

The **STANDARD BEARER**

— A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE —

There is therefore now no condemnation.... My sins are forgiven! I am righteous in Christ!... It is on the basis of that meritorious work of Christ on the cross that God casts our sins into a sea of eternal forgetfulness, as if they never existed.

See "My Sins Forgiven!" — page 74

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MEDITATION

My Sins Forgiven!

Rev. C. Hanko

Ques. 56. What believest thou concerning "the forgiveness of sin"?

Ans. That God for the sake of Christ's satisfaction, will no more remember my sins, neither my corrupt nature, against which I have to struggle all my life long; but will graciously impute to me the righteousness of Christ, that I may never be condemned before the tribunal of God.

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21

No condemnation!

There is therefore now no condemnation, not in this present time nor in the great Day of days as I stand before the tribunal of the Most High God! My

sins are forgiven! I am righteous in Christ!

So often Jesus sent the weeping, sin-burdened sinner joyfully on his way with the assurance, Go in peace, thy sins, though they are many, are for-

given thee. Our Lord's first cry on the cross expresses His deep concern for His lost sheep and His willingness to take our guilt upon Himself, when He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Pentecost, with Peter's sermon and the anxious response from many hearts, "Men and brethren, what must we do?" was a powerful evidence that this prayer was heard.

Of all the benefits of salvation that might have been mentioned in the Apostolic Creed and in this Lord's Day, the fathers chose this one great, fundamental blessing as the core of the riches of grace, the basis upon which God bestows all the other blessings upon us. It is for this reason that our Catechism treats the subject of the forgiveness of sins no fewer than three times in the course of its instruction (see questions 60 and 126). This follows the pattern set before us by the Lord Himself, when in the model prayer He teaches us to present our personal needs in just three petitions, the central one of which is, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

O the blessedness of him whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputes not iniquity!

Blessed gift!

This gift of forgiveness means all the more to us when we consider that it is experienced only in the church and in the communion of saints. The world knows nothing about forgiveness. The unbeliever is never forgiven, nor can he forgive. He is never sincerely sorry for his sins, never confesses them before God and the neighbor, except for an empty "I'm sorry." It is within the church and under the ministry of the Word that the Holy Spirit convicts of sin and guilt, arouses in us a sincere cry for mercy, and causes us to hear the powerful, reassuring voice of Jesus saying, "Thy sins are forgiven thee!" It is for that reason that the church of all ages confesses almost in one breath: I believe a holy, catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins. It is in that blessed confidence that we can forgive our neighbor, even as God in Christ has forgiven us.

My sins ... my depravity.

Sin is a small, ugly word. It encompasses a host of evil desires, thoughts, words, actions, and deeds. I experience every day anew my Father's care and protection, bounties of natural and spiritual blessing far above all that I could ask or think, yet I use those very gifts to turn against my God. I know so very well that whether I eat, or whether I drink, or whatever else I may do, I should do it all to the glory of God, yet I fail in that so miserably. I miss the mark of God's glory both inadvertently and often deliberately; I transgress His commandments

both unconsciously and consciously; I am guilty of offending God even in my holiest undertakings.

Still worse, sin is like a cruel tyrant that takes us in his grip and forces us to willful submission. Scripture compares sin to a lion that crouches at the door of our heart, ready to pounce in at the earliest opportunity, in order to devour us. Once in its power, one sin leads to another, each one worse than the former, for sin breeds sin unto death. Willingly we heed the lures of Satan, like a child that is drawn to a puddle of water, or like a moth that flits dangerously near the flame of fire. Our sins rise up against us, prevailing day by day, for we are evil, born in sin.

Leprosy was a dread disease in Israel. This was true mainly because of its symbolical significance. A leper was a most miserable wretch. A small spot appeared somewhere on the body and grew into a festering, stinking sore. As the disease progressed, the face and limbs became distorted into ugly shapes, the extremities rotted away, while the victim lay in mortal agony, longing for release in death. What made the disease even more horrible was the fact that the leper was an outcast, driven from God and from men, living in the caves of the hills and forced to cry out when anyone approached him, "Stay away, for I am unclean, unclean!" Isaiah describes Israel's spiritual condition as that of a wretched leper (1:5, 6). David has this in mind in Psalm 51 when he pleads that the Lord may wash him with hyssop, for only then will he be fully healed, white as snow. There were many lepers in the days of Jesus. The land seemed to be full of them. That also speaks of our spiritual condition better than words can utter it.

I stand before the tribunal of God. Shamefacedly I must confess that I have grossly transgressed, and do transgress all His commands. As for my sinful self I do not, I cannot keep a single one of them. The convicting power of the Spirit of Christ in my conscience forces me to confess that I deserve nothing less than God's just and eternal condemnation in hell fire. Thank God, that same Spirit also creates in me a true and lasting sorrow for my sins.

There is also an "Esau's sorrow." I fear that. So readily we are sorry, not because we have sinned against the most high majesty of God, but rather because our sins have found us out. We failed to get away with it, so that now we experience the bitter consequences. We tend to blame everything and everybody but ourselves. We lie awake at night thinking up excuses to condone what we have done. Although we most strongly condemn that deed in others, we can readily justify ourselves. We may even be angry with those who accuse us. And as soon as the consequences have somewhat faded

away we are ready to return to our old "habits." Scripture calls that a sorrow unto death (II Cor. 7:10).

There is also a godly sorrow, wrought by the Spirit of God in our hearts, whereby we cry out with David, "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight." The burden of guilt oppresses us; the shame of having offended God with our transgressions humbles us in dust and ashes. From the depths of hell, as it were, we cry for mercy, for cleansing, for peace.

Forgiven!

"But God, Who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us," says Paul in Ephesians 2:4, 5. Our Catechism echoes that joyful cry by saying, "That God for the sake of Christ's satisfaction, will no more remember my sins, neither my corrupt nature, against which I have to struggle all my life long."

There is a divine forgetting. Not as if God forgets as we do because of our human limitations. That would be contrary to God's eternal immutability. God loves His people with an eternal love in Christ Jesus. That love is so great, so deep, so broad that He gave His only begotten Son to die the accursed death of the cross in our flesh. It is on the basis of that meritorious work of Christ on the cross that God casts our sins into a sea of eternal forgetfulness, as if they never existed.

Christ made a perfect satisfaction for all our sins. Satisfaction! Amazing word, rich in its value for us! Our Lord satisfied God's justice by His atoning sacrifice of willful obedience in our stead on the cross, so completely "as if I had satisfied in my own person for all my sins and fulfilled all righteousness" (Communion Form). The righteousness of Christ is so completely ours, that we have the right to the adoption of sons, the right to call God our Father, the right to be heirs of eternal life. Who is the condemner? It is God Who justified now and forever!

"I will, be thou clean!"

There was a certain occasion when a leper came running into the city after Jesus. Little did this leper realize that as Jesus passed him outside the city power had gone out of the Lord drawing him in faith after Him. We may marvel at the audacity of this fellow, who leaves his isolation, runs among the crowd in the city, and falls down before Jesus in humble worship. He does not call Jesus "Master," but addresses Him as "Lord." He adds, "If Thou wilt Thou canst make me clean." What an amazing confidence! There is no doubt in his mind that Jesus can cure the "incurable" disease, but only the question whether He will have compassion on such

an unworthy wretch. Readily we join him in the plea, "O Lord, be merciful to me, a leper!"

We read that Jesus touched him. Imagine that! The holy, sinless Jesus condescended to touch that festering, diseased sinner! He took upon Himself our deadly diseases. "Surely, He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" (Isaiah 53:3). He set His face steadfastly toward the cross, willingly spread His arms on the accursed tree, and out of the darkness of hell cried out, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me, the Leper?"

A single word sufficed for the leper who lay at Jesus' feet, even as for us: "I will, be thou clean."

How blest is he whose trespass hath freely been forgiven,

Whose sin is wholly covered before the sight of heaven.

Blest he to whom Jehovah imputeth not his sin,

Who hath a guileless spirit, whose heart is true within.

I believe the forgiveness of sins. This does not mean that my struggle, my battle against sin is finished. In a sense, it has just begun, for sin still wars in my members. That struggle I must carry on as long as I live, even to my dying breath. But grace abounds. According to the new man in Christ I hate sin, can crucify the flesh, as painful as that is, and can in principle live a new and holy life before God.

In that confidence I can anticipate the coming of that great Day of days when the great white throne will be set up. God Who has begun a good work will surely finish it. He rewards His own work in me with His testimony, "Come, thou blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for you." Amen.

LETTER TO TIMOTHY (continued from page 95)

It is important for all our thinking and willing life, for we think and will consciously. It is important for enjoying life and feeling sympathy or sorrow. How could we cry if we were not conscious and self-conscious? It is important surely for self-examination to which Scripture calls us.

But it is rather striking that a child does not possess very much of this. And, as a child develops, consciousness develops in that child, but also self-consciousness. And consciousness comes before self-consciousness. A child is not usually self-conscious until he is over a year old. That is why when a child begins to speak, he always speaks of himself in the third person: not, "I will go out to play;" but, "Danny will go out to play." And how surprised some of my own children were when suddenly they discovered that that image of themselves in the mirror was an image of *them*! Self-consciousness sometimes dawns suddenly and startlingly.

Fraternally in Christ, H. Hanko

EDITORIALS

Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

Reformed or Baptist: Either...Or

In a recent issue of *Reformation Today* (Number 68) its editor, Erroll Hulse, an English spokesman for those who call themselves "Reformed Baptists," makes some remarks about this name in which, in part, he seeks to explain and to justify the name Reformed Baptist. Evidently he writes mainly for the benefit and instruction of Reformed Baptists. Nevertheless, in reflecting on this subject he writes about something which ought to be dear to the heart of any truly Reformed person. And in doing so, Mr. Hulse fails on two counts. In the first place, it appears to me that he presents a woefully weak and lame explanation and justification for their use of the name "Reformed." And, secondly, he apparently fails to see that the Baptists have emasculated the Reformed confession, i.e., have so changed it by their modifications that they have stripped it of its very Reformed character. The result is that their Confession is no longer Reformed, and they no longer have a true right to call themselves Reformed. This is something which many Reformed and Presbyterian people fail to see, probably because they no longer fully understand and appreciate their own heritage. But it is important nevertheless. He who is a Baptist *cannot* be Reformed; and he who is Reformed *cannot* be Baptist. The difference between the two is not incidental; it does not have to do with non-essentials. The difference is fundamental. It is a difference which has to do with the very genius of the Reformed faith. Reformed and Baptist cannot be mixed any more than one can mix water and oil.

