by denying the responsibility of man. According to this view man is merely a machine. He is moved about by God's own hand without any action on his part. In this operation of God, man is wholly passive. This is the deterministic conception. This presentation we do and must also reject. It has no place in its system for man as a moral, responsible being.

In Reformed circles, in connection with this problem of God's providence and sin, we are faced, first of all, with the weak infralapsarian conception of sin. When we insert the word "weak" here, we realize that our confessions are infralapsarian. And we endorse those confessions. They are not weak. How is this possible? Now we must bear in mind that these confessions are Reformed. We must also bear in mind that they are strong presentations of the truth. They declare emphatically that the Lord does not will to bestow faith upon the reprobate, that the Lord has sovereignly willed to leave them in their misery, does not will to save them. This is strong language. We can surely endorse this. Only, we believe that Scripture teaches us that we must go beyond this. The Word of God does not merely teach that the Lord, be it sovereignly, does not will to save and bestow faith, but it also holds before us that the Lord sovereignly hardens and prepares vessels of wrath for everlasting ruin and destruction. The word, "infra-lapsis" means literally: under the fall. The exponents of this doctrine place election and reprobation, in God's counsel, under or as following the fall of man. The fall, corruption of the human race, is their starting point. They begin with this in the counsel of God. They prefer to speak of sin as taking place with God's permission, and, therefore, believe that the Lord has elected and reprobated out of a fallen humanity. Reprobation, then, is God's sovereign decree to leave people in sin and death, if only we bear in mind that this

decree of God is strictly sovereign. The motive prompting this infralapsarian view is to avoid presenting God as the author of sin. And, let us bear in mind, we share this concern with our infralapsarian brethren. We, too, want to avoid making the Lord the author of sin. The Lord is too pure of eyes that He should ever behold iniquity. Nevertheless, this infralapsarian view of sin and grace is surely not satisfactory. First of all, it does not explain the strong expressions in Holy Writ that touch upon this matter. We need not at this time call attention to these strong expressions in the Word of God. And we may add that also the infralapsarian brother himself will concede this. When I speak of the "infralapsarian" brother, I do this, in the first place, because our confessions are infralapsarian and, secondly, because I will always welcome into our fellowship a strong, sound infralapsarian. However, his view does not do justice to the strong expressions of Holy Writ. Secondly, this view does not answer to its purpose. The infralapsarian purposes to avoid making God the author of sin. And, we repeat: we appreciate and share this concern. But, I ask you, what is more cruel: a God Who causes man to fall, or a God Who can prevent his fall but nevertheless leaves him in his sin and perdition? If a person is perishing in a burning house and I am able to deliver him out of that burning house am I, then, not responsible for his perishing in that inferno? Thirdly, infralapsarianism has no eye, fundamentally, for the antithesis. Dualism, as well as the antithetic conception of things, speaks of light and darkness, life and death as contrasted with one another. What, then, is the difference between them? The antithesis explains this contrast as originating in the one source, the one and only true God, whereas dualism presents them as having a twofold origin, always opposing one another and with the issue, therefore, constantly in doubt. Infralapsarianism places sin in God's counsel without trying to explain its origin, views it independently of the Lord. Surely far better is the supralapsarian conception of this matter. This view places, in God's counsel, the decree of election and reprobation before the fall of man. Creation and man's fall are but God's sovereign means to realize His sovereign decree concerning the salvation or perdition of man. And I assure you that, also in connection with sin, I would rather begin with God than without the Lord or with the devil. Beginning with God, we are perfectly safe.

This problem of God's providence and sin is a difficult problem. We do not deny this difficulty. And neither are we so presumptuous as to believe that we can explain it. The difficulty of this problem does not lie in the proposition as such. God is sovereign and man is a responsible being. This is

clearly the teaching of the Word of God. We must never confuse these thoughts or detract from them. These truths must stand, must also be preached and taught in all their significance. Our churches have been accused of failing to lay sufficient emphasis upon the responsibility of the sinner. Of course, we need not be too alarmed because of this accusation. On the one hand, this accusation is absolutely untrue. And, on the other hand, to be accused of this simply means that we are in good company. The enemy of the truth has always hurled this charge against the defenders of the truth and of the Word of God. So, these truths must stand and they must be preached and taught. The difficulty, however, lies herein: how can the holy God direct the actions of iniquity, all these actions, so that we do not lose sight of man's responsibility and yet maintain that the Lord is holy and righteous. God may *work* sin, but man *does* the sin. God is never the author of sin. An author is one who does something voluntarily and willingly. An author is one who delights in his activity. God is never the author of sin. Man is the author of sin. I repeat: we do not purpose to solve this problem. But we do desire to discuss the question, in order that we may receive comfort from the Scripture's presentation of sin and the providence of God. We cannot solve the problem. But we may and can surely say something about it. Fact is, we must face the problem. God is God. This is Scriptural. We cannot avoid this truth. That would be folly. And sin is sin. That, too, is a reality. Also this fact we cannot deny or avoid. This, too, would be folly. We speak of the reality of sin. Indeed! Sin is a universal phenomenon. Sin characterizes the entire human race. None is exempt. And think of all the misery which this phenomenon of sin leaves in its wake. Think of all the diseases and of death. Think of all the wars and rumors of war, and of all the misery which these wars leave in their wake. Think of all the social unrest, of all the economic unrest, of all the hatreds characteristic of all the children of men. All these disturbances and hatreds are reported daily, over the radio and in the news on television. And the daily papers are full of them. What a folly it would be to ignore the reality of sin! God's providence and sin. And we must surely face them in the light of each other.

