

The **STANDARD BEARER**

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

The wonder of grace is that God rewards His own work that He performs through us. In the day of judgment all of our own works, that we have produced, will be consumed like straw and stubble in the fire. Nothing will remain except Christ's work in us, which will be rewarded with a crown of glory and with our own personal place in Christ's kingdom. All of Christ, none of self.

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MEDITATION

Justified Solely in Christ

Rev. C. Hanko

Ques. 62. But why cannot our good works be the whole, or part of our righteousness before God?

Ans. Because, that the righteousness, which can be approved of before the tribunal of God, must be absolutely perfect, and in all respects conformable to the divine law; and also, that our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin.

Ques. 63. What! do not our good works merit, which yet God will reward in this and in a future life?

Ans. This reward is not of merit, but of grace.

Ques. 64. But doth not this doctrine make men careless and profane?

Ans. By no means: for it is impossible that those, who are implanted into Christ by a true faith, should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness. Lord's Day 24. Heidelberg Catechism.

God justifies the ungodly.

That is the keynote that resounds throughout Lord's Day 23 and which we hear again in this Lord's Day as we are once more placed before the judgment seat of the living God.

We hear His verdict pronounced over us: Not guilty! He finds no reason to condemn or to punish us, for He sees no transgression and, therefore, no guilt whatsoever.

Before we have fully recovered from our amazement we hear the divine declaration that we are righteous in God's sight, perfectly obedient and in all respects conformable to the divine law.* God calls us His beloved saints, chosen and precious in His sight. He assures us of His divine approval and favor, His covenant fellowship now and eternally. In the great Day of days He will greet us with the hearty welcome, "Come, thou blessed, and inherit the kingdom that is laid away for thee."

For us that can only mean one thing, God justifies the *ungodly*.

For my conscience condemns me that I have and do transgress God's commands in all that I say and do, even every day and every second of the day. I transgress, not merely one or two commands, but all. I admit that when the law is read in the public worship on Sunday my conscience accuses me, especially in regard to this or that command, yet a bit of introspection convinces me that I transgress every single one of God's commands.

Even so, I have not sufficiently cleared my conscience. Shamefacedly I must admit that I not only transgress, but also fail to obey God's commands. I must daily confess sins of commission, but also of omission, for I do not do that which I should do. I do not love the Lord my God with my whole being. This becomes evident to me even in my prayers, in which Christ teaches me to make as my chief desire, "Hallowed be Thy Name." At best I stammer this petition, yet this does not permeate all my prayers. How little I actually live to the glory of my God!

I can hide behind no excuses. There are no extenuating circumstances to which I might appeal. I cannot even promise to improve my way, for I realize that "I am evil, born in sin." God desires truth within. My conscience accuses me that I am the chief of sinners.

Yet God declares me righteous by His own testimony in the Scriptures and by His Spirit in my heart (I John 3:20).

The question forces itself upon us, How is that possible? One might possibly assume that God

speaks contrary to fact. A mother may see no fault in her little darling, so that when he is accused of having done some wrong in school the mother arises in his defence, saying, "My boy would never do a thing like that." But God is not a man that He should lie. His verdict is a true verdict, based on strictest justice. God justifies the ungodly in His eternal righteousness.

For God justifies His people in Christ. Eternally He gave them to Christ, and made them one with Him, even as branches of a vine. We were in Christ from eternity. We were in Christ when He brought the sacrifice for sin on Calvary. When He suffered and died, we suffered and died in Him, so completely as if we in our own bodies had atoned for our sins and merited eternal approval of God. Christ assures us of this by His indwelling Spirit in our hearts. We are knit to Him by a bond of living faith, whereby we confess that we belong to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ, in life, in death, with body and with soul. We are transformed into His likeness in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness as saints in Christ Jesus.

Christ alone is all our righteousness. No sin of the past, present, or future can separate us from the love of God in Him. On the other hand, nothing that my hand might bring can add to that perfect righteousness which is ours in our Lord. It is all of faith, all works excluded!

What! no merit?

At this point many voices raise a storm of protest. What? No works? No merit?

The error of salvation by works is as old as this world since the fall in paradise.

Adam and Eve did not face this problem before the fall. When they awoke in the morning they were eager to start another day in devotion to their God. They delighted in all the marvels of God's creation. They joined their voices with the whole creation in praise to their Maker. With dominion over all the creatures they busied themselves all day long with serving God. The thought never occurred to them that they should have some time to themselves, much less that they should be rewarded for their labors. Theirs was a service of loving devotion, a foretaste of heavenly perfection, where the saints tell the praises of God in complete surrender to Him!

But immediately after the fall our first parents sought to cover themselves with their own fig leaves, still not realizing that no cover could be found anywhere apart from the atoning blood of the Savior. Their son Cain brought the firstfruits of his crop, expecting God to appreciate his gifts. Israel boasted that they were the people of the Lord

* See the answer to question 62 above.

in distinction from all other nations, as if they had a special merit in the sight of God. From them were born the sect of the Pharisees, who needed no Savior, because their good works far exceeded the requirements of God's law, whereby they would merit prominent seats in heaven. We need only add to that basic error of the Roman Catholic Church, of the Pelagians and Arminians of various sorts, and of the preachers who proclaim a social gospel, and we realize that the sinful pride of self-righteousness is rooted in our very nature. Throughout Paul's entire epistle to the Romans, as well as the epistle to the Galatians, the Spirit warns us that if our salvation is of faith, then all works are excluded, and if of works, then our faith means nothing.

Yet the question persists, does not Scripture speak of a certain merit? According to our sinful nature we can understand the vehement protest of the objector, "What! do not our good works merit, which yet God will reward in this and in a future life?"

There are numerous passages in Scripture that assure the people of God of a reward. In the Old Testament, Israel is told, "If ye walk in My ways, and keep My commandments, thou shalt eat of the fruit of the land and prosper." Also in the New Testament, Jesus tells His disciples that no one has left father or mother, field or houses for His sake, but is richly rewarded both in this life and in the life to come. When Jesus speaks of the final judgment in Matthew 25, He assures us that those will be welcomed into the kingdom who have fed Him when He was hungry, gave Him to drink when He was thirsty, took Him in as a stranger, clothed Him when He was naked, and visited Him when He was sick or in prison.

It is in this assurance that the believers live and die, for they have Christ's promise, "Behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his works shall be."

Our Catechism points out that, "This reward is not of merit, but of grace." To this every sincere child of God readily agrees.

Imagine a father in the home who figures out exactly how many hours he works for each member of the family and holds them obligated to him accordingly. Or imagine a mother who expects commensurate wages for every hour that she spends scrubbing floors, washing dishes, caring for the children and feeding the baby, along with time and a half pay for every hour of overtime that she spends when the family is sick. Or again, imagine a child who will obey his parents and run errands only if he receives a proper reward. What kind of home would we have if love and acts of love were

wanting?

We readily confess that we serve God, not out of anything in ourselves, but because the love of God is poured out in us. We are unprofitably servants, who never do more than our duty. Christ performs His work of love in and through us. We are the instruments, even the willing instruments, who by His grace may confess, as a Dutch Psalm expresses it, "My service of love to Thee has never yet vexed me."*

The wonder of grace is that God rewards His own work that He performs through us. In the day of judgment all of our own works, that we have produced, will be consumed like straw and stubble in the fire. Nothing will remain except Christ's work in us, which will be rewarded with a crown of glory and with our own personal place in Christ's kingdom. All of Christ, none of self.

"Does not this doctrine make men careless and profane?"

From an entirely different direction arises a new objection. If we cannot merit salvation and the benefits of salvation by our own works, why do them? This is the argument of the antinomian in us.

Our old sinful nature raises the argument that, since we are righteous in Christ we need not strive for holiness and perfection. Or again, what difference does it make if we sin, since our sins are forgiven anyway? Or even, we should taste the evils of sin, in order that we may fully enjoy the rich benefit of forgiveness.

To this the child of God responds: God forbid! How shall I, as a new creature in Christ, still sin against my God? Can Christ in me grow careless and profane? Can the Spirit of Christ condone sin in me? On the contrary, it is Christ Who makes me sincerely willing to walk in all good works, to abhor sin and to flee from it. The approval and fellowship with God means more to us than life itself.

Christ's righteousness is not like a coat that we put on or shed at leisure, but we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

That work of God is crowned with His blessing. To Him be the glory, now and unto endless eternity!

* "Uw liefde dienst heeft mij nog nooit verdrotten."

Read and Study
The Standard Bearer

EDITORIAL

Our Calling as Protestant Reformed Churches to be Specific (1)

Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

For various reasons which will become clear, I trust, as we proceed, I am intending to write an occasional editorial on the subject which heads this article. As churches, we must be specific. We must not be generally Christian. We must not be known or try to be known merely as "conservative," nor even as "conservatively" Reformed. But we must be clearly, unmistakably, *specifically* Protestant Reformed. We have a distinctively Protestant Reformed heritage. By that heritage we have always been known over the years. And by that heritage we must continue to be known.

This implies necessarily that this distinctively Protestant Reformed heritage must be preserved. And it implies that this heritage must be passed on in our generations. Moreover, the passing on of this heritage in our churches is primarily—though not exclusively—the responsibility of the office of the minister, the task of the pulpit and of the catechism class. It is also the calling of homes and parents. It is also the responsibility of various other agencies and functions in the circle of our churches. But the first responsibility lies with our pulpits and with those who are charged with the work of the ministry and the oversight of that work.

About this and about the dangers of being and becoming less than specific, as well as about what it means to be specific—and I shall be concrete in this regard—I intend to write.