Let us look at this matter a bit more closely in connection with Editor Hulse's claims. He writes:

To our advantage both words, Reformed and Baptist, convey a great deal of meaning if understood within the context of Church history. To the outsider religious words mean little or nothing. That is one reason why the title 'Strict and Particular' has been discarded by some Reformed Baptist churches in England....

What about the title Reformed Baptist? By Reformed we mean that we believe in the heritage of the Reformation. We believe the 1689 Confession of faith represents the maturest, fullest and most accurate expression of the Christian Faith. The 1689 Confession has 32 rich chapters proceeding in logical order. As it happens this work was not achieved by Baptists but

by the Puritans of the Westminster Assembly, 1643-1649.

Now it simply is not true that the 1689 Confession (known in this country also by the name 'The Philadelphia Confession') was achieved by the Puritans of the Westminster Assembly. Eventually Mr. Hulse has to admit this, as we shall see. But I want to emphasize that this is misrepresentation. If I write a book, and someone comes along and eliminates whole chapters, substituting chapters of his own, then it can no longer be claimed that the book was achieved by Homer Hoeksema. And if, in addition, those chapters which were eliminated were key chapters in the statement of my thoughts and position, then it is even less possible to claim that I am the author of the book. Well, this is the situation with the 1689 Confession. Not the Puritans and the Westminster divines were the authors of it, but certain Baptists. The Puritans were the authors of the Westminster Confession. But the Westminster Confession and the 1689 Confession are by no means the same.

Mr. Hulse has to admit that the two are different, of course. But when he does so, he tries to minimize the differences, as follows:

The Baptists changed two or three articles and added one (chapter 20) to the Westminster Confession thus arriving at the 1689 Confession, which represents the main body of what we believe. The word Reformed then is accurate, suitable and appropriate, providing we bear the historical background in mind. As with all names we must always avoid everything which may be party-minded or proud. We are not saying we are better than other believers. We are simply saying that in a day when almost all Christian truths are under attack that it is needful to be accurate and definite in declaring our beliefs. It is no small help to find that over hundreds of years the Gospel has not changed. It is timeless.

Notice how the changes are minimized. Only two or three articles were changed, and one was added. It is even suggested that the name 'Reformed' is still accurate if only some historical background is taken into account. In the next paragraphs Editor Hulse even tries to suggest that at least in England the addition of the name 'Baptist' is not even necessary, but that in other settings and other countries it may prove necessary.

Meanwhile, the real difference between Reformed and Baptist, between the Westminster Confession and the 1689 Confession, is nowhere directly mentioned. Writes Hulse:

When the 1689 Confession conveys every major truth why is it necessary to add the word Baptist to our title? The 1689 Confession which is comprehensive deals fully with the nature of the church. Baptism is closely related to the nature of the church. Chapter 26 of the 1689 Confession is fuller and richer on the subject of the church than the Westminster equivalent. Chapter 29 fully expresses our convictions on Baptism. In England therefore we could argue that the one word Reformed is quite adequate to express what we are. We are not threatened by anyone. Why should we use the term Baptist at all? A word could be chosen from any chapter of the confession to use for a title.

Why, indeed?

The answer is that the 1689 Confession *is not* the Westminster Confession and *is not* Reformed. And the answer is that the one word 'Reformed' *is not* adequate to express what those who hold to the 1689 Confession are. In fact, it does not express *at all* what they are. And the answer is that they should use the word 'Baptist' because they *are* Baptist, not Reformed.

You see, the chapter on baptism was changed completely in order to give expression to the Baptist insistence on immersion as the only proper mode of baptism and to give expression to the Baptist denial of infant baptism. And one of the chief reasons for the change in the chapter on the church was the Baptist insistence that the church consists of professing believers, not of believers and their children or believers and their seed.

In those four words—BELIEVERS AND THEIR SEED—is expressed the fundamental difference between Baptists and Reformed, a difference which makes it fundamentally impossible and dishonest for Baptists to claim the name 'Reformed.' Reformed theology is covenant theology. The

Reformed faith holds to the organic realization of God's covenant, both in the old and new dispensations, with believers and their seed in the line of generations. Baptists deny all this.

And let no one say this difference is incidental. Change this truth, and it affects the Westminster position radically. Otherwise, why, pray tell, did the Baptists themselves feel the need of a new confession? Moreover, it does not merely change the position of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. In the Westminster tradition it also involves a radical change in the Directory for Public Worship.

And then we have not even mentioned the fact that the Reformed faith is expressed in numerous other Reformed confessions in which this fundamental covenant theology is expressed, if anything, even more clearly and strongly. Nor have we mentioned a creedal document such as our Form for the Administration of Baptism.

But there is more. The Baptists have traded this Reformed truth of the organic realization of God's covenant with believers and their seed for a position which is fundamentally *individualistic*, a position which emphasizes that God deals strictly with individuals in His work of salvation. This, too, is very important. Reformed theology is not individualistic. All Arminian and Semi-Pelagian and Pelagian views have always been individualistic, and they still are today. And here lies the underlying reason why eventually Baptists cannot succeed, and historically have not succeeded, in holding to the doctrines of sovereign grace, the doctrines of the Five Points of Calvinism. It is possible for Baptists to hold to these doctrines for a time, perhaps; but eventually, because of their inherent individualistic view, they are compelled to drift in the direction of Arminianism.

So remember—and do not be deceived on this score: Baptist and Reformed do not mix. It is either ...or! Not both...and!

Another Gospel!

Probably like many others, I always tended to think of Robert H. Schuller, of the well-known Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California, as just another of the several mass-evangelists in our country. He is touted as such. His congregation is said to number 10,000; and his television program, "The Hour of Power," it is claimed, is the most

widely watched broadcast of all televised church services. Though I never paid much attention to reports about his high-powered operation, I had a vague impression that his name was connected with the phrase "possibility thinking." For the rest, I had a rather vague idea that, like most of the crusade-type evangelists, he probably came with an

Arminian message.

Recently, however, (like many clergymen whose names found their way to his mailing list) I received a book by Schuller: *Self-Esteem, The New Reformation*.

While reading in this book, I changed my mind about Robert Schuller.

Not for better, but for worse.

Mr. Schuller, I believe, cannot even be classed with those who are sometimes called "evangelicals" in a broad and loose sense, evangelicals of an Arminian bent.

In fact, I do not hesitate to say that he presents "another gospel." And my reference in using this term is to what the Apostle Paul writes in Galatians 1:6-8: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."

When Mr. Schuller speaks of "The New Reformation," he means what he says. He means that we must abandon the Reformation of Luther and Calvin, with its principles, and replace it with something new and different. Just as surely as Luther and Calvin broke radically in the Reformation with the teachings of Rome, so surely Schuller's "New Reformation" purposes to break with the doctrines of the Reformation and to replace them with new and strange doctrines.

Let me cite some shocking samples from this new book.

"For the church to address the unchurched with a theocentric attitude is to invite failure in mission. The non-churched who have no vital belief in a relationship with God will spurn, reject, or simply ignore the theologian, church spokesperson, preacher, or missionary who approaches with Bible in hand, theology on the brain and the lips, and expects nonreligious persons to suspend their doubts and swallow the theocentric assertions as fact. The unconverted will, I submit, take notice when I demonstrate genuine concern about their needs and honestly care about their human hurts." p. 12

"The scales must tip the other way. It was appropriate for Calvin and Luther to think theocentrically. After all, 'Everyone was in the church' and the issues were theological, not philosophical. For them, the central issue was, 'What is the truth in theology?' The reformers didn't have to impress the unchurched so there was no need for them to take the 'human needs' approach....

"Time and history have changed all that. Today the sincere, Christian believer is a minority. So the church must be willing to die as a church and be born again as a mission. We cannot speak out with a 'Thus saith the Lord' strategy when we are talking to people who couldn't care less about the Lord!" pp. 12, 13

In answer to the question, "What do I mean by sin?" he offers this:

"I can offer still another answer: 'Sin is any act or thought that robs myself or another human being of his or her self-esteem.' And what is 'hell'? It is the loss of pride that naturally follows separation from God—the ultimate and unfailing source of our soul's sense of self-respect. 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' was Christ's encounter with hell. In that 'hellish' death our Lord experienced the ultimate horror—humiliation, shame, and loss of pride as a human being. A person is in hell when he has lost his self-esteem...." pp. 14, 15.

Here is his definition of self-esteem: "Self-esteem is the human hunger for the divine dignity that God intended to be our emotional birthright as children created in His image." p. 15

"Yes, what we need in the worldwide Christian church today is nothing less than a new reformation. Where the sixteenth-century Reformation returned our focus to sacred Scriptures as the only infallible rule for faith and practice, the new reformation will return our focus to the sacred right of every person to self-esteem! The fact is, the church will never succeed until it satisfies the human being's hunger for self-value." p. 38

"The core of original sin, then is LOT—Lack of Trust. Or, it could be considered an innate inability to adequately value ourselves. Label it a 'negative self-image,' but do not say that the central core of the human soul is wickedness. If this were so, then truly, the human being is totally depraved. But positive Christianity does not hold to human depravity, but to human inability. I am humanly unable to correct my negative self-image until I encounter a life-changing experience with non-judgmental love bestowed upon me by a person whom I admire so much that to be unconditionally accepted by him is to be born again." p. 67

"No theology of salvation, no theology of the church, no theology of Christ, no theology of sin and repentance and regeneration and sanctification and discipleship, can be regarded as authentically Christian if it does not begin with and continue to keep its focus on the right of every person to be treated with honor, dignity, and respect. At the same time, any creed, any biblical interpretation, and any systematic theology that assaults and offends the self-esteem of persons is heretically fail-

ing to be truly Christian no matter how interlaced, interfaced, or undergirded it might be with biblical references...." pp. 135, 136.

Examples equally as shocking could be multiplied.

It does not require much discernment to detect that my characterization of Schuller's book is correct. It is indeed "another gospel," not the gospel of the Scriptures, that he brings!

Correspondence and Reply

From a Holland, Michigan reader I received the following inquiry, dated October 12:

Dear Editor:

I recently read your Convocation address as printed in the Oct. 1 *Standard Bearer*. I read the article with great interest and was once again struck by the awesome responsibility that lies with our seminary and its professors. I also thought that the analogy that was drawn between the seminary and the greenhouse was quite fitting, but while reading was struck by the terms that were used in explaining the design of the seminary. In particular, I refer to the weeding out of the culls or the unhealthy plants (page 7).