The truth of God's providence and sin is surely confessional. We must surely maintain our confessions. We may not and cannot deny them. It is, therefore, proper that we turn, first of all, to our confessions. We read of this truth in our Heidelberg Catechism, in questions and Answers 26 - 28 in Lord's Day 9 and 10, and we quote:

Answer 26: ...and further that He will make what-

ever evils He sends upon me, in this valley of tears turn out to my advantage; for He is able to do it, being Almighty God, and willing, being a faithful Father.

Question 27: What dost thou mean by the providence of God? Answer: The almighty and everywhere present power of God, whereby, as it were by His hand, He upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures; so that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, and all things come, not by chance, but by His Fatherly hand.

Question 28: What advantage is it to us to know that God has created, and by His providence doth still uphold all things? Answer: That we may be patient in adversity; thankful in prosperity; and that in all things, which may hereafter befall us, we place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father, that nothing shall separate us from His love; since all creatures are so in His hand, that without His will they cannot so much as move.

This providence of God is also held before us in our Confession of Faith. We read in Article 13 of this Confession:

We believe that the same God, after He had created all things, did not forsake them, or give them up to fortune or chance, but that He rules and governs them according to His holy will, so that nothing happens in this world without His appointment: nevertheless, God neither is the author of, nor can be charged with, the sins which are committed. For His power and goodness are so great and incomprehensible, that He orders and executes His work in the most excellent and just manner, even then, when deeds and wicked men act unjustly. And, as to what He doth surpassing human understanding, we will not curiously inquire into, farther than our capacity will admit of; but with the greatest humility and reverence adore the righteous judgments of God, which are hid from us, contenting ourselves that we are disciples of Christ, to learn only those things which He has revealed to us in His Word, without transgressing those limits. This doctrine affords us unspeakable consolation, since we are taught thereby that nothing can befall us by chance, but by the direction of our most gracious and heavenly Father; Who watches over us with a paternal care, keeping all creatures so under His power, that not a hair of our head (for they are all numbered), nor a sparrow, can fall to the ground, without the will of our Father, in Whom we do entirely trust; being persuaded, that He so restrains the devil, and all our enemies, that without His will and permission, they cannot hurt us. And, therefore, we reject that damnable error of the Epicureans, who say that God regards nothing, but leaves all things to chance.

*Know the standard
and follow it.*

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Colossians — Christ the Head of All Things (1)

Rev. J. Kortering

This letter to the church at Colosse is closely related to the one to the church at Ephesus. They were written about the same time and under the same circumstances. Even the thoughts are very similar. There are differences however. Colossians is more polemical, it deals with combating error, while Ephesians concentrates upon encouragement and teaching. The polemics of Colossians deal with a specific heresy that plagued that congregation, while Ephesians has a broader application. The doctrinal emphasis is also different; Ephesians stresses that the church is the body of Christ and Christ is its head, while Colossians views Christ from a broader point of view, that of Head of the entire universe.

THE COLOSSIAN CHURCH

The city of Colosse was located about 100 miles east of Ephesus, 13 miles from Hierapolis, and 10 miles from Laodicea. It was in the region of Phrygia on the Lycus River which flowed into the Euphrates valley. In the fourth century before Christ, Xerxes and Cyrus visited this city. In later times the city diminished in stature and was overshadowed by Laodicea.

From the letter itself (2:1), Paul indicates that he did not know the members of the church by personal contact; he had learned of them from others (1:4). Whether this means that Paul never travelled to Colosse, we cannot tell. We conclude from this that Paul was not directly involved in the establishment of this congregation. While Paul labored in Ephesus for two years during his second missionary journey, the gospel spread throughout that entire region: "all they which dwelt in Asia heard the Word of the Lord Jesus both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10). During this time a young man by the name of Epaphras came to him from Colosse to learn about the truths of the gospel of Christ. Paul instructed him and sent him back to Colosse and the regions about there, to preach the gospel (4:12, 13). Hence, Paul refers to Epaphras as "our dear fellow-servant" (1:7). At the same time, he became the minister of that congregation, "who is for you a faithful minister of Christ" (1:7). Probably Timothy accompanied him, since Paul refers to

Timothy as "our brother" in the greeting (1:1).

A few things seem to indicate that the congregation of Colosse was mostly Gentile converts. In chapter 1:27 we read, "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." Again in chapter 2:13 Paul refers to the "uncircumcision of your flesh." The error that forms the background of this letter was a strange mixture of pagan (Gentile) philosophy and Jewish legalism. Some Jews had fled to that region through the dispersion and evidently had some influence on the thinking of the people.