While I was doing some research in connection with these planned editorials, I came across a radio sermon by the late Rev. Herman Hoeksema which was delivered in 1945. It was part of a series on the general subject of *The Church*. Its title is "The Reformation Of The Church." When I perused it once again, I came to the conclusion that this radio sermon not only was in several aspects in line with what I intended to write, but that it could also serve as a fitting introduction to this series of editorials and furnish helpful background. I am therefore reprinting this radio message which was originally made available in mimeo form.

THE REFORMATION OF THE CHURCH

It is the solemn obligation of the believer, we said (in a previous message, HCH), to seek and join himself to the true church, the purest manifestation of the body of Christ on earth, distinguished by purity in preaching, by proper administration of the holy sacraments, and by faithful exercise of Christian discipline. To this we now add that, when the true believer has found this church and lives in her fellowship, it is also his sacred calling as well as his earnest desire to seek the good, the true, spiritual well-being of that church. And to this calling belongs the obligation of constant vigilance lest the church become deformed and corrupt, and to work for the continued reformation of the church.

Always the church in the world faces the danger of deformation. Within and without, forces are at work constantly that tend to lead her astray, to persuade her to apostatize from the truth of the Word of God, to tempt her to depart from the way of the precepts of her Lord in walk and conversation, to profane the holy sacraments, and to grow lax in the exercise of Christian discipline. The reasons for this are evident. The church in the world is never perfect. Always there is the carnal seed, those that are in the church but not of her, that are outwardly in her fellowship, but are devoid of her spiritual life. This is the plain teaching of Scripture; and it is corroborated by experience and by the history of the church of all ages.

A great multitude it was that followed Moses out of Egypt. And concerning them the apostle Paul writes: "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of the spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness" (I Cor. 10:1-5). And the epistle to

the Hebrews, referring to this same fact in the language of Psalm 95, reminds us of the day of temptation in the wilderness, when these same fathers tempted God, until He swore in His great wrath that they should not enter into His rest. And they did not enter because of unbelief (Heb. 3:7, ff.) And the epistle to the Romans in its ninth chapter postulates the principle that God's sovereign election and reprobation cut right through the church in the world, so that it is always true that not all are Israel that are of Israel. The Lord Jesus compares the gathering of the church in the world to a field into which the good seed is sown, but also the tares, and the two shall not be separated until the end of the world, when "the Son of man shall send forth His holy angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire" (Matt. 13:41, 42). And again, He likens this gathering to "a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, and cast the bad away."

The carnal element, therefore, is always in the church on earth. It arises from within; for all the children of believers are not children of the promise. And it joins itself frequently to the church from without. Never can they be completely eliminated. A pure church of believers only we must never expect in the world.

To this must be added, first of all, that believers themselves are not perfect. They have a principle of the new life in Christ, a beginning of the new obedience. And according to that regenerated life they love the Word of God and are desirous to walk according to the will of God in the world. But their old nature remains with them as long as they are in the body of this death. The operations of sin continue in them. And, secondly, the church is in the world, with its false philosophy, its opposition to the truth of the gospel, its lust of the flesh, and lust of the eyes, and pride of life, its temptations and persecutions.

Hence, it may truly be said that from a natural viewpoint, the church occupies a precarious position. The flesh within her is opposed to the truth of the Word of God, and hates the way of God's precepts. It loves the lie, and seeks to satisfy its carnal lusts. And in this carnal element within the church the world without with its philosophy and vain deceit, finds a powerful ally. Because of the presence and operation of these forces of evil the church is in constant danger of apostasy from the truth and of amalgamation with the world. The many places of formal worship in our land, from whose pulpits once the clear sound of the pure Word of God was heard, but in which one now seeks in vain the

preaching of the gospel, are tangible proof of this truth. Always the church is in sore need of hearing the admonition of the Scriptures: "Beware, lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Col. 2:8). And again, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? ...Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you" (II Cor. 6:14-17).

The process by which a church yields to these forces of corruption, so that she finally becomes a prey to them, is not difficult to describe. There is, first of all, the gradual corruption of its doctrine. This doctrinal decline usually begins within the church itself. The preaching of the Word loses its distinctive note. It becomes general and vague. No longer does it emphasize sound doctrine. A superficial message, delivered in fifteen or twenty minutes, permeated by all kinds of stories, must suffice. There is no longer heard the clear call to live in sanctification and separation from the world. Light and darkness are mingled into a gray and heavy mist, in which no one can distinguish the one from the other. Instruction of children and of the youth of the church is neglected. Soon an appalling ignorance in regard to the most fundamental truths of the Christian faith is the result. Thus the church becomes an easy prey to every wind of doctrine, and to the ungodly influence of the philosophy of the world. And especially in our modern day these influences are many and manifold, and are exerted upon us through many means and avenues: the spoken word of the false teacher, the radio (and television, HCH), and the printed page.

Concomitant with this corruption in doctrine is a definite degradation of the very standards of life of such a church. Discipline is, of course, no longer exercised. Anyone is welcome to join, regardless of his confession and walk. The sabbath is desecrated. The church-pews become empty. Soon it is compelled to close its doors in the evening for lack of an audience. Its members seek enjoyment elsewhere. They become friends of the world. They sing and dance with the world; they attend theaters and movies with the world; they have their card parties and drinking parties with the world; they join the society of this world; they speak as and look like the children of the world. Christ and the devil seem to have joined hands; righteousness and unrighteousness.

teousness have become an indistinguishable corruption that is still called religion. The church has become a silly company of adulterers, and the Lord spews her out of His mouth.

It is difficult to determine just which of these two is first, decline in doctrine or spiritual degeneracy, and which must be regarded as the cause of the other. Certain it is that they go together. For a time it may seem possible to maintain a certain dead orthodoxy, a soundness of doctrine in the face of a growing laxity in regard to the life of sanctification; but such a situation cannot continue for any length of time. And, on the other hand, for a while it may appear as if a church can maintain a certain standard of Christian living without the pure preaching of the Word and instruction in sound doctrine, but also this soon proves to be impossible. There is, therefore, a reciprocal relationship between the two. On the one hand, ignorance in regard to the truth and laxity in the preaching of the Word are conducive to degradation in respect to life and walk. But on the other hand, where discipline is not exercised, and the life and walk of the church members becomes carnal and worldly, the carnal element of the church will soon clamor for a preaching that justifies their sinful walk, choose for themselves teachers after their own carnal desire, and silence the voice of the Word of God.

Because of these forces of evil within and without, and because of this danger that the church becomes corrupt and moves in the direction of the false church, she is in need of continued reformation.

Just as the individual believer is in need of constant conversion, so the church, if she is to remain true, must pass through a continuous process of reformation. And what is true of the conversion of the individual Christian, that it consists of a putting off of the old, and a putting on of the new man, is applicable to the church: she must repent, hate sin and flee from it, but also positively grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherever a church reveals even the first tendency to depart from the truth and yield to the influence of false doctrine, or to lose her first love and become lax in Christian living, she must repent and return to the way of truth and righteousness. But she must also positively increase in the knowledge of the truth, become stronger in the faith, more firmly rooted in Christ, and abound in love and spiritual discernment, in order that she may approve that which is excellent, and be filled with fruits of righteousness. Moreover, she must also constantly adjust her position over against and in the midst of a changing world. Fundamentally, the world, in its evil sense, and the position of the church over against it, are always the same: the

church is in the world, but not of the world. Yet, our fathers of the sixteenth century did not face the same problems the church of today confronts. Then life was comparatively simple, now it is complicated. Then there were but few different churches, now winds of doctrine blow from all directions, and there is no end of heresies and sects. Then the church could live in relative isolation from the world; now, through modern inventions of steam and electricity, auto and airplane, telegraph and telephone and radio, the world is literally on top of her. (And how things have changed even since this was written less than 40 years ago! HCH) The problems of worldmindedness, of dancing and theater attendance, of sabbath desecration, of divorce, unionism, and the like, were virtually unknown, in their present form at least; today they are acute. And with respect to that changing and developing form of the world, the church must constantly give herself account of her calling, and determine her position, that is, understand the will of her Lord, and keep it. She needs continuous reformation in order to remain steadfast, unmoveable, and abound in the work of the Lord.

Hence, the church has the sacred obligation to watch, and to labor with a view to this continued reformation.

Everywhere this calling is emphasized in Scripture. She must grow in the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, that her members be no longer children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine (Eph. 4:13, 14). She must repent and do the former works, Revelation 2:5; be faithful unto death, Revelation 2:10; put away false prophets and their doctrine, Revelation 2:15, 16; and all fornicators, Revelation 2:20ff.; hold fast that which she has, Revelation 2:25; be watchful, and strengthen that which is ready to die, Revelation 3:2. And if she fails to hear the Word of her Lord, He will reject her and spew her out of His mouth. This, to be sure, is first of all the calling of the institute of the church, of her ministry and overseers, but not so that the individual members have no calling and responsibility at all in this respect. They, too, must hear the Word of their Lord, watch against intrusion of false teachers and evil men, and raise their voice in protest against the church institute, wherever and whenever she departs from the truth and becomes unfaithful and corrupt in walk and conversation. Either in cooperation with the official institute, or in protest against her, every believer has the calling to labor for the constant reformation of the church.

But what to do, if in the church of which you are member the carnal element begins to dominate?

What if the institute of the church itself becomes corrupt, the Word of God is adulterated, the sacraments are profaned, false teachers and their winds of doctrine are tolerated and welcomed, and Christian discipline is no longer exercised? What if the officebearers will no longer be servants of Christ, but lord it over the flock? What if they turn a deaf ear to all your protests against their evil way? And what if they grow wanton, demand that you subscribe to their false doctrine, or corruption in life, or both; and if you will not be silent, they employ their official power to persecute you, and cast you out? In that situation, the church of which you are a member reveals the marks of the false church; and the only way in which you can continue to work for the reformation of the church is by separating yourself from the particular institute, and continuing the true church, with its pure preaching of the Word of God, its proper administration of the sacraments, and its exercise of Christian discipline, in a new organization.