In light of the Scriptures and Question and Answer 111 of the Catechism, I would appreciate more of an explanation as to what was meant by those terms.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think you are referring to the students who have not in the past, or will not in the future, meet the requirements of the seminary for one reason or another. I will be looking forward to your response since this area does concern me greatly.

Sincerely,

Wesley Koops

Reply:

Dear Brother Koops:

Thank-you for your letter and the interest that it shows.

First of all, it may be well to get the pertinent paragraph of my address before our readers: "Positively, the seminary is an institution where ministers of the gospel are prepared, nurtured, trained. Just as a greenhouse with its proper soil, its air, its water, its light, its heat, its plant nutrition, is designed to foster the growth of healthy plants, so the seminary is designed to foster the growth and preparation of doctrinally and spiritually sound and capable Protestant Reformed ministers of the gospel. And by the same token, of course, it is de-

signed to weed out the culls or the unhealthy plants, as the case may require."

Secondly, it was not my purpose to refer either obliquely or implicitly to any specific students. If that had been my purpose, I would have mentioned names and cases. However, I was speaking of the *duty* and *purpose* of the seminary. And the negative side of that duty—sometimes sad and unpleasant for the faculty—includes the weeding out of culls or unhealthy plants. If I were to define what I meant by a "cull," I would say that is a student who manifests that he does not have the academic abilities and gifts to become a preacher of the Word in our churches. This is, of course, measured by standards which the churches have set for our school. Without going into detail, let me mention, for example, that a presemianian must have an average grade of at least a B- and show no failing grade in any course, and a seminarian must have an over-all average of at least a C and show no failing grade in any course. Now the whole matter of academic standards and the procedures connected with their application is for the purpose of "culling out" those who do not measure up to these standards. This does not mean or imply, of course, that a person is a "cull" as a Christian person or a "cull" as far as life in general or as far as other callings in life are concerned. I was simply extending the whole figure of a greenhouse in application to the seminary as an institution for the preparation of Protestant Reformed preachers. If I were to define what I meant by "an unhealthy plant," I would say that is a student who manifests that he is not committed to our Protestant Reformed position.

Over the years, since 1924, there have been both such culls and unhealthy plants from time to time. And I suppose we may expect this in the future also. And speaking from the experience of my 23 years since my ordination as professor—and, I am sure, speaking for my fellow professors and for the Theological School Committee—it is always a profoundly sad and painful experience when we have to tell a young man that he can't make it or that he has to discontinue—or when he sees this for him-

self and informs us.

Now what about Q. and A. 111 of the Catechism? In its positive explanation of the eighth commandment the Catechism says that God requires "That I promote the advantage of my neighbor in every instance I can or may; and deal with him as I desire to be dealt with by others...."

I would say this is exactly what we do at seminary in this "weeding" process. And my reasons are two: 1) We promote the advantage of all our many neighbors in the Protestant Reformed Churches by preventing them from receiving less than capable or unfit ministers. 2) We promote the

true advantage even of such young men as must discontinue their studies and not enter the ministry. For I assure you that there is no more unhappy position in life than to be in the ministry when you don't belong there and fit there. A man who has the capabilities of a ditch-digger but has all the responsibilities of corporation president is unhappy. But a child of God who is in the ministry of the Word when he doesn't fit in that position is far more unhappy.

Cordially, in Christ,

HCH

GUEST ARTICLE

A Minister-Rabbi Conversation

Rev. Robert C. Harbach

III. About Anti-semitism and the Trinity

"I thought you might invite me to your office in Temple Beth Anshe Chesed," was the way the Rev. N. K. Russo began his third conversation with the rabbi. "No," that dignitary replied, "I prefer the advantages of an open-air restaurant with nothing but the Creator's shade trees and Jehovah's heaven over my head. Such comfort we should always have! Such delicious espresso to stimulate our discussion on the planned topic of, you should pardon the expression, 'anti-semitism'! You don't believe in it, do you?"

"You mean entertain or practice it in any way? Of course not! Nearly everyone realizes that the Jewish people have suffered a great deal of 'anti-semitic' persecution throughout their history. However, not only Jews but Reformed Christians too have suffered terribly under the Inquisition. So while there's a great hue and cry against 'anti-semitism,' where is there a voice raised against terroristic 'anti-Christianity'? The term 'anti-semitism' has become hackneyed and often appears to us Calvinists as a sort of a 'scare-word' intended to shut our mouths and to compromise us in the preaching of our Christian gospel. Why do the Jews condemn the New Testament as an 'anti-semitic book'? Out of about ten writers of the Book, all were Jewish except one. Was Paul anti-semitic writing as he did about the Jews in certain sections of his Roman epistle, e.g., chapter 2:17-29 and chapter nine? Don't forget, he also wrote chapter one, indicting

the entire heathen world. But no one thinks to charge him with 'anti-gentilism.' Does all this offend you?"

"Not at all, Christian friend. What you say only more broadens the mind of an already broad-minded rabbi."

"Well, then, are you Jews so sensitive to criticism that you must continually defend yourselves with the worn-out accusation of 'anti-semitism,' or are you people always looking over your shoulders as though half expecting another Hitler to jump out of the woodwork to bite your heads off?"

Chuckling good-naturedly together at this last sally, the rabbi responded, "Never in my wildest imaginations could I ever envision myself laughing with a Christian relative to 'anti-semitism'! But don't forget what Israel suffered in World War II, and suffers to this day at the hands of PLO terrorists. Now *that's* anti-semitism!"

"There you go again, my rabbi friend, harping on that same string! Answer me this question: The Yisraeli forces recently tried to rid the world of the PLO in Lebanon, didn't they?"

"Sure, a favor they were doing the whole world. Thankful every nation should be for that!"

"Begin's bagels, Nate! Aren't the Palestinians and the PLO of Arab descent? and aren't the Arabs *semites*? In connection with Israel's recent siege against Lebanon, wasn't the whole world fearful Israel would be guilty of genocide? But ever since

Isaac and Ishmael, Arabs and Jews have been at one another's throats. Then oughtn't the pot (the Jews) be careful about calling the kettle (the Arabs) black? Have the Jews never been guilty of 'anti-semitism'?"

"Touche, Nathanael! Maybe we should drop that reproachful expression. It could get too embarrassing to the Jewish community."

"Not *touche*, Nate; I'm not trying to score points, nor to appear witty and clever. True Christians are not anti-semitic. Neither are they anti-Arab, or anti-Negro, anti-Irish, anti-Polish or anti anything—unless it be anti-sin. We are intolerant to sin and to anything not in harmony with the Holy Bible of Old and New Testaments. That is why we are called Protestants. We protest any denial or profanation of God's covenant. Have you thought any more of what is written in Sepher Tehillim, the Book of Praises, in ha-mizmor le-Davidh, the Psalm of David, where Jehovah speaks of Meshicho, His Anointed, His Messiah?"

"Not really. Reform rabbis are not very messiah-oriented, unless in a more practical vein we hope for another Bernard Baruch or another Franklin Roosevelt."

"Well, anyway, in that Second Psalm David is more relevant. He tells us that Jehovah reigns over the goyim, the gentiles, the nations, by His Messiah Whom He appoints as King in Zion. To Him Jehovah gives the goyim as an inheritance, the whole earth as His possession. To Him, His enthroned King, Jehovah actually says, 'Thou art My Son!' Then He commands the kings and magistrates of the earth, 'Kiss the Son!' Render Him supreme homage and allegiance. 'Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they who put their trust in Him!' Take refuge in the King Who laid down His life for Zion, for our sins (Psalm 22) that we might have a safe refuge from the wrath of El Shaddai, God Almighty!"

"Still," the rabbi insisted, "no mention is made there of the son's name. As for the Isaianic passage alluded to the other day, your Protestant RSV Bible, to my way of thinking, has a much more suitable translation than heretofore. It states, 'Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign, Behold, a young woman (Du., *jonkvrouw*) shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.' The rabbi of Temple Sinai in Capitol City expressed warm approval of this translation of the text. He said, 'I am delighted to know that at last this great error of translation (as appearing in your KJV) has been finally corrected, and that at last some elements of the Christian world no longer officially maintain that Isaiah 7:14 is a prediction that Jesus

was to be born of the Virgin Mary.' "

"Now here is an instance of where the Jews may scream 'anti-semitism!' any time they please, but no Christian dare charge a Jew with being anti-Christian. For that (RSV) mistranslation of Isaiah 7:14 is a deliberate corruption of the original Hebrew, the result of recent Jewish influence on the Revised Standard Bible Committee. One of the members of that committee was connected with a Jewish religious institute. Anyway, the text, instead of saying what it does in the original, becomes an intrusion of Talmudic Judaism, and anyone checking into the Talmud is soon impressed with its strong anti-Christianisms. But anti-semitism, anti-Christianism—aren't they both culpable evils?"

There comes a time when both sides should surrender to silence to give space to cool down, to reflect and meditate. At this point such an advantage was grasped. Later, on another occasion, the two friendly opponents resumed their talks on the plurality of God. The Reformed minister was addressing himself to the rabbi's question that "assuming there is more than one divine personality in the Godhead, why may there not be only two?" "Let me get into the question, Rabbi, with another question. What are the first words written in the Torah?"

The answer came spontaneously: "Bereshith bara' Elohim eth ha-shamayim ve-eth ha-aretz" (In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth).

"Thank you, (That's beautiful, isn't it?) Now notice that though the subject, Elohim, is plural (the singular would be Eloah), that the predicate, bara (created), is singular! Interesting; for in Ecclesiastes 12:1, 'thy Creator' is in the plural, literally, 'Remember now thy *Creators* in the days of thy youth.' You see that this agrees with the plural of Genesis 1:1. For there are three who create, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Cp. Psalm 33:5-6. But don't overlook that word 'heavens' in Genesis. That's right; it's no plural, but a dual. However, there is no dual form of the name of God. If there were but two divine personalities in the Godhead, the dual would have been employed. But in Scripture this is never the case. So the Hebrew plural always implies more than two, at least three, and in reference to God we know from other Scriptures it means exactly three. This fact could hardly be made clearer than it is made in Isaiah 63:7-10, where three divine Persons are mentioned: the Lord, their Savior (the Father), the Angel of His presence (the Son), and the Holy Spirit.