AUTHOR, OCCASION, AND DATE

Colossians was written by the Apostle Paul. He designated himself as the author (1:1). He was accepted as the author by the early Christian church both by the quotations the early church fathers made from this book and by their acceptance of him as the author. A later objection to the Pauline authorship came when it was pointed out by the higher critics that the vocabulary and style were different from Paul's writings. They discovered thirty-four words in this brief epistle that are not found in his other letters. If, however, one allows for the use of such words due to the subject matter being discussed and the circumstances under which he wrote, the differences are no more than in his other epistles. We may conclude without reservation that Paul wrote these words by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The letter to the Colossians is one of the prison epistles written by Paul during his early imprisonment in Rome. The other early prison epistles were Ephesians and Philemon. Philippians was written during his second imprisonment at a later date. During his first imprisonment, Paul could have friends stay with him in the house and comfort him. This letter to the Colossians indicates that Mark, Aristarchus, Justus, Luke, Demas, and others were with him in Rome (4:10, 14).

Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon were written about the same time. Tychicus was the man who brought the letter to Colosse (4:7). He also car-

ried the letter to Philemon. You remember that Philemon was a member of the church at Colosse who owned Onesimus, the runaway slave, who fled to Paul at Rome and who was instructed by Paul to return to his master. While Tychicus was bringing this letter to Philemon, he also took with him Onesimus (4:9). While making this trip, Tychicus would naturally pass through Ephesus, so it was easy for him to drop off that letter en route.

These facts lead us to set the date of composition about A.D. 62.

The immediate occasion for writing this letter was the information Paul received by Epaphras that the church of Colosse was being attacked by an evil philosophy.

Paul immediately warns the church that they be not spoiled by "philosophy and vain deceit" (2:8). In this letter he also designates some of the evil tenets of the false religion that was making inroads into the church of Colosse. They worshiped angels (2:18); practiced voluntary asceticism — that is, abstained from certain things and restricted the body (2:18, 20-23); and practiced certain Jewish laws regarding food, drink, feasting, and ceremonial days (2:11, 16, 17).

This heresy was a strange mixture of Judaism and Eastern philosophy. The seeds of Gnosticism are evident, though as a philosophy it did not reach its great influence until the second century. The ascetic tendency was rooted in the notion that earth and the physical were evil. They glorified the mind, and the ultimate goal was to rise above the flesh. They saw in Jewish laws a spirit of self-denial. The angels were heavenly hosts able to come between man and God to help deliver man from the limits of his earthly existence. Hence, they prayed to angels as if they could intercede with God.

The concern that Paul had with the presence of this evil philosophy is evident. If this lie was allowed to be taught and go unchallenged, the church would once again be placed under the bondage of the law. True, it was different from the old

Jewish legalists who carried the formalism of the Pharisees into the church. Yet, the result would be the same, to be right with God one had to keep seasons and external rituals, etc. Because his readers were Gentile converts, Paul did not argue that the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament did away with the external legalism of the law as he did in the letter to the Galatians. Rather, here he points out that in Christ all the external emphasis is done away by the cross (2:12, 13). In addition to this, if such ideas of angels were allowed to go unchallenged, eventually the universal rule of Christ would be lost. Only Christ is the true Head of all things as He serves the One Living God (1:19, 20).

THE MESSAGE

Here too we can appreciate the glorious gospel that the Holy Spirit gave the Apostle Paul to write. Here he is in prison, yet surrounded by his fellow laborers who come and go, keeping him informed on the welfare of the church. Now comes Epaphras from Colosse and reports on the condition of the church there. He tells Paul of the terrible philosophy that has infiltrated the church and influenced some of the members. Perhaps some have even left the faith. And for what? the beggarly doctrine that teaches men to hate their bodies and flee from the world, to pray to angels rather than to Christ. What is the answer? It is this: Christ Jesus, He is the image of the invisible God! He redeemed His people by His precious blood and delivered them from condemnation. He is exalted higher than all principalities and powers, above devils and angels. He is the Head of the church, the Firstborn from the dead. Now, in Him we that are afar off are reconciled unto God. Indeed, the Headship of Christ over the whole universe, especially the church, is God's good news to His people. That cannot be compared to the foolishness of men. The letter to the Colossians gives us that detail. Well may we open our eyes to read and our hearts to understand.

FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

Nicene Creed

Rev. James Slopsema

HISTORY

The Nicene Creed can not be fully appreciated without a proper understanding of its history.

The Nicene Creed arose out of the great Trinitarian controversy that rocked the church early in her history and threatened her very existence.

The Christian church from the beginning of her existence has believed the truth of the Trinity, that God is somehow three yet one. This is the current thought running throughout the whole of Scripture. It is expressed in the baptism formula where the church is instructed to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is implied in the benediction of the Apostle Paul upon the church: "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all" (II Cor. 13:14). In these and many other passages of Holy Writ it is quite apparent that God is triune, three yet one. And whereas the Christian church has always believed this truth she was not able in the beginning of her history to give expression to this truth in very clear and concise terms.

The truth that God is triune is basic to all the great truths of the Scripture. It is the one foundation upon which everything else rests. A denial of the triune character of God will inevitably lead to a denial of the whole of the truth of God. For that reason the powers of darkness chose to attack this doctrine first in the church's history. For the first 300 years of her existence, the devil had sought to destroy the church through terrible persecution. This failing he next sought to destroy her by attacking the very foundation of the truth upon which her whole existence depended—the doctrine of the Trinity. He was aided in this by the fact that the church in her early history had not come to a concise understanding of these things.