Such specific reformations, in the form of secession and separation from a certain instituted church, have repeatedly occurred in the history of the church of the new dispensation; and they still take place. And they are unavoidable, unless the church takes her task of continued reformation

very seriously. Needless to say, one dare not take this final step lightly. For minor reasons or personal prejudices no one may apply this measure. On the other hand, if one stands before the alternative of denying the Word of God or leaving a certain institute, if it becomes a question of defending and remaining in a certain institute on earth or preserving the true church, the purest manifestation of the body of Christ on earth, no true believer may hesitate to take that final step. A sad spectacle it is, indeed, to behold the visible church in the world split up and divided into many different parts and sects opposing one another. But woe unto those corrupters of the truth and of the life of the church who are the cause of this offense!

When the church in the world reverts to the type of that of Laodicea, the Lord Christ Himself is expelled from its fellowship. He stands outside, calling to the faithful to open the door, and promising them that He will recognize them as the true church if they come out to Him. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Rev. 3:20, 22).

MY SHEEP HEAR MY VOICE

Letter to Timothy

Dear Timothy,

April 15, 1983

I want to conclude our discussion of Christ-centered preaching in this letter to you. We have discussed a number of particular illustrations of Christ-centered preaching—illustrations from different kinds of biblical material. But there remains one kind of biblical material which we must still treat. I refer to hortatory texts, i.e., texts which contain admonitions.

Perhaps especially this type of material can easily become Christless. It ought not really to be that way, but it appears sometimes as if it is. I suppose that if one casts about in his mind why this is the case, the reason, at least in part, is that hortatory material necessarily emphasizes *our* activity as it directs us to our calling. When the emphasis in a text falls upon what we must do, then

the danger is ever present that we fail to emphasize what Christ has done. And if we fail to emphasize what Christ has done, then we reduce the admonitions of Scripture to moral homilies or pertinent and helpful advice or "hints for better living." And this is exactly to rob the Word of God of all its significance and power.

It is well that we take a moment or two to emphasize that also the admonitions of Scripture must be preached on in such a way that these sermons too are Christ-centered. There are two points here which we must notice. Even the admonitions in Scripture are part of the revelation of God as our God Who has saved us through the blood of His own Son, Jesus Christ; all the admonitions of Scripture emphasize the fact that God saves us through Jesus Christ as rational and moral creatures. But the emphasis falls upon the fact that

God saves us—even when it needs to be stressed that He saves us, if I may put it that way, without doing violence to our human character. We do not, as the saying goes, go to heaven in the upper berth of a pullman sleeper; nor are we pulled into heaven as a child pulls a mechanically-quacking duck along the floor. It is not God's purpose or desire to save us in this way, because it is His will to save us in such a way that we experience His salvation so that we may give all the praise and glory to Him for His great grace. Admonitions in Scripture form a part of that.

It is perhaps well too to emphasize that preachers ought to make this explicit. It is spiritually dangerous and theologically incorrect to leave this to the understanding of the people. Sometimes this happens. A minister may preach what is essentially a Christless sermon as he admonishes those in his audience to do this or that; and when this is called to his attention, he responds by appealing to the fact that it is to be understood that he is speaking to people of God who have the grace of God in their hearts. But assumptions are not enough on such important matters. It is spiritually dangerous to do this because, on the one hand, we are all, as far as our natures are concerned, fundamentally Arminian, because we always strive to preserve some remnants of our shattered pride and keep for ourselves some element of our work in our salvation. And we need constantly to be reminded of the truth that this will never do. And, on the other hand, if the truth of Christ is not made explicit in such preaching, the listening saint will only be filled with a sense of despair as he ponders the hopelessness of this high and lofty calling. But it is theologically incorrect because we jerk admonitions out of the context of the Scriptures themselves when we do not make these things explicit, and present them, after all, as our work.

How then can we make our hortatory preaching Christ-centered?

In the first place, it is extremely important to develop carefully the *concepts* of the text. If this is done with care and precision and in the light of the Scriptures themselves, we will without fail be led to the fundamental truth of salvation in Jesus Christ in this way. I do not think that it is an exaggeration to say, when a sermon is Christless, it is because a minister has failed to pay attention to the concepts of the text on which he is preaching. Perhaps a few examples, chosen at random, will illustrate what I mean by this. Supposing that you are preaching on the text, "Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Quite obviously, the admonition here is the calling not to be afraid. And there is surely where the emphasis of the sermon must fall. But how can one preach on

this text without paying attention to the fact that God's people are called here, "little flock"? And how can he develop that important concept without going into the truth of eternal election? There are, of course, many other things implied: the people of God are compared with sheep, and sheep have, according to the Bible, various characteristics which fit the people of God. They are always, in this world, a *little flock*; and this is surely one reason to be afraid. But while all these things are true, the fact remains that election stares us in the face and cannot be ignored. Another example. Supposing that one is preaching out of James: "But that ye ought to say, If the Lord wills, I will do this or that." Certainly this is an important admonition, especially within the context in which it is found. But it seems to me to be on the surface that it is impossible to preach on this text without carefully explaining what the will of God is. And that, in turn, will lead us to discover that, not the will of God's command, so called, but the will of His decree is referred to. And this in turn will surely lead us to expound how that will centers in Christ and in the salvation of the church through Christ's work. And only when we understand this, are we able also to say, "If the Lord wills, I will do this or that."

And so we could go on. But perhaps the point is sufficiently made to show that even this kind of preaching is and must be Christ-centered.

But there is another important aspect of this question. It must always be remembered that the preaching is addressed to the people of God. The Scriptures are addressed as a whole to the church. They are the church's Book, God's gracious gift to His people, Christ's love-letter to His elect bride. They are specific and particular in their contents, never general and for all men. They are addressed in a very particular way to the saints because they are the infallibly written and inspired record of God's particular revelation to His church.

It is true, of course, that the preaching of the Scriptures has a broader address. This lies in the very nature of the fact that the preaching is promiscuous and comes to all who hear whether elect or reprobate. And God intends also that this be so, for it is the means which God uses to accomplish His purpose also in the hardening of the reprobate, for God sovereignly hardens through the means of man's unbelief. And it is for this reason that our Canons are quite clear on the point that the particular promise of the gospel must be promiscuously proclaimed along with the command to repent and believe (See Canons II, 5). But this does not alter our fundamental thesis. All the letters of the New Testament were addressed to congregations, even to saints, to the called, to the churches in this place or that.

This is true even of those texts in Scripture which are often given some kind of universal reference. When Jesus says, in Matthew 11:28, "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden. . .," He is speaking to His people who have experienced the burden of sin and guilt and who have, for that reason, the work of grace begun in their hearts. When Isaiah calls, "Ho, everyone that thirsteth; come ye to the waters and drink. . .," the specific address is to the thirsty. And it surely must be emphasized that this is for the thirsty and for them alone. That is, it is for them who have a deep longing for escape from their sin and guilt as they wander in this desert land "where all the streams are dry." But that too is the work of God.

This particular address of the preaching must always be maintained. And again it must be emphasized that this be made explicit in the preaching. It is never enough, especially in these days of rampant Arminianism, simply to assume these things.

My colleague in the Seminary drove this point home strongly to me the other day when he observed that, if you stop to think about it, it has only been for very brief periods of time in the history of the church that the church has strongly and uncompromisingly maintained the doctrines of sovereign and particular grace. How true this is. Always the tendency is towards Arminianism, because this is exactly the tendency of our own sinful flesh.

If we maintain this truth and make it explicit in our preaching, then it is also true that we put all of hortatory preaching in its proper context. We make it clear that this is the way God saves us, that it is God's purpose to save us in such a way that, consciously experiencing His salvation, we give all praise and glory to Him. And this conscious salvation becomes ours in the ways of admonition, reproof, the chastisement of the Word, encourage-

ment and constant incentive to press on in our calling. And, at the same time, it is made clear to God's people that they are enabled to do good works and fulfill the admonitions of Scripture just because they are the recipients of grace, the objects of God's salvation, heirs of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. It is true that this is yet only in principle, so that we have daily to humble ourselves before God, seek His forgiveness, and constantly fight against our whole evil nature with which we live all our life long. But it is also true that, relying upon the one perfect sacrifice of Christ, we have a sincere and earnest desire to live according to all the commandments of God.

God's Word holds before us perfection, complete and absolute perfection. Nothing else will do. Nothing short of this will please God. But by the preaching of that perfection of God's commands, we are taught how deep are the sins from which God delivers us, how great is the power of the cross in which we are more than conquerors, and how blessed is the perfection which is reserved for us in heaven towards which we wend our sometimes weary way and for which we long with ever greater longing—in the confident hope that the time will come when we shall finally be gathered without spot or wrinkle in the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

The people of God want to hear Christ speak to them. Don't ever forget that. And they want to hear Christ speak to them of the work which He has performed for them to save them from their sins. In the final analysis, when everything else is said and done, this is all they want to hear. And that is what you must preach. For that is the kind of preaching which makes God everything so that all things are only to His glory now and forever.