"Interesting, too, is Genesis 18, where the Lord appeared to Abraham in a theophany (a supernatural appearance of God). This appearance oc-

curred in the form of three men. Abraham saw Them, greeting all three with a divine name he had used before of God—Adonai, a plural name, literally 'my Lords.' He addressed Them with singular pronouns: 'If now I have found favor in *Thy* sight, pass not away . . . from *Thy* servant.' Here he addresses one of Them, referring to himself as servant of that One. Then he addresses Them with plural pronouns: 'Let a little water, I pray *You*, be fetched, and wash *Your* feet, and rest *Yourselves*, and comfort *Ye Your* hearts,' as '*Ye* are come to *Your* servant.' Here he addresses all three of Them, referring to himself as the servant of all three. These three he recognizes to be Adonai. This use of both the singular and plural pronouns, not indicated in the modern versions, reveals something of the unity and trinity of Jehovah (Adonai).

"One more point, Rabbi: John the Baptizer, the

last prophet of the Old Testament, and his hearers, were fully acquainted with the names of the three Persons of the Godhead. There was not the least necessity to explain to them that God exists in three Persons. They read their Old Testament understanding this fact. Under the Baptizer's and our Lord's teaching the mystery of the trinity was never explained as previously unknown. Cp. Luke 1:35; 2:27f; 3:22; John 1:32f and 3:34, 35. It was never questioned nor objected to as Unitarians do. "The Jews of this period were not Unitarians as are those of today.' What the Jews of Jesus' day objected to was only that He called Himself God's Son. They never contended that God is only one Person and not three, nor that God could not have a Son. For the Old Testament revealed the trinity to the Jews under the Old Covenant."

TRANSLATED TREASURES

A Pamphlet Concerning the Reformation of the Church

Dr. A. Kuyper

(Kuyper is discussing reformation in the church through the way of separation from the church. He is discussing the conditions under which such separation becomes necessary and the individual's calling to be obedient to God even when he faces opposition from his church. This kind of reformation must begin in the local congregation of which the individual is a member when that local congregation begins to lose the marks of the true church.)

If it happens that the church is remiss in the administration of the means of grace so that Christians receive neither the preaching of the Word nor the administration of the sacraments in the God-ordained way, then the obligation rests on the individual member to fill this lack. He can do this in the easiest way by moving to another church where a proper distribution of the means of grace is present. But this is not possible for everyone. Many are bound to the place where they live. In that case it can never be enough to rent a local hall and there now and then to let so-called evangelists preach. Instead, one is obligated to send for an ordained minister. And because this calling of a minister can take place lawfully only through a consistory, those who oppose their church are obligated to proceed to the appointment of elders and deacons and to call a minister through these office bearers. A minister for worship: thus not only someone who

preaches now and then, but also a minister who administers both sacraments, i.e., not only the Lord's Supper but also Baptism. Therefore a minister who with his consistory exercises discipline so that the administration of the sacraments is done properly.

We do not deny that this involves separation. We are treating exactly a reformation through separation. But we do want to notice that such a separation does not have to continue indefinitely.

During the turbulence of the Remonstrants' controversy the faithful in the land followed a course of action which we described above. In fact, such a separation between consistories and the Reformed took place in various congregations that the Remonstrants, in the twenty-sixth and twenty-ninth sessions of the Synod in 1618-'19, openly accused these people of being schismatic, and on that ground challenged their right to participate in the ecclesiastical body. But this sentiment found little support and the English, the Genevan, the Palatinate, and the Bremer theologians explicitly testified in separate declarations that such a separation of oneself from those who are disobedient to God had nothing in common with schism.

We do not deny that such a step can lead to permanent separation; but it is also true that it is not

impossible that the breach be healed. The example of 1619 shows this.

If anyone asks in what way such aggrieved ones have to proceed then this rule can be safely set forth: 1) If among the aggrieved there is a preacher of the congregation and some other members of the consistory, then the aggrieved must recognize these office bearers provided that they gather separately as the council of the church. 2) If members leave without a preacher, then they should invite one of the neighboring preachers so that he acts as moderator to guide the work. 3) If such a moderator is not obtainable, then they must proceed by themselves under the leadership of one of the oldest brethren to choose elders and deacons. Or, if the number of aggrieved ones is too small for this, then they must seek the shelter of a neighboring consistory which must temporarily care for this congregation as a part of its own.

This holds true for the attitude of the common members. Greater responsibility rests on office bearers. If it is indisputably the conviction of office bearers that the church which they serve does not walk obediently, then they may not rest. They must arise and pay close attention to how they themselves must be obedient and how they shall in obedience lead the flock entrusted to their care. To attain this goal they must restlessly enlighten the members of the congregation from the pulpit, in religious instruction, in the families, and if need be through letters and circulars. Secondly, they must press for improvement of ecclesiastical life in the consistory. Thirdly, without asking whether the consistory permits it, they must do what obedience to God's Word demands of them and what is necessary for the congregation so that they walk in the way of God's Word. And, fourthly, they must give assistance to churches outside their own who are in spiritual need.

If they are rebuked by the consistory for this they must bear this and meanwhile proceed in the same way in which they have determined to go. If one of the ministers is silenced through suspension, he must nevertheless continue to preach the Word and to administer the sacraments because this is his calling from the Lord. And if his consistory, in spite of this earnest warning and evidence of conviction, continues stubbornly to walk in the way of disobedience, he is finally obligated to break with the fellowship of such a consistory and be ready to help his church in calling together a faithful consistory.

What the result of such a clash will be we do not know. But certainly a minister of the Word must never avoid the way of obedience out of fear of monetary loss.

If one would want only to create a disturbance,

his flesh would oppose his spirit; and in a short time his pride and pretensions would be forced to bow in shameful disgrace.

But if the desire to obey the Lord of lords motivates a man to walk in uprightness of heart, then such a one, who would witness even with his blood for the Lord's name, if that is necessary, should never allow himself to be dissuaded from faithfulness to his Lord by temporal loss of money or goods.

In this case, however, the separation already will have gone further than the organization of the local church. It will have already affected the church federation, and so we will speak of this no more in this paragraph.

However, the question does belong here, in how far we can justify a break because of the corporate guilt of the disobedience of others. This question also arises where we are not compelled to be disobedient or where no one hinders us in the way of obedience.

At this point, out of fear of creating over excitement and recklessness we want to warn people most urgently to be doubly careful.

There are so few, also among the sensitive children of God, who feel this corporate responsibility so deeply that they confess their guilt before the throne of grace. And it is surely true, where this sense of guilt is not present, the first requirement which justifies separation is absent.

If on the other hand, it is true that the Holy Spirit leads the soul into this consciousness of guilt so that one does not only talk of the disobedience of others, but also feels weighing of his own heart his corporate guilt in the fellowship of the body of Christ, so much so that he invokes the blood of Christ over it, then most certainly one has both the right and the duty, even the full right and the inescapable duty, to break the bonds with such an organization. This is true because one does not walk out of his church nor judge his church as church and so much less denounces her as the false church, but rather because one breaks off all fellowship with his consistory as a quiet and earnest witness against her.

This duty reveals itself first and simply by not receiving the disobedient minister and elder when they come on family visitation. But one cannot stop there. He must continue his separation by protesting to the consistory, since the consistory may not passively ignore evil in the church.

So the presence of unbelieving consistory members can be the cause for believers to gather separately. This is something which can have as its consequence that also the consistory as such can be

called of God to make such a separation. Indeed, a consistory which wishes to practice obedience to God's Word shall not be able to rest until the unbelieving members are removed from its midst, the congregational meetings are again held according to the confessions, and the ministry of unbelieving teachers is stopped. A chairman of the consistory who wishes to be faithful in this shall not inform such unbelieving members of the meeting, shall omit their names in the reading of the roll, and shall refuse to give them the floor.

This shall almost certainly result in a clash or separation in the consistory or in the local congregation. But even the fear of this should not prevent anyone from carrying out his duty, and will not prevent him if only a proper conviction of guilt, aroused by the Holy Spirit, precedes and motivates the desire for obedience.

Even the state supervisors can be called of God to create a split, if they realize that they may no longer make the church building available for wicked preaching nor may pay out salaries to unfaithful preachers.

In short, obedience has no limitations. It includes the organist who shall refuse to play; the precentor

who shall refuse to sing; the janitor who shall refuse to clean up; the caretaker of the pews who shall refuse to do his work; yes, even the collector who shall refuse to collect.

When disobedience becomes strong, obedience shall resist it directly.

We are not afraid of the clash which this must bring about. We will even bless this clash if it only is the work of the Lord and not a wild game of fanatic recklessness.

If the impulse comes from the outpouring of the soul in consciousness of guilt, from a soul which has wrestled in dust and ashes before his God, then even the stopping of one's salary by the trustees of the church is reason to rejoice. But also, if there is not a consciousness of guilt, then only the self-exalting Pharisee is the zealous one, and woe to him who seeks separation. That one is not pleasing to God, but comes under God's judgment.¹

¹. To understand what Kuyper is saying here we must remember that Kuyper was writing this prior to his break with the State Church. The circumstances which he describes, therefore, are circumstances which were true in the State Church. In our own circumstances we would probably not agree with every course of action which Kuyper prescribes.

THE DAY OF SHADOWS

Deathbed Confidence

Rev. John A. Heys

In Hebrews 11:20 we read of the faith of Isaac consisting in this, that he blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. Then in the next verse we read of Jacob blessing the sons of Joseph; and that is presented in this chapter of the giants of faith as evidence of Jacob's great faith. Both father and son are listed as giants of faith, and both are presented as performing the same act of faith, namely, blessing their seed.

On the surface it would seem as though we have somewhat of a repetition here, a case of "Like father like son." It is true that we read a bit more about Jacob, such as the fact that he was dying, that he worshipped, leaning on his staff, and that it was his grandsons whom he blessed, rather than sons as was the case with Isaac. But otherwise it would seem to be the same act of faith, whereas we, no doubt, would be expecting something different to be made known to us, some new facet of faith to enrich us with a fresh viewpoint of what faith does.

Now in a sense we may say that the incidents recorded in Hebrews 11, and given to the author by the Spirit, single out the high points of faith in the lives of these saints and manifest most clearly the strength of their faith. But at the same time it must be admitted that throughout this chapter we have presented to us not only different giants of faith but also different works of faith. And this blessing by Isaac of his sons, and of Jacob upon Joseph's sons would seem to be an exception to this procedure.

Yet mere repetitions are not to be found in Scripture, and we had better look a bit deeper to appreciate this work of Jacob consisting in blessing the sons of Joseph.