The Trinitarian controversy developed around the identity of Jesus Christ. That the Father is God was not a matter of dispute. Neither was there much discussion at first concerning the Holy Spirit. If Jesus is God, co-eternal and co-equal with the Father, then it simply follows that the Holy Spirit is also God in the same sense of the word. But if Jesus be something less than God, then the Holy Spirit is simply some impersonal power of God. The identity of Jesus therefore was the key to this controversy.

This controversy had its roots in the contradictory theology of Origen. Origen (A.D. 185-254) was a church father who lived in Alexandria of Egypt. Origen was a speculative and original thinker. His greatest downfall was the influence he allowed heathen philosophy to have upon his theology. The result was that much of his theology bordered on heresy. This is especially true if judged in light of its further development. Origen's teachings concerning Christ are what interest us at this point. Origen taught on the one hand that Jesus Christ is the Son of God eternally generated of the Father. He attributed to Christ many of the attributes of God, especially emphasizing that Christ is eternal with the

Father. This suggests that Jesus is somehow divine, which was exactly Origen's conviction. On the other hand, however, Origen virtually contradicted this by teaching that the eternal generation of the Son by the Father is not rooted in God's being but in His counsel or will. Consequently, Origen taught that the Son of God was eternally *created* by the Father. The eternal generation of the Son by the Father consists in the communication of a divine yet secondary substance to the Son. The Son therefore is divine, yet subordinate. He is a secondary God beneath the Father. This view of Origen is confusing to say the least. And because Origen was a prominent figure in the church this confusion would spell trouble for the church in the years ahead.

Over the years two discernable positions developed within the church. There were those who emphasized the teaching of Origen concerning the eternal generation of the Son. They taught that although the Father and the Son were personally distinct they were nonetheless of the same essence or being. In light of subsequent history this view has been called the orthodox view. The chief proponents of this view were Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, and later Athanasius, an arch-deacon of Alexandria. Over against this arose the view of Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria. He took as his starting point the idea of Origen that the Son of God is created of the Father and therefore subordinate to the Father. From this he deduced that whereas Christ is truly the Creator of all things, He is nevertheless only a creature Himself and therefore not truly divine.

As these two ideas emerged the church soon became hopelessly entangled in bitter controversy. The contest between these two views broke out about A.D. 318. For their denial of the true deity of Christ, Arius and his followers were deposed and excommunicated by a council of a hundred Egyptian and Libyan bishops at Alexandria in A.D. 321. This did not stop Arius from spreading his blasphemous lies. He continued to propagate his views in Palestine and Nicomedia. Nor was Arius without his sympathizers even among the bishops of the church. Consequently, the church saw bishop rise up against bishop and province against province. The entire church was engulfed in controversy.

In A.D. 325 the emperor Constantine called an ecumenical council, the first ever, representing the whole Christian church, to settle this matter. This council was held in Nicea, the second city of Bithynia, which was a province of Asia Minor. Nicea was chosen for the site of this very important council because it was only 20 miles from the imperial residence in Nicomedia. This council was attended by 318 bishops, about one-sixth of all the bishops of

the church. Although the whole church was represented at this council, the eastern branch of the church was more strongly represented than the western branch. The council was convened around Pentecost, the end of May, and lasted until the 25th of July of the same year.

Very soon three distinct parties or groups emerged at the council. There was the orthodox party led by Athanasius, the arch-deacon of Alexandria, who had just recently come to prominence in the church. He would be the future spokesman for the orthodox view. This group firmly clung to the deity of Christ. They were at first a minority. They were however more talented and influential than the other two groups. The second group was led by Arius and numbered about 20 bishops. These propagated the views of Arius which flatly denied the deity of Christ. Then there was the third group which composed the vast majority of the delegates. These more or less took a middle ground. Philip Schaff in his *History of the Christian Church* Volume III, page 628, describes this majority group thus: "Many of them had an orthodox instinct, but little discernment; others were disciples of Origen, or preferred simply Biblical expression to a scholastic terminology; others had no firm convictions, but only uncertain opinions, and were therefore easily swayed by the arguments of the stronger party or by mere external considerations".

According to His promise to lead the church into

all the truth, God used Athanasius and the orthodox party to sway the majority to the orthodox position and confess the deity of Christ. Because the statement adopted by the council of Nicea differs somewhat from the Nicene Creed as we have it today, we quote that which the council adopted in full.

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father (the only-begotten, i.e., of the essence of the Father, God of God, and) Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by Whom all things were made (in heaven and on earth); Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made Man; He suffered; and the third day He rose again, ascended into heaven; from thence He cometh to judge the quick and the dead.

And in the Holy Ghost.

And those who say: there was a time when He was not; and: He was not before He was made; and: He was made out of nothing, or out of another substance or thing, or the Son of God is created, or changeable, or alterable;—they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic church.

This confession was certainly a victory for the truth and for the church. Yet this was not the end of this controversy as we shall see in a future article.