Fraternally in Christ,
H. Hanko

TAKING HEED TO THE DOCTRINE

God's Providence and Sin (5)

Rev. H. Veldman

We concluded our last article by calling attention to the Scriptural truth that God is free. We noted that Pelagianism would maintain a freedom for the sinner in the sense that he is free, able to choose both the good and the evil. Otherwise, so he claims,

we lose man's responsibility. The Arminian, we understand, is guilty of the same heresy. Man, he asserts, must be free to accept the general, well-meaning offer of the gospel. To him, the preaching is such a general, well-meaning offer of a salvation

which the Lord would bestow upon all that hear it. How, he objects, can God hold a sinner responsible unless that sinner be able to accept or reject an offered salvation; But, as we noted in our preceding article, God is free, and He is free in the eternal and absolute sense of the word. That God is free means that He, unhindered and unmolested, wills and maintains Himself. And this freedom of the Lord surely determines our freedom. This is not freedom that I can do as *I* please. Freedom, perfect freedom for me means that I will be able to serve Jehovah as unmolested by sin, in purity of heart and life. Understanding this, we may conclude that man's responsibility does not consist herein, that I am able to do the good as well as the evil; if that were the case, we would never be able to speak of man's responsibility, of man as a moral, responsible being. Fact is, he cannot be subject to the law of God. Hence, if man's responsibility consists in his ability to do good and that, refusing to choose the good, he is therefore responsible, then there is simply no responsibility of the sinner. But Scripture surely teaches man's responsibility.

Speaking of the freedom of a sinner, we may observe that only Adam ever had a free will. Adam was created good. There was no imperfection in him. He could choose the good, the service of the living God Who had created him. But he could also, by an act of the will, choose to ally himself with the devil, to disobey the command of his Maker which was not to eat of the forbidden fruit. This freedom of the will was Adam's alone. The sinner, as apart from Christ, cannot possibly choose the good. He is not, cannot be, subject to the law of God. And the elect sinner, called out of darkness into God's wonderful light, cannot choose the evil. It is true that he is holy only in principle and that therefore much evil cleaves to him and that the movements of sin continue in his members. But the Word of God teaches us, as especially in the epistles of the apostle John, that that which is born of God cannot sin.

Speaking of man's responsibility, the responsibility of the sinner is never to be identified or confused with sovereignty. Responsibility is a compound word, consisting of two parts: response and ability, meaning therefore the ability to respond. The Lord has revealed Himself in all the works of His hands and also in the infallible Scriptures. In all this revelation of Himself the Lord speaks only one language: I alone am God and therefore must be served and loved with all one's heart and mind and soul and strength. And the sinner is able to respond to this divine revelation by God of Himself. An animal cannot respond to it. But the sinner can. Of course, he can give only one response. He is not subject to the law of God and

neither indeed can he be. He can therefore never give the response: Yes, Lord, I love Thee. The sinner can only say No to God's revelation of Himself. He can only say: Lord, I hate Thee and I refuse to serve and love Thee. But this response he is able to give. He can do this because he is a moral-rational being. This is man's responsibility. And this has nothing to do with sovereignty, as if the sinner determines and controls his lot and destiny.

Nevertheless, God's providence and sin are so related to one another that sin is always a deed of man, remains a deed of man and never of God. Man sins, the Lord never sins. God is sovereign, performs all His good pleasure, and this good pleasure is all-comprehensive in the absolute sense of the word, including sin. Man, although never sovereignly free, is always morally free. He never sins because he is forced to sin. We are reminded, in this connection, of the Word of God in Acts 2:23: "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Notice how both truths are maintained in this word of Peter: God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. The Lord Jesus Christ was delivered, we read, by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. How this is emphasized throughout the Word of God! Does not the Saviour declare that the Son of Man goes as it is written of Him? Is not the entire program of His suffering set forth in all the Old Testament Scriptures, especially in the prophecy of Isaiah, called the Old Testament evangelist? Indeed, He was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of the Most High. The crucifixion of the Man of Sorrows is attributed here directly to the will of God, to His foreknowledge. And this word, we must understand, does not simply mean that the Lord had prior knowledge of it, knew of it in advance, but it means that this knowledge is foreknowledge because it determined His crucifixion! God's knowledge does not follow upon the existence of things. It precedes the existence of things, determines them. This is what we have in Acts 2:23. But we have more in this Word of God. We also read here: "ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." This is man's sin. And, mind you, we have taken Him, by wicked hands have crucified and slain Him. Man is a moral-rational, responsible being. They crucified and slew Him by *wicked* hands. They acted wickedly. They were not forced or compelled to do this, contrary to their own desires. Wicked hands took Him and crucified Him. We performed this heinous crime because we willed to do it. We were morally free. And, yet, it occurred by God's determinate counsel and foreknowledge. Fact is, the crucifixion of our Lord was surely di-

vinely willed. But let us understand, it was divinely willed, sovereignly, as an act of the sinner. Christ was slain by wicked hands.

This should enable us to understand somewhat the relation between the providence of God and sin. Sin is always a deed of man, never of the Lord. Man, although never sovereignly free, remains morally free. The sinner, of course, never possesses the true freedom of the service of Jehovah, yet he is consciously, morally free. Man is a rational-moral being, is therefore a responsible creature. An animal is not God-conscious and therefore it never acts in a conscious relation to the Lord. Whatever man does, however, he does as in relation to God. He is God-conscious because he has been created as adapted to God. He is, by virtue of His creation, image-bearer of the Lord. Hence, he understands intellectually the speech of God in creation and in the Scriptures. Whatever he does he performs most decidedly in relation to God. He hates the Lord or he loves Him. He walks either from the principle of enmity or of love. He seeks the glory of the alone living God or he opposes that God. He is never neutral. This is his rational-moral nature, always walking in a conscious relation to his Creator. And this consciousness of the Lord determines and establishes his responsibility. We must understand this correctly. He is not free in the true, spiritual sense of the word, as if he for one moment would be independent of the Lord. In this sense he will ever remain the instrument of the Lord, His agent, absolutely controlled and directed by Him Who does all things according to His sovereign will and purpose. But the sinner is relatively, morally free, always in complete subjection to the Lord. For in the final analysis we may not speak of man as a mere instrument, inasmuch as an instrument is wholly passive. Man, however, is an active, moral creature. He is spiritually, morally free in his sin. He sins consciously, not because he must and is compelled to do so, but because he wills evil. He sins out of himself, spontaneously and voluntarily, is never forced to commit, but always remains the conscious author of his own evil. This is the sinner's moral freedom, his morally free will, that he sins as rejoicing therein, choosing the evil always as the object of his own desire and will. This truth is surely Scriptural.

Herein lies the distinction between origin and author. We do well to bear this in mind, also when we read the Canons of Dordt, when our Reformed fathers emphasize that the cause of iniquity lies in man. An origin is the willing, determining cause, the source of everything. That man sins surely has its sovereign origin in the Lord. Do not the Scriptures declare in Isaiah 45:7, "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace and create evil: I

the Lord do all these things"? From where else would sin come, sovereignly, if not from Jehovah? But wholly different is the conception of author. An author is the conscious, active perpetrator, doer of a deed, himself spiritually in accord with the same. An author, therefore, of sin is he who loves iniquity, does iniquity because he desires it, and who is consciously free, unmolested in his sin. We therefore reject all determinism, as if man would be a mere stock or block, but we maintain him as a responsible free-moral agent. In this sense of the word the Lord is never the author of sin, but He hates sin with all that is in Him, although He is its sovereign origin and cause. The Lord is indeed a light and there is no darkness in Him at all. He never tempts the sinner, we read in James 1, and He is never tempted with evil. Never does sin ever have any effect upon Him. Sin is always the active operation of our nature against the living God; man always rejoices in it. So, the operation of the Lord, in connection with evil, is always so that man is its author, doing it not because he is forced to do so, but as the desire of his own heart and mind. Hence, when the Lord sovereignly and eternally wills sin, in His eternal good pleasure, He wills it as being committed by a sinner, the author of all his evil and iniquity. This relation between God and evil we must always bear in mind. The Lord is too pure of eyes to behold sin and iniquity. The eternal love by God of Himself and His hatred of and aversion to sin and evil can never be stressed too emphatically. Sin is always far from the Lord. And this also applies to the sinner. Any fellowship between the holy and righteous God is therefore inconceivable with the sinner; this conception violates the very essence of the alone living God.

This surely places us before an unfathomable mystery. This we readily concede and confess. Man is a free-responsible being. He performs iniquity because he loves it. He is unmolested in his sinning, is never coerced. And he never wills or desires anything else than sin, is a slave of iniquity, but always a very willing slave. He is free, but only in this moral sense of the word. And God is the living God! He alone is God. We cannot afford to lose this truth. If we lose this truth, then we surely lose God. And then we lose all. However, we will continue with this in our following article.

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FROM HOLY WRIT

Believing All the Prophetic Scriptures

Rev. G. Lubbers

Chapter VI

The "Seven Dispensations" of the Scofield Bible - continued

Our starting-point in reviewing the "Seven Dispensations" of Scofield is taken from the Word of God in II Corinthians 1:20, where we read, "for all the promises of God in Him (for *whatsoever* promises of God there are) are yea, and in Him Amen to the glory of God by us." Fact is that in the Greek text these promises are "*the Yea*" and "*the Amen*." And they are emphatically thus to God's glory! This means that there are definitely no promises in the entire O.T. prophetic Scriptures, which have not been fulfilled in Christ. Many are these promises of God which are recorded throughout these holy Scriptures, which many, many promises, in divers times and seasons, have all been fulfilled in Christ's death, resurrection, ascension, and glorification at God's right hand (Heb. 1:1-4).

The "things concerning *me*" have an end! (Luke 22:37).

These "things concerning *me*" are written in all the law and the prophets, from Genesis 1:1 to Malachi 4:6. And their "end" is that Christ, by being numbered with the transgressors, will surely bring His church to glory, and shall see seed of a numberless throng of His redeemed church, who wash their garments in the blood of the Lamb (Is. 53:12; Luke 22:37; Rev. 7:14).