Not only is it important to note and bear in mind that these are grandsons of the one pronouncing the blessing, whereas with Isaac it was a case of blessing sons, but also that Joseph on hearing that his aged father was sick brought his two sons to his dying father. And although we do not read of

Joseph doing so in order that Jacob might bless them, we may be sure that it was not simply, or in the first place, merely to say "Good-bye" to their grandfather who lay on his deathbed.

Another difference that does not lie on the surface is that although they were grandsons and therefore Jacob's seed as surely as the children of the other eleven sons of Jacob, these sons of Joseph were not like the other grandsons, either in outward appearance (because of distinct dress and hair styles) or in speech.

Now Jacob, with his dim eyesight, could no doubt see some difference, and certainly could see a bit. We read in Genesis 48:8, "And Israel beheld Joseph's sons, and said, Who are these?" A little later in verse 11 we read, "I had no thought to see thy face, and, lo, God hath showed me also thy seed." He did see dimly. Whether he heard them speak is another matter. This was not the twentieth century when children show increasing disrespect for their elders, and claim to have, and behave as though they have, freedoms which, if they were theirs, would nullify God's unchangeable and ever-abiding law with its fifth commandment of honouring father and mother, and which also includes grandfather and grandmother. There could even be the language barrier that prevented such communication. Even then, silence and failing eyesight would not make Jacob unaware of a vast difference between these grandsons with their Egyptian culture and education and the other grandsons of his sheep-tending sons.

There is another matter to remember. Had Jacob seen these sons of Joseph when he first came into the land of Egypt, or on that trip that he made shortly after arriving to be presented to Pharaoh, these grandsons would have been very young, as young as two and three years old. Aged Jacob lived in Goshen, and Joseph and his sons far removed in the capitol city of Memphis. It is very doubtful that Jacob ever went to Joseph after the one recorded instance, so that a tremendous physical change had taken place in these sons of Joseph. Now being about twenty years old they no longer looked like the little grandsons that Jacob saw, if indeed he did see them, on that trip to see Pharaoh. Being dressed as young men and not as little boys, wearing Egyptian attire and hair style they could easily have been mistaken by Jacob with his dim eyesight as part of Joseph's bodyguard or attendants. Hence the question, "Who are these?" Remember that Jacob lived in Egypt for seventeen years (Genesis 47:28). His two grandsons were born before the seven years of famine began. That would mean 24 years from the beginning of the famine until Jacob's death. But Jacob came into Egypt two years after the famine began and was there during only

five years of famine. So Joseph's younger son was at least 19 years old and the older one was at least 20 years old when they stood before Jacob. Recognition would be remarkable even for a man with good eyesight.

Now consider that Jacob, not knowing the identity of these young men, and yet in their presence, said to Joseph, "And now thy two sons Ephraim and Manasseh which were born to thee in the land of Egypt, before I came unto thee in Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine." Whether these grandsons understood their grandfather is another matter. But he did order Joseph to consider them to be his sons on the same level with Reuben and Simeon his first two sons born to him in Haran. These two sons of Joseph were to be reckoned on a level with those sons of Leah who were certainly first in line to be heads of tribes that would constitute the nation of Israel. These two sons of Rachel, his beloved wife, of whom he will speak in the verses immediately following, will as surely be counted as heads of tribes in the nation of Israel as the two sons of Leah whom all would count as worthy of that rare honour because of their places in the genealogies of Jacob. Jacob's name shall be on them and the name of Abraham and Isaac shall be on them as fully as upon Reuben and Simeon.

It cannot be denied that Jacob on his deathbed is much concerned with the spiritual well-being of Joseph and of these two sons who were brought up in Egyptian culture and education. Joseph was high in this world and his situation was very similar to that of Moses who "had it made" as far as the things of this world are concerned. Both had bright futures, if you are thinking of worldly advancement and wealth. Jacob had, indeed, gotten a promise from Joseph that he would bury him in Canaan and in this found out that Joseph did remember God's promise to Abraham and his seed. His political career had not turned him away to unbelief. But there are those grandsons growing up in pagan Egypt with all its idolatry. There is also their mother who is daughter of the priest of On. Jacob rightfully has much concern for them. And as a faithful covenant father and grandfather he launches at once, upon Joseph's visit — even strengthening himself to sit upon the bed to talk to Joseph — into that which is heavy on his heart.

He speaks to Joseph of God the Almighty and His appearance to him at Luz in the land of Canaan and to the blessing which He gave Jacob to make him fruitful, to multiply and to become a multitude of people, and to give him the land of Canaan. It is the covenant and the covenant promise that is uppermost in Jacob's mind. Of it he wants to speak to his son before he dies; and the place of his grandsons in

that promise and in that covenant he also wishes to set forth. It is in that light that Genesis 48 presents those words of Jacob, "And now thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh . . . are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine." And then the idea is not simply that they shall belong to the covenant family of Jacob and must not be given over by Joseph to be Pharaoh's, or to belong to Egypt's pagan realm and to the idols of Egypt. No, the connection between verses 3 and 4, and verse 5 is that Joseph's sons, on a par with Reuben and Simeon, are a fulfillment and will be a fulfillment of God's promise to Jacob to be fruitful, to multiply, and to become a multitude of people.

That there was fleshly disappointment to Jacob as well as to Rachel that God did not give them more sons is certainly true. This moved Rachel to cry out to Jacob, "Give me children or else I die" (Genesis 30:1). Yet as far as Jacob, who did have children, is concerned, it was also because he looked for the fulfillment of God's promise to him, namely, to make a multitude of people out of him.

By faith Jacob blessed these sons of Joseph. And what a faith it was! Faith in God's faithfulness. Faith in the covenant promise so that, granted these grandsons are in the culture and environment of gross idolatry, "God Almighty" — as Jacob here calls Him — is God the all faithful One Who will keep His Word and preserve in the midst of a sinful world His people.

What is more, what great faith Jacob displays here on his deathbed! Many a dying saint, because his sins rise up against him, prevailing every day, seeks comfort on his deathbed that those sins are gone and that he is sure of a resurrection to glory. Many a saint who knows his life is quickly slipping away wants, exactly because he is a child of God, to be assured of God's promises and to have prayers spoken in his behalf. But Jacob, strong in his faith, speaks of those promises, instructs his son and grandsons about them. And though he is dying, he

speaks powerfully of the continuation of the covenant promises in his grandsons who are on every side surrounded by heathendom and idolatry and great temptations for the flesh.

And Jacob has no doubt about their or his own everlasting future because, although he is weak physically and no longer able to wrestle with men for the things of this world — and God mercifully took that power away from him so that he would wrestle in prayer with his God — he is strong in faith in his Saviour. He confesses, according to Genesis 48:16, that the Angel which redeemed him from all evil will bless these grandsons. He prays that the Angel of his redemption will do this; but his prayer is prophetic, and prediction and evidence of his confidence in God.

We know that Angel Who redeems us from all evil to be Christ, the Son of God in our flesh. "All evil" certainly includes first of all our sins. And although Jacob saw his Redeemer only in the types and shadows, we see Him in the reality of His incarnation, cross, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, so that He sits there now with a glorified body that is truly redeemed from all evil and cannot be touched by any evil.

Because of that fact we too on our deathbeds, rather than listening to others comfort us, can — when we are strong in faith — comfort those whom we will leave behind. And we can close our eyes in the sleep of death with confidence for the church here on earth after we have left the scene. When Jacob says, "Thy two sons . . . are mine," he speaks as the head of the church of that day, and in the name of Him Who is The Head of the church. Our children are His and are equal with Reuben and Simeon, yea with Jacob and Joseph in God's covenant. They shall be named the True Israelites, the church of God, the people whom He redeems from all evil. And they shall be this, not simply in name, but in all the redemption which the Angel of the Lord has earned for them by His precious blood.

ALL AROUND US

Rev. G. Van Baren

On Divorce and Remarriage

I found an interesting letter in the "Mailbag" of the *Presbyterian Journal*, September 29, 1982, on the subject of divorce and remarriage, written by Rev. William E. Hill, Jr. In commenting on earlier articles found in that magazine, he states about his own personal experience:

I began my ministry by thinking that I could judge every case on its own merits and then decide whether or not to remarry a divorced person. I soon found that I often was mistaken in my judgment and that often I had been given the wrong information. So I developed an ironclad policy of refusing to marry divorced

people to new spouses. I came to believe that I was unable to judge in such matters—nor have I ever seen a session capable of being a judge in such matters—because only God and the parties themselves know who is the “innocent person” if, indeed, there is such.

Does this mean that we look down on divorced people or consider this an unforgivable sin? Certainly not. God forgives any sin where there is repentance and faith and certainly this sin can be covered by the grace of God. In my ministry I made a special effort to find places of service in the church for people who have experienced this tragedy—but not in the official and ordained leadership of the church.

In Paul’s listing of gifts, I should say that such Christians qualify for the gift of “helps”. Divorced people can be strong witnesses for the Lord. Some of

the finest and most effective witnesses for Christ I have known have been people who have experienced this tragedy. Their witness is even more humble than most and therefore often more effective.

The church ought to take a clear and consistent stand against divorce but not against divorced people. At the same time, divorced persons should never shrug their shoulders in the mistaken conviction that no wrong has been done. A broken vow is wrong no matter what the cause and a broken home is a tragedy no matter what the cause.

But “a broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.”

Notice again that last sentence in the second-to-last paragraph.

Planned Parenthood

There is an organization with the above name, located in many communities, setting forth ideas on sex and marriage obviously contrary to Scripture. Yet this organization is supported by tax dollars and voluntary contributions—often made by church members. The *Christian News*, September 27, 1982, presents a quoted article which gives numerous examples of the “morality” of the teaching of “Planned Parenthood.” It advocates, according to the article, compulsory sex education along the lines of one of the booklets published by a branch organization which states: “Sex is fun and joyful, and it comes in all types and styles, all of which are O.K. Do what gives pleasure and enjoy what gives pleasure. Don’t rob yourself of joy by focusing on old-fashioned ideas about what’s ‘normal’ or ‘nice’”. After listing more such examples of the evil teachings about sex, the article continues:

These are but a few examples of how Planned Parenthood’s approach to sex education—which it wants to see made compulsory—attacks the ethical and religious standard of reserving sex for marriage that was long part of our cultural heritage. As Mrs. Jurs warns: “Under the guise of knowledge, P.P. selects only those facts that lead students to embrace ‘reproductive freedom.’ By omitting positive support for marriage, commitment, intimacy, and relatedness to social patterns, values, or symbols, it is proceeding to establish [Margaret] Sanger’s ‘new morality’ based on ‘knowledge’. Through omission, it has been ‘abolishing the arbitrary and outmoded restrictions’ of our culture, which today’s P.P. as well as Margaret Sanger perceived to be the Judeo-Christian ethic.”