THE LORD GAVE THE WORD

Presenting the Gospel to Strangers (1)

Rev. Steven R. Houck

It is certainly true that the Christian life is not an easy life. It is a hard life, with many problems and difficulties. For we are sinners and our sinful flesh is constantly seeking to hinder us from performing the good works we will to do. It is no wonder, therefore, that we Christians find it so hard to tell others of the faith that God has given to us. For presenting the gospel to others, especially to strangers, is indeed a most difficult and arduous task. It is hard work that demands courageous zeal from a heart filled with a love for the truth.

This is true first of all because of the very fact that when we present the gospel to strangers we are dealing with strangers. When we do not know someone, it is always hard to talk to them, especial-

ly if you are shy by nature. They do not know you and you do not know them. You don't know how they will respond to you, whether they will accept what you say or reject it and even become angry with you. and on the other hand they do not know who you are, nor what you want from them. There are so many people peddling all kinds of strange philosophies these days, that people are very cautious, and understandably so. All of this causes anxiety and fear on the part of both. In fact, some strangers are so fearful that they will not even talk with you. They simply refuse to hear you.

What makes this even more difficult is the fact that we are not only confronting the stranger, but we are confronting the stranger with the gospel. We

do not go to him to speak about the weather, nor to talk about current events. We go to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ, the truth. And the very nature of the gospel is that it either unites and binds together or it divides and separates. Often times it is the latter that we experience. There are not very many people who readily respond positively to the gospel. Many people reject what we bring. They do not want it. Especially when we go as Protestant Reformed people, with the pure doctrines of the Word of God. For that reason we are often times very offensive. We are offensive not only to the unbeliever, but many times offensive to the "Christian" and even to the "Christian" who calls himself "Reformed." For the truth is always offensive to the flesh. We must be very thankful to God for the truth He has given to us; but we must understand, too, that it is that very God-given truth that makes the presentation of the gospel to the stranger even more difficult.

What, then, can we do about this difficulty? Can we in some way make the presentation of the gospel easier? Or do we simply have to face the difficulty head on? One thing is certain—we may not change the gospel. No, never. Nor do we want to change the gospel—not if we love the truth. It is a terrible thing when someone changes the message of the gospel in order that it might be more acceptable to the one to whom he goes. It is a great and terrible sin. We must not ever change the gospel to make it easier for us to share our faith. Then we deny the faith.

There is, however, something that we can do in many cases. We can try to ease the problem somewhat by making the stranger less of a stranger. Some evangelistic organizations make a big thing out of knocking on doors and talking to complete strangers. But, in my opinion, this is not a very effective way to present the gospel. Not that we never confront the complete stranger with the gospel. Sometimes that is necessary. What is better, however, is to get to know the stranger a little bit before you meet him face to face with the truth. If you know him and he knows you, at least a little, then there is not so much anxiety.

This familiarizing process can take place in the following manner. First of all, we advertise our literature in the local newspapers. These ads should be large enough so that they attract the attention of the public. Those who have an interest in spiritual things will then write to us and ask for this literature. When we send them this material, they will learn something of us. They will learn who we are and what church we represent, because our name and address will be on each pamphlet. The very fact that we send them literature will tell them that we are interested in them and their spiritual wel-

fare. They will also learn something of what we believe as they read the pamphlet. In this way we become less of a stranger to them. After giving them time to digest the material, we then call them on the telephone to make our first personal contact. We use the telephone, because it is always easier for a person to talk on the phone than it is to talk face to face. We can tell them that we are the ones who sent the literature which they requested. With this point of reference as our introduction, most people will very readily talk with us. We can repeat the telephone calls several times at appropriate intervals to become more and more familiar with each other. But ultimately our goal is to make a personal, face to face contact with them. If this procedure is followed with wisdom and discretion, when finally we do meet the stranger in his home, he will no longer be a complete stranger. We will know each other and that makes things much easier.

This is not the end of it however. We must be very careful to continue the contact. We must not be like so many who think that they can "evangelize" a person in thirty minutes or an hour. They go with their pamphlets, like *The Four Spiritual Laws*, and think that if they merely go over these pamphlets with the stranger, they have completed their task. For when they are done, all that is left is that the stranger make his decision. If he accepts Christ, then they have won a convert, and if he rejects Christ and the gospel, there is nothing more to be done. That is the end of it. That is not the approach of a Calvinist. That is Arminian. A Calvinist recognizes the fact that God does not always work in such a way that we see dramatic and immediate results. We must continue to make contacts and not expect everything to happen at once. In many cases it takes a long time for a person to come to the knowledge of the truth. Sometimes it takes several years.

We must, therefore, continue to send appropriate literature, continue to talk with these people on the telephone, and continue to visit them in their homes. The result will be that we create a personal relationship with them. They learn to trust us and look upon us as those who bring them something that benefits them. Not that it always works out that way. Certainly some reject us before we make much progress; but many, in time, become receptive to the gospel. One of the most important principles to remember, then, is that it takes time. We must be very patient. Especially when we are dealing with someone as far away from us as an unbeliever. But the same is true of those who call themselves "Christians." Even they do not find it easy to see the truth as we do. It is of utmost importance, therefore, that we take all the time that is needed to

cultivate a personal relationship which then becomes the medium of sharing our faith.