Using this measuring rod for the interpretation of the Sacred Writings we do not wander off into a labyrinth of Satan's errors, nor into the perplexing combinations of Dispensational errors. We will then learn from the Prophetic Scriptures that there is basically but one great Promise of God in the Old Testament Scriptures, which promise is fulfilled in the Christ, the only begotten Son of God.

However, whosoever cuts the Scriptures into "seven dispensations," contrary to the plain teaching of the Bible, does so because he does not hold on to the Divinely given interpretation as fulfilled in Christ, the Christ of the Scriptures. When Scofield limits the "Promise" to the chronological time

between Abraham and Mount Sinai, the time of the "Lawgiving," he has made it impossible for himself to do justice to the great "Promise" as given already by God Himself in Paradise to Adam and Eve at the very dawn of history. He has cut the doings of God, His dealings with man, in such a way that there is no grand Promise of God which reaches across the ages! He really cannot say with Paul "*whatsoever* promises of God there are, these are (the) Yea, and (the) Amen in Christ!"

Such handling of the Scriptures is not a "rightly dividing of the Word of truth." But it is a mutilation of the unity of the Promise, and that too beyond recognition. These sound like strong words. Be it so; they are true words. That will be the burden of what we hope further to write about this grandiose error! It is one of the winds of false teaching which sweeps through the church here in our land.

Let us take a bit closer look at these "seven dispensations" of Scofieldian Dispensationalism.

We begin with the first "dispensation," which he named "Dispensation of *Innocence*." This must then refer to the brief span of time from the creation of our first parents on the sixth day till the day of the Fall through Satan's temptation in Paradise. How Scofield came to designate this time as a time of "*innocence*" we can understand in a measure, provided that "*innocence*" be properly explained by good exegesis of Genesis 1:26, 27. However, it is surpassingly strange to denominate this period as a "dispensation" in the biblical sense of the term. For that biblical sense of the term we refer to Ephesians 1:10; 3:2; and Colossians 1:25. In every case this refers to the actual dealings of God with His people through Christ's Cross and resurrection. At best this period could be called simply Adam's state and condition of rectitude, a *compliance* with the commandment of God. The term dispensation does not fit here at all. Although it was a time of trial from God to Adam, it was not a dispensation, a period in which the reality of a "good conscience" was absent. This is by implication the teaching of Scofield. His concept of "*innocence*" is *not* that of one who is standing in true knowledge of God, righteousness,

and holiness, but it is a not yet having a real knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve really received their actual "conscience" by means of the transgression of eating from the forbidden tree: the tree of knowledge of good and of evil. "Innocence" is a lack of knowledge of either good or evil!

Now according to the orthodox sense of the term, "innocence" is not being under the condemning verdict of standing guilt before God. It meant that Adam was representative of the human race, and that in his spiritual rectitude we too were not under condemnation, but we were standing in positive righteousness, a good will and a proper understanding of God by means of the "things made." It meant a proper receiving of God's revelation, both of God's power and godhead (divinity)—(Rom. 1:20). But innocency was not that man was in a certain "ignorant bliss" concerning the moral life of right and wrong. God's command was so clear that Adam knew the *wrong* of eating of the forbidden tree contrary to God's command, and the *right* of not eating, but that he might eat of the tree of life which stood in the midst of the garden. Adam's innocency was woven in the very fabric of the "antithetical" keeping of God's command.

Such is the innocency of which the Bible teaches us.

This is an "innocency" which is qualitatively different from the wrong version of it as taught by Scofield's Bible notes. Strictly speaking the innocency-conception of Scofield does not allow for the possibility of a real Fall as taught in the Bible, a Fall by which our nature became so corrupted that we are born and conceived in sin, a "one transgression" by one man in which sin reigned unto death (Rom. 5:15). In such a "dispensation of Innocence" there is no real, positive righteousness of the human will, nor can in such a conception there be a losing of our righteous will, a will which through the Fall became "wicked, rebellious and obdurate in heart and will, impure in affections" (Canons of Dordt, III, IV, Art. 1). Small wonder that this perverted presentation of Adam's "Innocence" knows nothing of the Promise of the victory through "blood of atonement" as clearly taught in the sovereign grace of the Protevangel in Genesis 3:15. The glad tidings of the Gospel, as first revealed in paradise, would to Scofield be a meaningless sound indeed!

This brings us to our consideration of the so-called "dispensation of Conscience."

It should be borne in mind that in all false teaching there is ever just enough plausibility to make the teaching sound acceptable to the ears of God's children. This is true until we listen a bit more sharply and apply the touchstone of biblical

teaching on the matter of "conscience." We must not be hoodwinked by nice-sounding words.

Let us take a closer look at this so-called "dispensation of Conscience."

It is true that the term "conscience" means literally: to *know* with. That is the meaning of the term also in the Greek, as well as in the Dutch and German. The Dutch has "*ge-weten*" and the German "*gewissen*." It deals with the moral life in men and angels in their conscious relationship to God, as they know the will of God from His law: to love God with all the heart, the mind, and the soul and the strength!

It is the teaching of Scofield that Adam really had no "Conscience" prior to the Fall. Writes Scofield, "By disobedience man came to a personal and experimental knowledge of good and evil—of good as obedience and of evil as disobedience to the known will of God. Through that knowledge conscience awoke" (page 10, note 2 in the Scofield Bible).

Now it is simply not the teaching of Scripture that man's conscience "awoke" through the sin of the Fall. According to this teaching there will be not an awakened conscience without sin. Furthermore, this makes the Fall not an act of man followed by God's pre-announced verdict of "dying thou shalt surely die," but sin is then a mere stepping-stone, a transition from a slumbering conscience to an awakened conscience. It is entirely evident that Adam's conscience was not merely *awakened* but his conscience became entirely corrupted by sin; Adam and Eve's consciences were such that they kept the truth down in unrighteousness, even when they tried to cover the shame of their nakedness with mere fig leaves. Furthermore, even though their conscience accused them they could not and they would not each confess their sinful part in the Fall (Gen. 3:7-13). They could only do what Paul writes in Romans 2:15: "...their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another."

Now in such a state of "awakened conscience," which is really a defiled conscience, a seared conscience, how could this be a positive "dispensation" of God to try Adam and his posterity whether they would walk as having conscience being their guide? Certainly in the state of rectitude Adam's conscience was "guided" by the revealed will of God. And after the Fall Adam was not left to the whims of a corrupted conscience (which is something else than an awakened conscience) but was graciously renewed in his conscience by grace and sovereign mercy. Such was the case with all who "began to call upon the Name of the LORD" in the days of Enos (Gen. 4:26). The rest walked in a conscience which accused and excused each other,

but which was even in so doing holding down the truth in unrighteousness (John 1:5: Canons of Dordt, III, IV, 4). Thus man became ever more inexcusable before God.

Hence, before the Fall: a good conscience, doing God's will. After the Fall: a condemning conscience, a filthy conscience, a corrupt and disobedient conscience. And for those who received mercy, such as Abel, Enoch, and Noah, a free and

good conscience in the Blood which they saw foreshadowed in their bloody animal sacrifices. After the Fall it was the Dispensation of grace for believers, and it was the fallen sinful state of those upon whom the wrath of God abideth.

A "dispensation of conscience" as God's way of trying man is the mere figment of man's mind, which does not "believe the Scriptures"!

THE LORD GAVE THE WORD

Missionary Methods (15)

Prof. Robert D. Decker

In the previous article we faced the question: Along what lines ought the native church be organized? Missionaries usually do not face that question very seriously. They simply assume that the mission church ought to be organized in the same fashion as the sending church. If the missionary is Presbyterian he organizes the mission church upon Presbyterian principles of church government. The Anglican missionary organizes the mission church according to the Episcopal form of church government. Dr. Nevius thinks this is wrong. It is his contention that the church ought to have the form of church government which is dictated by her needs and peculiar circumstances (cf. *Planting And Development Of Missionary Churches*, pp. 55ff.).

We can appreciate the fact that churches in other lands face different problems and exist in a different situation than does God's church in North America. Buddhism, Hinduism, the Moslem religion are certainly not of immediate concern to the church in North America, but these religions in other parts of the world represent a real threat to the church. Levels of education and of spiritual maturity also affect the organization of and subsequent life of the mission church. While all this is true we cannot agree with Nevius' contention that the form of government of the mission church should be determined by need and circumstance. The Reformed or Presbyterian form of government is based on sound biblical principles. Those principles belong to the eternal truth of God's infallible Word. Because they do they apply in every age and to the church in every land. God knows much better than we what is good for His church as it exists

in every nation under heaven. There may very well be, and in the nature of the case there must be, differences in nonessentials, customs, and practices, but never in the essential principles of the government of God's church.

This means the three-fold office of Christ must be present. The church wherever it is needs preachers. Initially, of course, the preachers are the missionaries sent out by the established church. As the number of converts grows, and as the converts grow in the grace and knowledge of God under the preaching of the missionaries, the group or groups of converts must be prepared to be organized into the church of Jesus Christ. This must be the goal of mission work. Suitable men must be trained for the office of Christ. There must be qualified elders and deacons and there must be preachers. These must be sought out and instructed. This too is an essential part of mission work. Missionaries ought not remain in a field indefinitely. The native preachers must not be called and supported by the sending church. This is wrong and for that reason a grave mistake. The church in the foreign land must call its own ministers and must support them so that they may devote all their time and gifts in the service of the church. The foreign church must be *indigenous*, and this means free from the support and rule of the sending church. All of this does not happen overnight. In some lands it may develop over the space of a few years or even less. In other lands which are more primitive it may take many years before an indigenous church can be established. But in either event this must be the goal of mission work. The church must have preachers, for, "how shall they hear without a preacher?"

(Romans 10:14).