What have been the results of Planned Parenthood’s approach? Planned Parenthood itself reports that abortions now average 1.5 million annually,

which means that over the last decade close to 15 million living human beings have been killed in the womb. And pregnancy among teenagers is an ever more serious problem. One million teens were pregnant in 1974, and by 1981 that figure had risen to 1,142,000. Consider the social and psychological problems this creates.

Adding insult to all this injury is that since 1966 the federal government has poured millions of your tax dollars into the programs of Planned Parenthood and other groups with a similar philosophy, so that by 1980 some \$319 million was allocated for sex training and “family planning” programs. Indeed *Town and Country* magazine for November 1981 reports that out of Planned Parenthood’s annual income of \$146 million for 1980, \$71 million, nearly 50 percent, was provided by American taxpayers.

Such use of our taxes is revolting, and it should be stopped at once. Meanwhile, Planned Parenthood should change its name to reflect more accurately what it is doing to our teenagers. The Federal Office of Recreational Sex might be more appropriate.

The dreadful statistics are presented above in the article. The evil and worldly philosophy is clearly set forth. These represent your “tax dollars at work.” Strange, is it not, how emphatically the government insists on “separation” of church and state? Strange that no tax dollars may be used, directly or indirectly, to support anything religious? Government would consider it an unheard-of thing to use tax dollars to present the origin of all things as set forth in Genesis 1. No tax dollars for religion or morality—but an abundance of such monies for every anti-Christian, godless philosophy which arises! The effect of this evil emphasis is increasingly seen in our day.

“Women in Office”

The *Calvinist Contact*, July 9, 1982, reports on the Assembly meeting of the Presbyterian Church of Canada, and especially on its decision pertaining to those who refuse to participate in the ordination of women to office. It points out the extent to which churches will go when once departing from the Scriptural standards concerning women in office. The article reports:

The Presbyterian Church in Canada's 108th General Assembly has dealt a heavy blow to reformed -evangelicals in its midst by ruling, June 10th, that all its ministers must be prepared to participate in the ordination of women to the offices of pastor and ruling elder.

The Assembly, which met June 6-11 in Toronto's historic Knox Church, was dominated by this issue as by no other. A minister commissioner (delegate) spoke for many when he implored the Assembly to provide for up to three hours for the airing of the matter "so that the question can be settled once and for all."

The denomination, which has permitted the entry of women into the offices of pastor and ruling elder since 1966, has been wracked by disputes since the Assembly of 1979 over what the law of 1966 implied concerning the ministers and candidates who could not in good conscience support the practice. Finally in 1981, after some 40 overtures and petitions of diverse viewpoints were received on the matter, that Assembly appointed a twenty-member "task force" to bring in recommendations.

As it turned out, the task force produced few surprises. Its majority seems to have pressed early and continuously for a restrictive policy, modelled after that of the liberal United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. However, a significant minority of six within the task force (including one woman elder) were un-

able to support such a policy and recommended instead a plan modelled after that of the Reformed Church in America. The latter would have guarded both the rights of women to be elected and ordained and the rights of conscience of ministers and candidates unprepared to personally support the practice....

Even a moving last-minute appeal from a "centrist" minister and elder, pleading for time and leniency while some "third way" was found, fell on deaf ears. The Assembly of about 250, clearly weary of the question, voted approximately 4 to 1 in favor of the restrictive path. At that point, no less than 18 of the minority view stood to their feet and requested that their dissent from the decision taken be recorded in the minutes.

The consequences of the decision are quite plain. Candidates for the ministry, unprepared to be bound by the policy which requires their participation in ordinations they do not support, will not be eligible for ordination themselves. Presently ordained ministers who will not uphold the policy will now be open to as yet undefined disciplinary actions. Having ruled that liberty of conscience is internal, and thus to be enjoyed, while liberty of action, as external, cannot be permitted, the Assembly has left no course of action open to such candidates and ministers but to participate and record dissent.

Now within churches is evident that progression of apostasy in which white is called black, and black, white. For a time, those who dissent are allowed to continue within the organization. But shortly, these too must submit or lose their positions. Again, it is the mark of the antichristian church which increasingly not only adopts anti-scriptural positions, but insists that all conform to its own false teachings.

THE LORD GAVE THE WORD

Presenting the Gospel to Strangers (2)

Rev. Steven Houch

Last time we began to consider some important principles which must govern the way in which we approach the stranger. We saw, first of all, that we must be honest. We bring the Truth of the Gospel and therefore must come in a truthful way.

In the second place, when we approach the stranger, it is essential for us to ascertain his spiritual condition. We bring the gospel and that gospel is

one. There are not many gospels. Yet, that gospel has various aspects to it, aspects which are applicable to different needs. It is difficult to know just what aspect of the gospel is needed most by the stranger, without discovering his spiritual condition. Sometimes the stranger is an unbeliever. Other times he is a Christian, in need of further instruction. He may even be someone who thinks

that he is a Reformed Christian. To each of these people we must bring the gospel, emphasizing one of its various aspects—the same gospel, but applying specific aspects of the truth to specific needs. You can bring the gospel in a general way to a person, but if you are not touching his need, you are not very relevant for him. And there certainly are many needy people in this world. There is a great ignorance of the truth. Even among those who call themselves Christians, you find very few who properly understand the true meaning of the gospel. There are so many cults and sects, false churches and false Christians. The lie abounds in our age. Therefore we must be able to discover the specific needs of the stranger and then have the wisdom and grace to bring the truth very specifically to that need.

Finally, in our approach to the stranger, we must always use the Scriptures. This is the most important principle of all. When we go to the stranger, we must understand that we have no authority of our own. It doesn't matter who we are, or how well we are respected by those close to us. To a stranger, we have no authority in ourselves. We are just a stranger presenting what we believe. No one has to believe anything we say. That is why it is imperative that we come with the Scriptures, with the Word of God. We have to make those whom we contact realize that we are not simply bringing our own word. We do not simply speak for ourselves and that is all. What we bring is the Word of God. Otherwise our discussion becomes an argument. They say what they think is right and we say what we think is right. And when the argument is all over, rather than feeling that he has been confronted with God's Word, the stranger feels that he has had a good argument on an intellectual question and that is all. We must take great care to show them that what we say is what God says in the Bible. We must support everything we say with the Scriptures. In that way, when we are all done, they will know that God has spoken to them and not merely a man.

In connection with that, we must also understand that there is very little place for our creeds and confessions in our dealing with the stranger. Certainly our confessions are true. They are beautiful expressions of the truths of God's Word. They mean much to us as Reformed believers. And when dealing with anyone who is of a Reformed background, they can be very useful to us. But when we present the gospel to the stranger, that which we love, that which is authoritative to us, and that which we see as a systematic expression of the truths of the Word of God, means nothing to them—absolutely nothing. In fact, when we bring our confessions and creeds, often times the stranger

accuses us of bringing man's word rather than God's Word. They look at us as though we are trying to force them to believe what has been devised by fallible men. Our creeds, then, become a hindrance rather than a help. We must be very careful, therefore, that we always go to the stranger with the Scriptures. They are the Words of God and they give us all the authority we need when dealing with the stranger. If the stranger responds to the gospel of grace, then in time and with discretion we may introduce him to our confessions.

With this understanding of the principles of a proper approach to the stranger, we can now proceed to consider what we actually say to him. And, obviously, what we bring is the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is our only message. We can bring no other. But when we say "gospel of Jesus Christ," we are talking about a vast body of knowledge, the whole of the Word of God as recorded in the Scriptures. For the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation are the revelation of God in Christ Jesus. It is impossible, however, in our first contacts with the stranger, to bring to him the whole of the Word of God. We could talk to him about thousands of subjects for months and years, and still not exhaust the riches of the gospel of Christ. That is why we must very carefully zero in on the most important and central issue of the gospel. We must begin with the heart and core of the gospel, with that one theme that is found on every page of Holy Writ. We must bring the sovereign grace of the sovereign God, Who sovereignly saves His people. For that is the heart of the gospel. That ought always to be first and foremost in our presentation.

We make a mistake, a great mistake, if we immediately confront the stranger with all kinds of peripheral and side issues. We must not go to the stranger with the intention of discovering whether or not he is divorced, belongs to the union, or goes to the theater, so that we can confront him on these issues first thing. That is putting the cart before the horse. Certainly our Protestant Reformed stand on these issues is right and biblical. We must even take care that we do not forsake these principles in this godless age of ours. But these are not the first things we say to the stranger. These things are not the heart and core of the gospel. If we bring these things first, many times we immediately close the door to any further discussion of the Truth. We offend the stranger and he will no longer hear us. He wants nothing to do with us. Thus he rejects us and our message without even hearing the heart and core of what we believe. We turn him away before we have had the opportunity to speak of God's sovereign grace. That is a great tragedy. To turn someone away by these peripheral issues after he has become thoroughly acquainted with the

sovereign grace of God is one thing. But to turn him away by these things before he knows the heart of the gospel is to belittle that which is the most important of all. The stranger, if he refuses our message and turns away, must refuse and turn away from nothing less than God's sovereign grace.

After the stranger has come to see the sovereign grace of God, he will more readily also come to see the implications of that central truth. Then these peripheral things will start to make sense to him too. If God gives him grace, he will in time come to see that divorce, union membership, theater attendance, and other such things are indeed inconsistent with the Reformed Faith.

I do not mean, by this principle, to suggest that we ever deny the Truth. No, we must never deny the Truth—not on any issue. If the stranger himself brings up these issues, then we must speak on them. We must, as I emphasized earlier, be honest. Even if the Truth offends, we must bring only the Truth. We dare not be afraid of offending someone. But what I am saying is simply this. There are some things which are more important than others. And it is these more important things that we must emphasize and bring first. We bring the gospel of God's sovereign grace.

When we go to the stranger, then, we must have a very specific message in mind, depending upon his need. If we discover that the stranger is a "Christian" our purpose is to lead him to the Reformed Faith. For that is the true Faith. We can do that by beginning our discussion with a presentation of the doctrine of God. Most who say that they are Christians will acknowledge that God is God. They do not realize all the implications of that truth. But if you ask them, "Do you believe that God is sovereign?" very, very few of them will say, "No!" That, therefore, becomes a very good point of contact. It is a point on which you both supposedly agree and therefore the perfect place to begin.