The next step is to encourage the most promising and most advanced of our contacts to join together in a Bible study. We do not ask them to leave their own churches, if they are members of churches. They are not ready for that yet. But, in order that they might have the benefit of systematic study with others who are interested in the truth, we establish a community Bible study. The emphasis is placed, not on leading them to the Protestant Reformed Churches as such, but on leading them to the truth, the Reformed Faith. Only after a person has advanced to the place where he is ready, do we introduce him to our formal worship services and all that belongs to our faith and practice as Protestant Reformed Churches. If this is done too quickly, we will, often times, scare them away before we have the opportunity to share with them the riches of God's sovereign grace. We are not interested, merely, in gaining members for our churches. We are interested in leading people to the truth that we love and cherish so dearly.

All of this leads us to the question, "How, then, do we approach the stranger?" That is, "What is the general manner in which we speak to him in order that we might build a relationship with him?" In answer to these questions we recommend three principles. First of all, it is important that we be very honest when we approach the stranger. We must take great care that we are honestly concerned about presenting the gospel to him. In all of our presentation, it must be evident to him that we are true. There are so many today who are not true and honest. So many put on a front and use all kinds of gimmicks. They try to trick their way into houses to gain opportunities to speak about the gospel. Some approach the stranger as a salesman selling books. Others claim that they are taking a religious survey. But all of these people use these

gimmicks as a means to present the gospel. That is their real purpose. Thus they are not honest with the stranger. Some come with a memorized speech which they prepared ahead of time. It sounds so "canned" that everyone knows it and resents it. Who likes to hear some cold, uncaring, memorized speech? It is neither sincere nor honest. There is nothing that annoys me more than to be approached by a salesman in a store with a memorized speech about the merchandise. It doesn't leave you with the impression that he cares about your needs and problems. You know that all he cares about is his own pocketbook.

We must be honest and open with the stranger if we are going to get anywhere with him. We must show him that we come to him without any gimmicks and because we are truly interested in his spiritual welfare. It is wrong to hide from him either our identity or our purpose, as so many "evangelists" do. At the very beginning, we must tell him that we are Protestant Reformed, without apology. We must tell him that we are here to tell him of our faith in Christ and share the truth with him. We don't want to sell anything, nor do we want to take a religious survey. We come with the truth and that is all. This is always the best policy. For even if we try to hide something from them, they always find out sooner or later. We can not hide anything from them. But then we have shown ourselves to be dishonest. And who wants to listen to someone who is dishonest? Surely not a stranger. We go to the stranger with the Word of Truth. Surely then, it behooves us to bring that Truth in an open and honest way—a way that is honoring to our Lord Jesus Christ Who is Himself the Truth.

(to be continued)

*Text of an address given by Pastor Houck at Mission Emphasis Day in Kalamazo Protestant Reformed Church in May, 1982.

FROM HOLY WRIT

Believing All the Prophetic Scriptures

Rev. G. Lubbers

Chapter II

The Great Hermeneutical Rule Of Interpreting Prophecy (1)

In our present church-world, to mention hermeneutics seems almost like joining the multitude

of voices, all clamoring for a hearing for their understanding of the correct, orthodox way of interpreting the Scriptures, particularly the Old Testament Prophetic writings called the Scriptures.

Howbeit, it is not our intention to add one more voice to the din of voices concerning the general

question of how to ascertain the "message," the KERUGMA, in the Scripture. We stand firmly anchored in the commitment that the Bible is the Word of God, and we agree with the Belgic Confession Article III which, speaking of the Word of God, declares,

We confess that the Word of God was not sent nor delivered by the will of man, but that *holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*, as the Apostle Peter saith (II Peter 1:21). And that God afterwards from a special care for us and our salvation, commanded His servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit this revealed word to writing, and He Himself wrote with His own finger the two tables of the law. Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures. (See Exodus 24:4; Psalm 102:19; Hab. 2:2.)

Furthermore, it is well, at the outset of this writing on "believing all the Prophetic Scriptures," to confess here publicly and before all the angels and all the saints, that,

We receive all the 66 books of the Bible as holy and canonical, for the regulations, foundation and confirmation of our faith, believing without doubt all things contained in them, not so much because the church receives and approves them as such, but more especially because the Holy Ghost witnesses in our hearts that they are from God, whereof they carry the evidence in themselves. For the very blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are fulfilling (Belgic Confession, Art. V)

In this Confession we expressed the very germ of our faith in the Divine Scriptures, also as to their principle of interpretation. In this Confessional statement is embodied the sound principle of Scriptural hermeneutics that Scripture must interpret Scripture. This is implied in that these Scriptures are a unity, and that as such they are the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith.

The Holy Scriptures are all given by inspiration of God. That is what is known as the "Theopneustos" of Scripture; they are God-spirited, God-breathed. They are the very breath of God in the Word incarnate. They contain what the Spirit says to the churches (II Tim. 3:16; John 15:26; 16:13-15; Rev. 2:7). And if we have an ear to hear we will indeed believe this testimony of the Scriptures, and emphatically we will believe that the things thereof are being fulfilled! The Jews, unbelieving hearers of Jesus' words, failed to hear because they believed not (Matt. 11:15; 13:9, 43). In the day of judgment Jesus will not condemn the unbelievers, but the Word which he has spoken will do so (Rom. 2:16; II Thes. 2:10-12).