Nevius continues by warning against appointing elders and deacons who do not meet the qualifications set forth in Scripture (pp. 59ff.). He cites two examples from his own work where unqualified elders were appointed who later had to be disciplined and even excommunicated. Again we certainly agree with this. A mission station which lacks men who possess the qualifications for office simply is not ready to be organized. But, and this is important, it belongs to the calling of the missionaries to work diligently toward that end. Classes ought to be provided in which instruction is given in the knowledge of Scripture, the Confessions, Church Polity. In this way men may be trained for the office. That training which is more than mere intellectual instruction must be done by means of the preaching of the Word. Surely the fruit will be that in the course of time men of God will emerge who meet the test of Scripture. In this way the church can be organized.

Nevius warns in this connection: "The appointment of elders should not interfere with the voluntary activities of church members. Rather than encourage such an idea I should postpone their (the elders') appointment" (p. 62). What Nevius wants is that all the converts according to the measure of each one's gifts be actively involved in the work of the church. All ought to be encouraging one another, teaching one another, witnessing to the unconverted, comforting one another, etc. He asserts, "It is not the function of the elder or overseer as such to assume and undertake wholly or mainly the work of the Church, but to encourage, direct, and assist all believers in the exercise and development of their special gifts as members of the one spiritual body of Christ; to set an example of working for all to imitate; to be leaders and captains in Christ's army, ruling, instructing, and directing those who are under their authority and care.

"I am disposed to think that the tendency to make working for the Church the duty of officebearers alone, rather than of all Christians, is introduced by missionaries from the Church at home. There is a prevailing disposition in western lands (around the turn of the century, R.D.D.), noticeable in Protestant communions to an all-pervading spirit of ecclesiasticism. The Church is regarded as an organization under the direction and superintendence of its proper officer or officers, whose function it is, for and on behalf of its members...to undertake and administer all church matters. A Church member has a quieting sense of having discharged his duty if he has contributed generously towards building a suitable church edifice and the support of a preacher, is always found in his place as a worshipper, and attends to the prescribed rites and observances

of the Church. This spirit, wherever it is found, tends to formalism both in the clergy and the laity. While it is far too prevalent, and it is to be feared growing so, we may well rejoice that it is by no means universal. There are not a few churches in which the main work of the pastor is to keep all under him at work. In such churches you will find individual growth and church growth, joy in God's service and influences for good extending to the ends of the earth" (pp. 63, 64).

It is a bit difficult to react to this statement. Believers who are not officebearers certainly are to be more than mere financial contributors to the cause of Christ and passive worshippers on the Lord's Day. Officebearers must not rule the church in such a way as to inhibit the calling of believers who are prophets, priests, and kings in Christ. But this is precisely the point! It is not the office of elder which is to be blamed nor does the fault lie in appointing qualified men too hastily. The troubles must be the *misuse* and *abuse* of the office. On the other hand we take issue with the statement: "...the main work of the pastor is to keep all under him at work." The main work of the pastor is to preach the Word. This is something long forgotten in our day in much of the church. Pastors have become professional counsellors and ecclesiastical administrators rather than *serious students of the Scriptures and preachers!*

God knows what is best for His church as it exists and is called out of every nation. What the church needs is preaching. Missionaries must preach first of all! This must be the main burden of their task. Missionaries must seek to find and educate sincere converts for the ministry of the Word. The church in India needs an Indian preacher, the church in China needs a Chinese pastor. The church also needs discipline. Believers, whether born and reared in the faith or recent converts, have to fight the old nature daily. For this reason God in His mercy has given elders to His church. These must "shepherd the flock" and "take the oversight thereof" (I Peter 5:1-4). The elders must guard the flock from all false doctrine and ungodliness. They must exercise the keys of the kingdom. Missionaries must prepare qualified converts to serve the church in this office. Those who are poor need deacons who will dispense to them the mercies of Christ and speak to them "comfortable words from the Scriptures."

In no way will all of this prevent the believers from being active in the church. In fact it will have exactly the opposite effect. Preachers, elders, and deacons faithfully serving the church by the grace of God will cause the church to flourish and grow. Believers will be living witnesses of the Gospel. Husbands and wives will know their callings with

respect to one another. Their marriages will reflect the mystery of Christ and His Bride, the church. Parents will faithfully instruct their children according to the demands of the covenant. The believers will visit one another in their sicknesses and other trials, pray for one another, rejoice with those who rejoice and sorrow with those who sorrow. Thus bearing one another's burdens they will fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2). None of this blessed fruit will be evident apart from the preaching of the Word, the proper administration

of the Sacraments, the exercise of discipline, and the ministering of the mercies of Jesus Christ. Once more, to this end the missionary must labor. In this great work he will be following the example of the Apostle who confessed: "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:20, 21).

Report From Singapore

Rev. Arie den Hartog

By the time this article appears in print almost a half a year will have gone by since we had opportunity to visit some of our churches on our furlough. It was a real joy to be back in the U.S.A. for a while and to be able to speak on the Lord's work here in Singapore. We were much encouraged by the evident interest and excitement about the mission work in Singapore that we found among our people. We trust therefore also that you will be interested in hearing again about the progress of the work. It is proper that you should be interested since the work which we by the grace of God are doing here in Singapore is the work which the Lord has given to our churches as a whole. We are sent out and supported by you and labor on your behalf. We hope that our reports in the *Standard Bearer* will give you a sense of the reality of this.

The Lord continues to bless His work and His church here in a most unusual and wonderful way. Surely there are also hardships in the work. The saints here are by nature sinners, even as saints are in the U.S.A. There are disappointments. There are those who come to the church for a time and then suddenly fall away again. There are also members of the church who struggle with sins in their lives and they need to be admonished. Probably the greatest problem we continue to face is the one of young men and young women seeking partners outside of the church. This often causes great sorrow and grief when relationships have to be broken for the Lord's sake and when great sacrifices have to be made. These situations usually require a lot of pastoral labors on the part of the pastors and elders of the church. We say all of the

above because we do not want to give the wrong impression in our reports that the church situation here in this respect is different from that in our home churches in the U.S.A. The wonderful thing however is that the Lord prospers and blesses His church in the midst of all her weaknesses and sins. We witness some of the most wonderful evidences of the Lord's blessing when He delivers and preserves His people from their sins and when He abides faithful when we are often so weak and sinful.

On the positive side the Lord causes His church here to continue to grow and increase both in numbers and in the knowledge and conviction of His Word. For the church of Jesus Christ the Lord's Day is always the great high point of the week. On the Lord's Day we now have two regular worship services. In the morning we have a worship service at our regular meeting place in the kampong on River Valley Road. This place is usually called here RVO. It received this name in the early days of the Bible society and stands for River Valley Outreach. At the morning worship service the attendance averages about 150 people. One of the most significant developments lately at this worship service is that we now have regular preaching according to the Heidelberg Catechism there. We, as your missionary family, are especially happy that the session has agreed to this type of preaching. It is true that the church must be instructed in the doctrines of the Word of God in a systematic way and she must learn and know her creeds. This, by the grace of God, will make the church strong. In the evening of the Lord's Day we have a second worship service

in another location in Singapore called Toa Payoh. This worship service is held at a premise that is rented from a Presbyterian church. This service is specially orientated for mission work in this area of Singapore. The location of this place is very good since it is right in the midst of one of the largest housing estates in Singapore. That means there are literally thousands of people living within short walking distance in row upon row of high apartment buildings. The church is actively engaged in mission work in Toa Payoh, trying to get new people to come to our worship services there. The sermons preached there are usually more simple and basic so that people who have never before heard the Christian faith can understand them. Many of the members of E.R.C.S. are actively involved in going through the housing estate to encourage people to come to the worship services. This, we are experiencing, is hard work. It is more difficult than encouraging people to come to the morning worship service at RVO. Presently attendance at the Toa Payoh Mission averages between forty and fifty. Most of these people are members of our church but we also rejoice to see some new people coming from the immediate area. The objective of this work is to preach the Reformed Faith in Toa Payoh and ultimately, the Lord willing, to establish another church there. Presently Pastor Lau and I are alternating preaching at RVO and Toa Payoh. I am sure that many of you would be quite eager to join one of our worship services and especially one where Pastor Lau was preaching. We would of course like it very much if you could. Most of you will have to be satisfied with this report. Pastor Lau is developing into a very good preacher. It is a thrill to hear him preach the Reformed faith which we so love and to hear also the evident influence of our Seminary in the U.S.A. in his preaching.

In addition to the two worship services on the Lord's Day we also have three "house churches" that meet in the evening in various locations in Singapore. These are small groups of the members of the church who gather together for Bible study or for listening to tape-recorded messages. We have told you about these before. These "house churches" meet the needs of people who would have great difficulty in coming to the Toa Payoh Mission for various reasons. Because of the smaller size of these groups they also enjoy rich and close fellowship, and as such can serve for great encouragement to the members of the church.

On the Lord's Day we are again having pre-baptism classes for those seeking baptism and membership in our church. We rejoice to see about sixteen young converts coming to these classes. Pastor Lau is teaching these young people from the

Heidelberg Catechism. In a short while they will be ready for baptism. This class has been going since last November. This class meets at our apartment because of lack of facilities at RVO.

One of the most exciting things going on in the church presently is the spate of weddings coming up. Within the next several months we will have eight weddings. All of these weddings are between members of our church. What a joy to see this. The Lord continues to raise up Christian homes in our midst. By the time all of these young couples are married we will exactly double the Christian homes of our church. Pastor Lau and I are sharing the opportunities of officiating at these weddings. Actually, all of these weddings will be solemnized by the state and confirmed in the church. According to the last word from the government, Pastor Lau will not be able to get a license to marry until we have at least 350 members and a church building of our own. The weddings in E.R.C.S. are very large occasions because all of the members of the church are usually involved. They usually include practically a whole day of festivities ending in the evening with a large wedding dinner.