Go to the Scriptures and show them that God is indeed God. Show them that He is the great and mighty God. He is the One Who alone is sovereign and Who rules heaven and earth by His sovereign will and power. No one can frustrate His will and no one can resist His power. He is the mighty King Who in His great majesty upholds and governs all things (Ps. 93:1, 99:1-3, Dan. 4:34-35, Isa. 46:9-10, Eph. 1:11, Rom. 11:33-36). After leading them into these Scripture passages and after eliciting from them a confession of agreement with this general truth, we then proceed to make them see the logical and Scriptural implications of this truth. We show them that if they believe that God is sovereign, of necessity they must believe the five points of Calvinism. For the Reformed Faith alone is consistent with the truth of God's sovereignty. It is at this

point that we discover whether or not they truly believe that God is indeed God. We force them to see their inconsistency on this point, so that they either see the truth of the Reformed Faith or have to admit that, in their theology, man is sovereign rather than God.

Even as with the "Christian," so also when we go to the unbeliever, our purpose is to present God in all His sovereignty and majesty. But now we are especially concerned with presenting the promise and the command of the gospel. We call the unbeliever to repentance and faith. This is his duty before Almighty God. He must be made to see his sin and guilt, as well as the sovereign grace of God that saves His people from sin and guilt.

This can be done in many ways, but one of the best ways is to follow the example of the apostle Paul and simply present Christ crucified and raised from the dead. Tell the unbeliever of the history of Christ. Begin with His birth, trace His life and ministry, and end with His death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. After sketching these facts of the history of Christ, go back and explain the meaning of the facts. His birth was a lowly birth, signifying the rejection He would face all His life. And yet it was a virgin birth, signifying His divinity. He was no ordinary man, but God's only begotten Son. His miracles demonstrate that. He is the Redeemer, the Messiah, sent of God to save His elect people. The death of the cross was no ordinary death. It was a sacrifice for the sins of God's people. And the resurrection is the sure sign that God has accepted His offering for sin. The unbeliever must see that Christ has power and authority to forgive sins and give life everlasting to as many as the Father has given Him. But he must also see that when Christ does this, the result is always faith and repentance. Thus the unbeliever is made to hear both the promise and the command of the gospel.

With this presentation to the stranger, we become faithful witnesses who sow the seed of the gospel. What will become of that witness, we leave to the sovereign good-pleasure of God Who alone can give the increase.

**(This is the second and final installment of an address given by Pastor Houck at the Mission Emphasis Day last May in the Kalamazoo Protestant Reformed Church.)*

*Know the standard
and follow it.*

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

A Pilgrim's Perspective (2)

Rev. R. Flikkema

Perhaps I should introduce myself. My name is Pilgrim Watcher. My God-fearing parents gave me that name as an expression of the faith that lived in them, and in order to express to me what my life must be.

You see, I had God-fearing parents. I say, I *had* God-fearing parents. God received them unto Himself a long time ago. But I still remember them. I can vividly remember what they looked like. I have their picture on my shelf. I can remember how they loved each other. Not with the love of this world, you understand, but with the love of Christ. I did not really appreciate when I was small what that love of Christ which united them together was all about. But now that I am married to a wonderful wife and have children of my own, I do.

In fact, I should tell you that when I was small I appreciated very little of my parents. I looked at them as though they would always be, that there would never come a time when they would not be there to provide for me. I learned from them, of course, that there was appointed unto every man a time to die. But the reality of that fact never really hit home until one at a time their appointed time to die came.

I remember those days very well. I stood in the funeral home and later at the grave and all kinds of thoughts went through my mind. Some of those thoughts were not very good. I began to think to myself: why? Why did their time to die appointed by God come now? They did not live very long, so I thought. It did not seem quite fair. Not only the fact that they did not live as long as I thought they should have, but the kind of life they lived—what they experienced in their life—did not seem quite fair. I thought of the fact that they never had very much of the world's goods. I have much more than they ever did. They did not have an expensive house. Their furniture was always tattered and worn. They did not have money to buy what they maybe would have liked. My father worked long hours every day, and the paychecks he brought home were scarcely sufficient to pay the bills. At that time I did not know what bills were. Now I do. But not then. And with whatever money was left my mother used to buy the food that she would prepare for our meals. I used to complain about what

my mother placed on the table at supper time. Little did I appreciate the struggle my parents went through to provide what I so foolishly disliked.

No, I have mis-spoken myself. It is not really correct to say that with whatever money was left after the bills were paid, my mother would buy food. I remember very distinctly that something always came first even before the paying of the bills and the buying of food. The kingdom causes came first. I remember on Saturday night every week my parents would set aside the church budget; and school tuition was high on my parents' list of priorities. They used to quote the words, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." But as a result of their obedience to that Word, they had to sacrifice all their life.

And I thought to myself, why? Why did they have to sacrifice all the time? Why could they never have what they maybe wanted? And why did they never complain about the fact that they did not have what they maybe wanted? Oh, that does not mean that my parents were perfect in this regard. But they never really complained. In fact they never really even considered what I have called sacrifice a sacrifice. They used to say to me when I complained about the meals or about the hand-me-down clothes that I wore, that all of those things were good things, a good gift of God. They used to tell me that all that they were they owed to God, and all that they received came from God. God gives us these things, and what He gives He commands that we use to praise Him in His service. And so although not always perfectly, nevertheless, at least in principle they used whatever God gave them in their God's faithful service.

And they taught me to do the same. From the beginning they did this. Some of the very first things that I can remember have to do with the sound, biblical, spiritual instruction that my parents gave to me. They taught me God's Word in our home. The Word of God was central to our family life. My father would read the Word at the supper table and would often stop at various appropriate places while he was reading to explain what the passage was about. My father always insisted that the reading of God's Word at mealtimes was essential to the life of the covenant family. And in that con-

nection he always insisted that the family always be together at least at supper time, so that we as a covenant family could read and study God's Word together. He used to say that if a family did not at least read and study God's Word at meal times the temptation was that it would never do it. In that connection my parents impressed upon me the importance of my own personal Bible study. I can remember that on my tenth birthday my parents gave me my own Bible. I still have it. It is tattered and worn but still the same Word of God that is ever dear. When I use it I think of my God Who gave me parents that impressed upon me the importance of God's Word.

In addition to this I will never forget the importance that my parents placed upon covenant Christian education—the importance of sending me to Christian schools, as much as possible our own Protestant Reformed Christian Schools. They taught me that this was but their solemn obligation before the face of God to train me to the utmost of their power; that this they promised God they would do when they brought me to baptism. You see, they always considered me to be a gift of God that was really not their own but God's. God gave me to them not to do with as they wanted, but to use and train and instruct to the glory of God, that when I grew older I would not depart from it.

But above all, they instructed me in the truth of God's Word by bringing me to the great Teacher Himself, Christ Jesus, in His church. Sunday was a special day for our family. It was different from every other day of the week. My parents used to tell me that it was a day of rest. God had given the Sabbath Day for a day of rest. And I assure you that rest in our home did not mean doing nothing, taking Sunday afternoon naps. The rest of the Sabbath Day meant busying ourselves in the study of God's Word, reading good books, and especially the periodicals published by our churches. But most of all the rest of the Sabbath Day meant frequenting God's church: attending the preaching of God's Word, hearing our minister preach sermons that for awhile I did not appreciate. When I was very small I would often sleep through the sermons. When my parents would wake me up, I sat there wondering when the minister was going to say "Amen." I did not know what the word "Amen" meant at that time, but this much I did know, the sermon was finished. They used to tell me that this attitude was wrong on my part because it was a very wonderful thing to hear the preacher, for in hearing the preacher I heard Jesus. Jesus spoke to me through the preaching. The words that He spoke were the words of eternal life. They were words that spoke to every one concerning the greatness and glory of God. They taught me the un-

speakable gift of my salvation, for they spoke of the cross. They instructed me concerning my calling to live a holy life in harmony with God's law. They taught me to live my life as a pilgrim: what it meant to be a pilgrim. They taught me to watch for the return of the great and glorious God of my salvation upon the clouds of glory.

Indeed, as I think about my parents, that is the one thing that I remember most and cherish above all. They taught me to be a pilgrim watcher. In fact, as I said, they gave me that name. As a pilgrim I am a child of God that walks through this life always seeking my home other than this life. I have a home. It is a nice home, much better than the one my parents had. But I know that that home is not an end in itself. It is, rather, just a temporary abiding place on my pilgrim's journey to my real home in glory. On my way to that home I walk. I live my life forsaking the world's corruptions, fighting against the corruptions of this world, against the devil, and against my own sinful flesh. I am a watcher. I watch for Him Who will drive away all my night and take me from this valley of the shadow of death—not just my parents, but me, to glory. I live in hope: a certainty I possess that He Who shall come will come and will not tarry. This is not easy to do. This is impossible apart from the free and sovereign grace of God which I need to fight against my own sinful flesh and this wicked world that seeks to destroy me every day. It is a constant battle that is waged, a never-ceasing vigil that is undertaken. But I know that to me belongs the victory.

I know that now. And I appreciate that now. I appreciate the fact that I am a pilgrim watcher; that that is my name; that that name expresses who I am; and that I am that as a result of, not what my parents did for me, but what my Father Who is in heaven did for me and also in me. I have nothing to boast of myself. My boast is in my faithful covenant God. This appreciation for what I am I seek to impress upon my own children. I breathe a silent prayer every day that even as my parents named me and taught me, so I may teach my children. I pray that also in my home I and my family may seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; that in my home the Word of God will always be central; that we may appreciate the Christian schools God has given to a home such as mine; that the Sabbath Day and the preaching of God's Word may be always cherished as a precious gift, more precious than any other.

But I am troubled. I see much sin in myself. I see what for a long time characterized myself to be characteristic of my own family, and not just my own family but also families in the church of Jesus Christ in general. I see more and more, as the evil

day draws nigh, a general lack of appreciation for what we have. We have so much. I do not refer merely to the abundance of material things that we have—which things we often like to complain about, that even they are not good enough. But I refer to the abundance of spiritual blessings and benefits

that God has so graciously given to us. May we never fail to appreciate these things is my prayer; that when our Lord Jesus Christ returns at the end of the ages, He will not find a church faithless, but believing, walking as pilgrims, watching and waiting to be received unto Himself.