This is Jesus' own Word to the church!

He tells us that His Word is always heard by His own sheep. When the cavilling Jews oppose Him,

He tells them that they do not believe because they are not of His sheep (John 10:26-28). He keeps His sheep in His own power by His mighty word of the Gospel-preaching.

Now there always have been men and women who hear the Gospel, who do not believe the Word of God, the Scriptures, and who wrest these oracles of God to their own destruction. This is particularly true of certain men throughout the ages who, concerning the Parousia, the final great and glorious manifestation of the Son of Man upon the clouds of heaven, wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction.

It is true, the Scriptures themselves speak of the truth of the "last things" in language which is hard to be understood. Peter writes thus in II Peter 3:16: "...wherein are some things hard to be understood." The term in the Greek is "*dusnoeeta*." This term emphasizes that Paul wrote certain matters concerning the coming of Christ which require hard and difficult study. It seems that we have such a passage of Paul recorded for us in II Thessalonians 2:3-12. What Peter emphasizes is that scoffers and mockers, who really do not love the coming of the Lord, and who will discourage the saints (II Peter 3:1-7) are the very men who are ignorant and unsteady, and wrest them to their own destruction. Such do not themselves enter into the kingdom of heaven, and they would forbid those who would enter the kingdom to enter. The beautiful Scriptures of Paul as well as of Christ Himself, do not incite them to "hasten" the presence of the day of God, and they do not really look for a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness (II Peter 3:12-13). These never were such that they expected to see the Lord Himself glorified. They never therefore purified themselves as God is pure (I John 3:1-3). They contradict the Scriptures to their own destruction. They receive their own (*idian ... apooleian*) destruction. They have their reward of disobedience. They received not the love of the truth!

Into this pitfall no man needs to fall unto his own destruction because of these "things hard to be understood." He must ever explain the less clear in the light of the more clear passages of Holy Scripture. The Scriptures are throughout clear and perspicuous. Jesus always quotes the Scriptures as those which can very readily be understood, and applies them to Himself. There is one truth which, concerning the Last Things and the final return of Christ, remains hidden from us: the exact day and hour of Christ's return (Matt. 24:36; Acts 1:7; I Thes. 5:1-11). The truth is that this is not a disadvantage at all for the church of the New Testament. This is the spiritual incentive to be watchful unto prayer (Matt. 24:42-44; Matt. 25:1-13; Rev. 22:17).

Hence, we are admonished ever to pray and not to faint (Luke 18:1-8).

There are some passages in the Old Testament prophecies which are hard to be understood. These require much devoted and sanctified study. And, alas, the number is legion who fall in the class of those who wrest these Scriptures very much from the pattern of sound words of doctrine to their own destruction. Those who wrested the words of the beloved Paul to their own destruction did this too with the other Scriptures (II Peter 3:16). One cannot tamper with the Scriptures simply in one place. The teaching of false preachers eats as does the cancer; it must depart by the very logic of their error from all sound words of doctrine which are for the edifying of the saints (Titus 1:1; Rom. 6:17). This is a solemn warning, also for the writer of these lines, not to depart from the pattern of sound words, unto which the church has been delivered in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:17).

And with this in mind we need not some clever rules of interpretation but we need sound rules of interpretation which Jesus Himself gives of the Old Testament prophecies. We have this given to us by Jesus Himself after His glorious and triumphant resurrection from the dead.

We call attention to Jesus' unfolding of the Scriptures with infallible accuracy. Jesus must have done this already when He was twelve years old, when He was there with the rabbis, "sitting in their midst, both hearing them and asking them questions; and they were all amazed at His understanding and His answers" (Luke 2:46, 47). Twice on the evening of the day of Christ's resurrection He interpreted the Scriptures. Jesus stands there between the ages as the fulfilment of all the promises. He stands there where the kingdom is really taken away from the Israel of the Old Testament dispensation, as the Theocratic kingdom, and as this kingdom will be given to others. He will take His church out of nonage, the time of her childhood and grant her the Spirit of adoption from on high, crying "Abba, Father" in their hearts. Now shall all nations be blessed in Abraham, as before was preached by the Holy Scriptures (Gal. 5:8). These Scriptures "foresaw" that the Gentiles too were by God to be justified by faith (Gal. 3:8). That is true not simply of some isolated passage in the Old Testament, but this is true of "the Scripture." Paul writes in the Greek "*he graphee*"! All the Scriptures speak thus as in one grand and glorious speech. It is the one *central theme* of the Old Testament. This Jesus expressed to the unbelieving Jews, as recorded in John 5:45: "Think not that I will condemn you unto the Father, there is one that condemneth you, even Moses, into whom ye trust. For if ye would believe Moses (that one) ye would

believe in Me, for he wrote concerning Me (*peri... emou*)."

And it is very evident from the preposition *peri* that this means that the first five books of the Bible have one central subject: Jesus Christ and Him crucified!

This is *the key* to understand the Old Testament Scriptures!