We received good news from the Singapore government recently. They finally approved the registration of our church. We had been trying to obtain this approval ever since the institution of the church. We experienced some difficulties because of the objection of the government to certain sections of the constitution of the church relating to limiting voting and the holding of office to the male members of the church. They finally did approve even these sections of the constitution. Now that we are officially registered with the government the running of the business of the church will all be so much easier. I cannot go into all the details of this but let me say that there are great advantages to being registered with the government as a church.

We are looking forward to sending another brother from here to our seminary in the U.S.A. for ministerial training. This brother is from an Indian family. His name is Jaikishin Mahtani. For the last year Pastor Lau and I have been preparing Jaiki for seminary by giving him some instruction in what we in the U.S.A. would call pre-seminary courses. We hope that by doing this his stay in the U.S.A. will be shortened. Jaiki will be marrying a Chinese girl who is a member of our church, Peh Gek Hong. They will together be going to the U.S.A., the Lord willing, some time in July. Many of you will probably have opportunity to meet them. According to plans they will be in the U.S.A. for three years.

Let me conclude with a few things about our family. We now have four children in school. Because of the fact that schools here operate on a shift

basis two of our children go to school in the morning and two in the afternoon. That means a lot of disruption of the family life schedule and it seems we are either sending off or picking up children all day long. They all seem to enjoy school and are progressing well. Sherry is busy among other things with practicing her organ playing, since she has been asked to play for almost all of the coming weddings. These weddings will all be held in borrowed churches since we do not have proper facilities for them at the kampong. We have some budding or-

ganists in the church but as yet none who are able to play for weddings. Our home continues to be a busy place. We regularly have seven meetings a week here besides "pre-seminary classes," and many times people from the church come for counseling or just for social visits. In all things the Lord blesses us and sustains us in His grace and mercy. Our work is a great joy and filled with excitement. We covet your continued support through prayers and letters.

FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

Nicene Creed

Rev. James Slopsema

Article 1 (cont'd)

After confessing that the one true God is Maker of heaven and earth, the Nicene Creed adds the phrase "and of all things visible and invisible."

This expression appears only once in Scripture, in Colossians 1:16. Here the apostle Paul writes, "For by Him (i.e. Christ) were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, *visible and invisible*, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him."

In this and the surrounding verses the apostle Paul establishes the preeminence of Jesus Christ over all things, especially over the angel world. In 2:18 of this same epistle we find that Paul inveighs against angel worship: "Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels." It appears from this passage that there were those in the church of Colosse that were worshipping angels out of a false sense of humility. They evidently taught that man is too insignificant to approach God directly in prayer but needs the mediation of the angels in heaven. The only way to God is through the angels. Consequently, because the angels were willing to perform this service, or in order that they might be obliged to do so, they were to be worshipped. The apostle Paul here condemns such notions and practices. We certainly do not need to approach the living God through the angels. Nor must we worship them. This elevates the angels far above their God-given place and work in creation. And it detracts from the glory of Christ Who is the sole Mediator between God and man. It

is undoubtedly with this error in mind that Paul in 1:16 proclaims Jesus Christ to be the Creator of all things. This includes those things that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible. These two expressions complement each other. Those things on the earth are things visible; whereas those things in heaven are things invisible. It is especially the latter that concerns us. Those things in heaven which are invisible refer to the angelic world. The angelic world is further described here as thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers. These are the angels from the viewpoint of their various ranks and positions of authority. And the truth that Paul is asserting here is that they were all created by Christ. They were all created by Him and for Him. Certainly therefore we are not to worship the angels at the expense of Christ. Let Christ be exalted by us even above the angels.

This error of angel worship was never really purged from the church. The early church fathers in their writings refer to this same basic evil existing in the church long after the time of the apostles. Thus, for example, the church father Theodoret, commenting on Colossians 2:18 which prohibits angel worship, states, "The disease which St. Paul denounces, continued for a long time in Phrygia and Pisidia." Irenaeus in his work *Against Heresies* (A.D. 182-188) speaks against invoking the angels and directs the church to call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. In turn, Michael, the archangel, was worshipped widely in Asia Minor even as late as the middle of the 8th century.

To the worship of angels was later added the

worship of various saints. The great saints of the past who perhaps suffered martyrdom for the faith were at first remembered and honored by the church. Gradually however they were worshiped along with the angels. This practice of worshiping saints continues even until today in the Roman Catholic Church. Mary and a host of other recognized saints are worshiped. By worshiping these saints and coming to God through them, Rome tells us that we can receive blessings which are not available through Jesus Christ. This is essentially the same error against which Paul struggled, only with a little different twist.

It is doubtful however that this evil practice of angel worship explains the expression that God is the Maker of all things visible and invisible. Were this in the mind of the church as she formulated the Nicene Creed, she probably would have attached this to the confession concerning Jesus Christ.

According to Calvin in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (I, xiv, 3) this phrase of the Nicene Creed was inserted especially to combat the error of Manichaeism. Manichaeism was an outgrowth of Gnosticism, which we have already discussed. Gnosticism had pretty well lost its influence around A.D. 250. It was revived however in a slightly different form in Manichaeism. The founder of Manichaeism was Mani (A.D. 215-277), a Persian philosopher and astronomer, who claimed to be the highest prophet of God and identified himself with the Comforter (Paraclete) that Jesus had promised to send to the church upon His ascension. Mani taught the existence of two eternal kingdoms. There is the kingdom of light which is ethically and spiritually good. Over against this is the kingdom of darkness which is evil. Over the kingdom of darkness Satan and his hosts of devils rule sovereignly. To Satan, especially, Mani ascribed such attributes as eternity and self-existence. This virtually makes Satan divine and places him on equal footing with God Who rules over the kingdom of light. According to the teaching of Mani, Satan made an assault on the kingdom of light. This resulted in the emergence of our present world which is a mixture of light and darkness, of good and evil. Man, for example, was created in the image of Satan but has a strong spark of light. Following the lead of Gnosticism, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are two aeons or spiritual beings who emanate from God. Through these two, God seeks to separate the light from the darkness of this world, to save that which is light and to destroy the darkness.

A complete development of Manichaean thought would reveal that it was a mixture of Persian Zoroastrianism and Buddhism with a gloss of Christianity. In as much as we have set forth the teach-

ings of Manichaeism it is quite evident that this philosophy was completely dualistic. God is the author of all that is good. Satan is the originator of all that is evil. Furthermore, sin and evil are not under God's control. Nor is Satan under the rule of God. Satan and his works of darkness stand eternally independent of God. God and Satan are locked in a desperate struggle the victor in which will gain spiritual control and rule of the world.

Manichaeism became a real threat to the early Christian church, more so perhaps than Gnosticism. This was due in part to the highly organized character of this movement. The Manichaeans were organized into a church structure with apostles, bishops, presbyters, deacons, and itinerant evangelists. Regular worship services were held. Various feasts were held and sacraments acknowledged. This was all of course apart from the structure and worship of the Christian church.

It was to combat this false religion of Manichaeism that the early church added to her confession concerning God as the Maker of the heaven and earth that He is also Maker of all things visible and invisible. Undoubtedly the church selected this phrase of Paul in Colossians 1:16 to emphasize that God is the Creator even of Satan and his hosts. Satan is not an eternal being that stands next to God or equal to God. He is a created being under God. He is part of God's creation. He owes his existence to God. And so it is true of all the demonic beasts of Satan.

In close connection to this the early church also confessed in this first article of her creed that God the Father is the sovereign Ruler of all. This she confessed when she acknowledged that God the Father is almighty. In this first article, the church confessed, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty...." We have seen earlier that the word "Almighty" is better translated "Almighty-One." It is a word which expresses more than the bare idea of power or might. It is much richer than that. It expresses the idea of absolute and sovereign rule over all things. This is not only the root meaning of the word but also the force that this particular word has in the New Testament Scriptures. Repeatedly this word is connected in the Scriptures to God's rule. This is true for example in Revelation 11:17: "We give thanks, O Lord God *Almighty*, which art, and wast, and art to come; because Thou hast taken to Thee Thy great power, and hast reigned."

This sovereign rule of God over all things follows from the truth of creation. If God is the Maker of the heavens and the earth, of all things visible and invisible, it only follows that He also rules over it all. All things depend on Him and are controlled by Him. This is true even of Satan and his hosts. If

Satan is a creature of God, then he stands not sovereignly next to God or independent of God but under God and His rule.

This rule of God over all things is very clearly taught in the Scriptures. God, we are told, works all things after the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11). This rule of God extends certainly to the brute creation. It is God that "covereth the heavens with clouds, that prepareth rain for the earth; Who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains. He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry" (Ps. 147:8ff). God's rule also extends to His rational moral creatures: men and angels. Is not the king's heart in the hand of the Lord? As the rivers of water He turns it whithersoever He will (Prov. 21:1). Nor do the Devil and his hosts stand outside of God's rule. Before Satan could lay so much as one finger on God's servant Job, he needed the permission of God. God's rule even extends over the sin of man. Is it not true that when Herod and Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, assembled together to kill the holy child Jesus, they were only doing that which God's hand and counsel determined before to be done? (Acts 4:27, 28). The Bible knows of no dualism. There is but one God Who rules over all absolutely and sovereignly. This is what the early church confessed when in this first article of the Nicene Creed she acknowledged

that as the Maker of heaven and earth, God the Father is also the Almighty One.