MY SHEEP HEAR MY VOICE

Letter to Timothy

November 15, 1982

Dear Timothy,

In our last letter we were discussing the human personality which God gives to everyone at the moment of birth. We noticed a number of things about the human personality, chief of which was that God gives to each man his own distinct and unique personality which makes him different from every other person that ever lived and ever will live.

I think it is very important to say a few more things about this.

For one thing, the personality, though given by God at the moment of conception, is so closely related and connected to his nature (which he receives from his parents) that there is no separation between the two possible. Each personality exactly fits, by a wonder of God, the exact nature to which it is given. It is not possible, e.g., that my person function through the nature of one of my fellow saints. It is not possible that the person of Stalin live and work through the nature of Hitler. There is, by a mighty wonder of God, perfect correspondence and harmony between the person and the nature of each individual.

Further, this is so true that the personality of an individual really affects (if that is the correct word) the whole nature. It is that person or personality which determines the whole physical appearance of an individual and the whole physical makeup. He is the kind of individual he is in both body and soul because of the person which God has given to him. So true is this that the personality even extends to the fingerprints of an individual. Every man's fingerprints are different from those of every other man—so much so that these fingerprints can serve as a mark of identification, and criminal courts can use them in crime detection. The presence of fingerprints at the scene of a crime is sure proof of the presence of the individual at that place. God so impresses the mark of each individual's per-

sonality upon the whole nature that it is present in the tips of the fingers.

But this difference in the person is a complete difference. This is even the case with identical twins. Even a rather close acquaintance may be unable to tell the difference between identical twins. But this is not a problem to those who know the twins well. A mother never makes a mistake. She can tell the difference between them very easily because they are two different people who act differently, talk differently, have different personalities. They are, though physically very much alike, two different people.

This is, by the way, an important truth for the doctrine of the church. The Scriptures teach that the church is the organism of the body of Christ. That the church is an organism means that it is basically one unit, just as a tree is one plant. But within that one unity is a wide diversity of individual members, which diversity is absolutely essential for the organism. If a tree, e.g., were composed of identical parts, it would not be a tree. If there were no leaves, no branches, no trunk, no bark, only roots, there would be no tree. But when all the parts are integrated so that one perfect unity results, you have an organism. So it is also in the church. The church as the body of Christ is possible only because each individual member is different from every other member. Each member has his own place in which place he contributes to the whole. And through it all is the one perfect unity.

This is a very glorious and significant doctrine, for it gives prestige and honor to every member, no matter how lowly we may, in our foolishness, consider him. But it is rooted in that work of creation whereby God forms each individual according to His own divine and sovereign purpose.

One of our ministers tells a story which illustrates this truth rather well. He had, in his congregation, a set of identical twins. They were so much

alike that almost no one in the congregation could tell them apart. These two twins, being boys and somewhat mischievous, had a great deal of fun fooling their teachers and friends. But for some reason they could never fool this pastor. Even when the one would answer in Catechism when the other was asked, the pastor would always catch their prank. They could not understand how he always was able to tell them apart; and, one day, in desperation, they asked him for the secret. But he refused to tell them because, as he put it, "If I tell you, it all will be spoiled." Then he took a call to another congregation and they asked him if he would tell them the secret now that he was leaving anyway. He told them that he always watched them when they walked into the door of a room or when they engaged in any kind of conversation because the one invariably took the lead. He would enter the door first; he would speak first; the other would always follow. This was, of course, due to a difference in personality which the minister observed and which he used to tell them apart with unflinching accuracy.

While we will have a bit more to say about this a bit later, it is interesting to note that this has a lot to do with pastoral work. Every child of God is different. There are degrees of intelligence, degrees of sensitivity, degrees of spirituality. There are differences of character, differences of emotional life, differences of understanding. The wise pastor takes these things into account when dealing with his sheep. And in the same way a parent takes this into account in dealing with his children; and a teacher recognizes these differences in dealing with his pupils.

There is another truth concerning the personality, however, which we must also discuss. It is because people are "persons" that the possibility of fellowship exists between them. Trees, obviously, cannot have fellowship. Neither can animals. For fellowship, personality is essential. Fellowship, after all, depends upon *knowing* someone. And knowing someone means knowing them as a person. It is the person we know when we know an individual. And the better we know that *person* the better we know the individual. On this knowledge rests the whole truth of fellowship in life.

God's covenant is a bond of fellowship and friendship. God takes His people into His own fellowship. But this is possible, you see, only because God is a personal God. The truth of the trinity is that He is three in person and one in essence. As the triune God, He has fellowship with Himself within His own life. But the covenant of grace means that He takes His people into that fellowship. He creates persons who can live in fellowship with Him, enjoy the blessedness of the fellowship

which He has in Himself and live as His friends. But at the very heart of this fellowship lies the fact that we *know* God. We know Him as a personal being. Our God, the God of the Scriptures, is not the cold and impersonal Allah of the Mohammedans. He is not the blind and impersonal Fate of the Stoics. He is a personal God Who speaks to us through Jesus Christ and through Whose speech we know, truly know Him.

But because we have fellowship with God, we also have fellowship with one another. The saints of God, each a person in his own right, have fellowship with each other, knowing each other and enjoying the communion which is established through the Spirit of Christ.

And it must never be forgotten that man is created as this kind of person—i.e., as the kind of person who *must* live in fellowship with others. It is unnatural for a man to live alone. He is created that way. It was not good for man to live alone even in the state of perfection in Paradise. The feeling of loneliness is one of the great sorrows which people experience in life. It is often the cause of untold trouble and grief. It is many times the root of terrible problems. But within the communion of the saints, there is always the fellowship of the people of God. And it is this which a man needs for his very life. But we will come back to this a bit later.

Finally, a person is a *conscious* being. This too is a great wonder. It is hard to convey the significance of this because it is one of those things in life which are so common that we take it for granted without ever giving much thought to it and realizing how truly wonderful this is. Trees do not have consciousness. Neither do roses. Perhaps some of the higher animals have a certain limited consciousness. I do not think a worm has consciousness. Maybe a dog has a bit of it. But man has consciousness; and only one who is a person can possess this. What is consciousness? Well, to put it one way: I not only *know*, but I know that I know. I am conscious that I know certain things like the rain that is falling now outside my study window. I am conscious and aware of what is going on around me. I am aware of all that is happening to me and around me so that I can give account of it. But I am not only conscious of my surroundings, but also conscious of myself. I have self-consciousness, not in the sense of embarrassment, which a person may feel when he must appear before an audience with a black eye. Of him too we say that he is self-conscious. Not that, but awareness of myself as a person, as one who knows and thinks and has fellowship with others. Only man possesses this great gift.

But it is important for all the life of an individual.
(continued on page 76)

News From Our Churches

November 1, 1982

Rev. den Hartog, our missionary in Singapore, is visiting the Grand Rapids area for a little while. The Jr. Mr. and Mrs. Society of First Protestant Reformed Church is sponsoring a night with Rev. den Hartog and his work in Singapore, November 16, at 8 P.M. in First Church. We welcome the den Hartogs into our midst again while they are on furlough for six weeks. If you want first hand information on how Rev. Lau Chin Kwee and his family are doing, then make sure that you take the time to talk with Rev. den Hartog and his family while they are here.

You may be wondering how busy are Rev. den Hartog and Rev. Lau Chin Kwee in Singapore. The articles in the *Standard Bearer* have kept us informed of their work. However, there are other sources that mention the work in Singapore, e.g., "Across the Aisle." A few sentences from the October issue will give you a clear picture of the work of these two men. "Presently Pastor Lau and myself are alternating preaching at the morning worship service in our regular worship service and at the evening worship service in Toa Payoh. If the Lord continues to bless this work as He is doing it may not be very long before it will be feasible to start another congregation." "Another exciting thing going on is our new study at Pacific Mansion every Thursday evening." "I am continuing to give one brother in the church pre-seminary instruction." "There continues to be a very great amount of pastoral work in the church. It is really good that there are now two pastors to handle this also. I am really convinced that a foreign mission field requires a lot of pastoral work. A missionary needs to do much more than just preach from the pulpit." Perhaps you may want to know how Rev. den Hartog feels about leaving Rev. Lau all alone with such a busy work load—then read this quote: "We are looking forward to our furlough very much of course. Sometimes though I feel a little guilty about going away for such a long time. Pastor Lau is really going to have his hands full when we are gone." We can appreciate Rev. den Hartog's wanting to be with us again but also his being very anxious to be back in Singapore to continue the work. May our faithful covenant God bless the den Hartogs while they visit with us.

Now that the new school year has already start-

ed, some Sunday School societies have ended for the year while others have just begun the year. Don and Judi Doezeema were busy again this past summer preparing the next series of *Our Guide*, the publication which has been the main curriculum material for our Sunday Schools throughout the years. The newest papers, we understand, will complete the current study of the New Testament and then return to a treatment of the Old. In a report to the Protestant Reformed Sunday School Association, Mr. Doezeema predicts that the papers dealing with the first part of Genesis will, because of the nature of the subject matter, be something of a challenge. He admits to having spent several days on each of those lessons ("researching, writing, calling ministers, rewriting")—about twice as much time as was needed for lessons of previous years. "Not only have I learned a whole lot in doing that," he says, "but I've found the subject matter to be most interesting, even exciting." He's convinced therefore that, though the pace may seem sometimes to be slow, the lessons "can be taught—with profit, both for teachers and students." Reflecting on ten years of preparing papers, Don says that "it's been *hard* work—no doubt about that. But, perhaps for that reason, it's been immeasurably profitable." And he adds, "I only hope that I've been able to communicate, over the years, something of what I've learned in the process."

Rev. Van Overloop and Rev. Houck visited the eastern part of the U.S.A. in the New Jersey, Vermont, Maryland, and Pennsylvania areas the first part of November. They did follow-up work with many contacts made in these areas. In addition, Rev. Van Overloop gave a lecture, a Reformation Lecture, on November 5, in New Jersey. They hope to seek out a field of labor for Rev. Houck.

Can you be in two places at once? Of course not! But if you were with Rev. Engelsma on October 28, you would have seen him give a Keynote address to the Teachers' Convention in South Holland, in the morning, on "Developing the Theme of Instructing and Preparing our Covenant Children for the End of Time," and a Reformation Day Lecture in the Grand Rapids area the same evening, on "The Reformation and Christian Piety."

What is the "Question Box"? Find out next time.

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