Here we read the great hermeneutical principle that Christ is the end (*telos*) of the law, for righteousness to those who believe, whether they be Jew or Greek, or barbarian, bond or free, male or female. And this also indicates that the entire old Testament not only predicted the coming of the Christ, but has meaning only when Christ comes to fulfill the promise to *all* nations.

Thus Jesus interprets the Scriptures to both the travelers to Emmaus, as well as somewhat later that evening to the eleven disciples, Thomas being absent however (Luke 24:13-32 and Luke 24:44-49). And we only will fare well as exegetes of Scripture when we carefully listen to Jesus, the great interpreter, and learn His infallible hermeneutics. No, Jesus did not give a formal course in the science of hermeneutics to His disciples after His resurrection. What Jesus did was to set the Cross in the proper place in the teaching of all the Old Testament Scriptures.

Jesus starts this instruction in a very pedagogical way with these two travelers to Emmaus, as they walk and talk of the strange and marvelous fact that Jesus of Nazareth had been crucified by the leaders in Israel (Luke 24:19, 20). And now they have another fact which must be explained, but it seems like a deep riddle which defies all explanation. Jesus is reported to have risen from the dead; yea, it is the third day, the tomb was found empty in a very wondrous way, and certain women reported that Jesus was no longer dead. He is alive! And so they have a very deep problem which can not be fathomed or interpreted by human ken, but which must be solved by a clear-cut, definite interpretation of all the Scriptures, as these cast their light upon this Wonder of wonders: the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

These two travelers need a lesson in good interpretation of the Scriptures, and then this "*peripatetic*" instruction of only two students becomes the great hermeneutical rule of interpreting the Old Testament prophecies, including the place of Old Testament Israel in the great economy of salvation! Christ was made a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, that He might confirm the promises given to the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy (Rom. 15:8, 9; Ps. 18:49; Deut. 32:43; Ps. 117:1; Is. 11:10).

Report of Classis West

September 30, 1982

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches met in Doon, Iowa from Tuesday morning, September 21, until late in the evening on Thursday, September 23. At the request of two Consistories and by the action of the Classical Committee, Classis had been postponed from the date originally set, September 1, in order that Classis might examine two men who had accepted calls to churches in the West. Ten ministers and fourteen elders represented the churches of the West. Rev. R. Moore presided over the meeting. The delegates *ad examina* from Classis East — Rev. C. Hanko, Rev. G. VanBaren, and Rev. B. Woudenberg—were present for the examination of the men who had accepted calls; and Rev. G. Lubbers, minister emeritus in Classis West, was present at the sessions of Classis.

On Tuesday, Classis examined Mr. Thomas Miersma and Mr. Jon Smith, according to the requirements of Article 4 of the Church Order. This examination was requested by the Consistories of Edmonton, Alberta and Edgerton, Minnesota, whose calls the men had accepted. Mr. Smith gave his "specimen of preaching" before the Classis on Tuesday morning; Mr. Miersma gave his "specimen of preaching" at a special worship service of the Doon congregation on the evening before Classis, in the presence of the delegates of Classis and the delegates *ad examina*. Both men successfully sustained the peremptory (decisive) examination. Classis advised Edmonton to proceed with the ordination and installation of Mr. Miersma; Classis advised Edgerton to proceed with the ordination and installation of Mr. Smith. The president expressed to both the joy and thankfulness of the Classis.

A great deal of Classis' time was taken up with the consideration, in closed session, of several appeals and of a Consistory's request for Classis' advice concerning the second step of censure of an impenitent member.

Classis forwarded to Synod, 1983, with its approval, an overture of South Holland, that Synod see to the inclusion in our *Psalter* of the three Trinitarian Creeds—the Apostles' Creed; the Nicene Creed; and the Athanasian Creed.

Edmonton sent to the Classis a "request for help, according to Article 41-4 of the Church Order." Edmonton asked for the interpretation of Article 21 of the Church Order: "The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant." Classis responded in six points: 1) Because God's covenant is with believers and their children, our children must be instructed according to the "demands of the covenant." 2) Christian parents have the calling to train up their children in the way they should go according to the Word of God. 3) This covenant instruction is accomplished not only in the home and church, but also in the day school. Therefore, Reformed believers establish Christian day schools... 4) The consistory is called to encourage the organization of our schools by the members of the congregation. 5) The consistory has the duty to admonish and exhort those parents who fail to carry out their covenant obligations. 6) Consistory members themselves ought to support our own Christian schools.

Edmonton and Isabel asked for special (emergency) subsidy for 1982 in the amount of \$4,250.00; Isabel asked for additional subsidy for 1983 in the amount of \$3,000.00; and Edgerton asked for \$1,000.00 for the moving expenses of their new pastor. Classis granted these requests and forwarded them to the Finance Committee of Synod.

Because of the delay (due to immigration proceedings) in the installation of Mr. Miersma, Edmonton asked for pulpit supply. Rev. Kuiper was appointed to fill Edmonton's pulpit the Sundays of October 17, 24, and 31.

Classis West will meet next in South Holland on March 2, 1983, the Lord willing.

Rev. David Engelsma, Stated Clerk
Classis West