And we too must still confess the same truth today. For the sovereign rule of God is also denied today. We need not look for such a denial among the various religious sects that have arisen of late. Nor need we look to the false religions of the pagans. This denial of God's sovereign rule is prevalent in the Christian church. It is inherent in the Arminianism that has virtually taken over the church. The Arminian has no sovereign God Who rules over all. He certainly does not rule over the heart of man. He can not make so much as one soul believe. Satan fights Him for the soul of every man. And, more often than not, God loses! Sin and evil are not something God uses for the attainment of His purpose and good pleasure. Sin is a reality that God must overcome lest it destroy His purpose. From this kind of mentality also arises the idea that the present sufferings of this world are not of God but of the Devil. God does not send sickness, war, poverty, and the like. Neither does He control them. These are all of Satan.

This smacks of the dualism of Manichaeism. Over against all such errors we with the church of the past must confess our faith in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

GUEST ARTICLE

The Covenant and the Atonement

Rev. K. Koole

In his excellent book, *The Scripture Doctrine of the Church*, D. D. Bannerman makes the following points:

I. "The Gospel" was "preached beforehand unto Abraham," and received by him. The apostle's whole argument with the Galatian Christians, in the third chapter of his Epistle to them, is, that if they do not know Abraham's Gospel, they do not know the Gospel of God's grace at all....

II. The covenant which God made with Abraham and his seed was the very covenant of grace and peace whereby we also, if we are true believers, inherit the promises.... If we are not in that "covenant confirmed beforehand by God," we are not in the covenant at all. (pp. 4, 5)

With this every truly Reformed man agrees. It is because the Dispensationalists have lost sight of

this that their Bible has shrunk to the New Testament, and even that becomes in most of their interpretations outlandishly contrived. But exactly because many in Reformed circles do not consider this covenant made before with Abraham carefully enough, they do not understand the nature of the covenants as fully as they should, nor for that matter the place of the atonement in the covenant. By using the history of the covenant with Abraham, which Paul in both Romans and Galatians uses so extensively, we intend to say a few things about the nature of the Covenant and the place of the Atonement in it.

In Reformed circles the truth of the Covenant has been impoverished because too much attention has been paid to ancient covenantal contracts

between men and direct analogy then made to the covenant of God in His grace with His people. How the insertion of God into the covenantal relationship transforms the entire picture has not received due consideration for the most part. As a result, the Scriptural truth of God's covenant with His people has suffered, especially as it is the most brilliant revelation of God's Sovereign and unmerited grace. In most covenantal explanations there is too much that clings to them of the earthly arrangement, so that to some degree God as the sole worker of Salvation is lost sight of, and to some degree man's doing something that enables the covenant to remain in force is suggested. This must be avoided.

What is accented in the record of Abraham is not a covenant of God with man in terms of a contract tendered by God, consented to by man, with corresponding responsibilities, (however easy the terms might be for man), but what we see is a relationship of abiding friendship into which the Sovereign God out of His own eternal love enters with His elect people, to which relationship God binds Himself without any qualifying clauses. This is a covenant in which the Almighty God *obligates* Himself simply according to His own good pleasure to those whom He in His own good pleasure makes the promises. Almighty God is fully resolved to be forever the God of Abraham and His seed, true Jacob Israel (Gal. 3:14-16), come what may. He so commits Himself to blessing them that He cannot *not* bless them and remain a God of truth. Even after the covenant of the Law at Sinai, which covenant Israel horribly transgressed, this is so. The recurring refrain in the Old Testament is—"Yet for My name's sake...." This is the most important phrase in the whole of Old Testament history. Countless times it alone stood between sinful Israel and their being consumed by God in indignation. "Yet for My name's sake...." (Is. 48:9-11). And what "name" is that? "I am Jehovah, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Of that name God never repents. And it is this alone that carried the Old Testament remnant to the New Testament age.

In Genesis 12 God singles out Abraham to receive the call to leave Ur to go to the land He would show him. In Genesis 15:7 God reveals that it is His avowed purpose to give him the land for an inheritance. It pointed to the Kingdom of Heaven which Abraham's seed is to inherit (Heb. 11:10, 16). How fully God obligates Himself to realize the promise with Abraham is seen in chapter 15. Abraham seeks a seal of assurance that God intends to keep His word. Amazingly, God sees fit to honor this audacious request born of despair. He uses a ceremony, common to that day, whereby men sealed covenantal vows. He passes through the midst of animals slain and cut in half (vs. 17). This served as

the strongest of vows. By the slain animals men said, "So may it be done to me and more also if I fail to keep my word in this covenantal matter." As though His own declaration were not enough (15:1, 2), God condescends to seal His word with this ceremony. "I the Almighty and eternal God will sooner pass through death than fail to keep My word to bless thee and give thy seed the land." God alone passed through the carcasses. He required nothing of Abraham. His word was independent of man. He held only Himself to perform what He had determined to do.

Thus you have the most basic expression of the Covenant. It is not a means leading to God's love, but in and of itself an expression of God's amazing grace and eternal love for an elect recipient and cherished people, according to which He would draw them unto Himself.

In this covenant the atonement, Christ's sacrifice, has a central place. (This is anticipated already by the bloody carcasses.) It must have, because of God's righteousness. That God is resolved to have Abraham's children enjoy His fellowship does not mean that He intends to "jeopardize" His own righteousness by ignoring man's sinful condition and guilty state. That is made plain by the covenant of the Law, which expressed God's righteousness and taught man his sinful unworthiness in painful terms. For there to be communion, there would have to be righteousness.

Significantly, Scripture tells us that the Law, which was added 450 years later, did not annul, make of no effect, the covenant made with Abraham (Gal. 3:17). It did not add conditions which, man being unable to fulfill, would conceal God's previous word of promise. That stood. In fact it is because of the prior covenant established with Abraham that God was obligated (meaning, had graciously obligated Himself) to provide a way whereby the righteousness could be justly worked out and obtained. It is not an arbitrary matter that the covenant of grace was made before the Law was added, before the righteous demands were spelled out. The unconditional promise stood, regardless of the righteous demands of the Law (Gal. 3:17, 18). According to His immutable word He would bless Abraham and His seed, and He would not fail even in the face of Jacob-Israel's transgression.

By the cross-atonement God kept the covenant. It is important to say it exactly that way. We do not say that by the cross God kept *His* part of the covenant, leaving the impression that there remains now something that Abraham's seed must keep if the covenant is actually to be finalized and operate. The cross is not a means whereby God *can* now

work salvation *if* the children of Abraham co-operate and show the necessary faith. Such is to say far too little about the reconciliation worked by God. No, the cross is the event whereby God carries out His covenant vow to Abraham, namely, that He would surely give to Abraham's seed the Kingdom. Through this death and its fruit Abraham's seed passed into the Kingdom. And what seed that is is set forth in Romans 9:6ff; not his fleshly descendants, but those elected to be his spiritual sons.

In the cross you have the amazing spectacle of Immanuel, God with us, passing through death. But, the Son of God dies, not because God has failed someplace along the line, and so the Son must suffer the penalty, but because the unrighteousness of Abraham and his seed had to be paid for, dismissed, and replaced by righteousness, lest it prevent the fulfillment of God's word. Their righteousness had to be worked out. The Law revealed that, and exposed man's inadequacy. And so, according to His promise to Abraham, God accomplished this requirement in His Son. Rather than having His word fail due to His chosen people's sin, He passed through death. And, certainly, that pass-

ing through death could not be in vain. As Christ states in John 6:37, "All that the Father giveth Me shall come unto Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." In accordance with His covenant promises God prepared a Mediator Who as The Seed of Abraham works all righteousness for those with whom God had determined to dwell and to whom He would give the Kingdom.

It must not be thought that, following the cross, the heirs of Abraham still had something to keep and work before the covenant of grace could operate. Christ as the Son of God is The Seed of Abraham also, and in Him the seed of Abraham fulfilled all righteousness. The blood of the covenant is shed that when God by His Holy Spirit calls the elect irresistibly unto faith and repentance their faith is not in vain, but has a God-approved object, a faith that indeed obtains righteousness, righteousness in the One crucified.

It is of God! It is of grace, grace that staggers the imagination and which overwhelms the soul, grace that magnifies Jehovah's name alone as Jehovah Our Salvation.

Book Review

LEARNING JESUS CHRIST THROUGH THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM, by Karl Barth; Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982; 141 pp., \$4.95 (paper). (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko)

This book contains two sections: the first is a series of lectures on the Heidelberg Catechism delivered by Barth at the University of Bonn in 1947; the second is a lecture given in 1938 in a course for teachers of religion on the Schauenberg, near Liestal, Switzerland and entitled: "Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism."

Both sections of the book are really too brief to

be a great deal of use for ministers and people of God who have made the Heidelberg Catechism all but a lifelong study — as is the case within our churches; the material was presented mainly to acquaint those who have little or no knowledge of the Catechism with its contents, emphases, and characteristics.

Nevertheless, there are interesting and fresh insights into the Catechism here and there which can only be of benefit to those who read it. And Barth's own incorrect views (such as his universalism) do come out on occasion in the book.

The book must be read with care and compared with a more orthodox commentary on the Catechism, but it can be an interesting addition to one's library.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The members of the Adult Bible Class of the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church express their sincere Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Ted Miedema in the death of her brother, MR. WIEBE BOONSTRA.

May they be comforted by trusting in the God of all wisdom Who does all things well.

Mr. Bernard Bruining, Pres.
Mrs. Joe Van Drunen, Sec'y.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Adult Bible Class of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church express their Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Case Veldman in the passing of his sister, MRS. WALTER NOORMAN.

We commend them to the care of our Heavenly Father for the comfort and sustaining grace that only He can provide.

Mr. Bernard Bruining, Pres.
Mrs. Joe Van Drunen, Sec'y.

NOTICE

According to the decision of the Synod of 1982, the Consistory of the Hope Protestant Reformed Church of Walker, Michigan, was appointed the calling church for the Synod of 1983. The Consistory of Hope hereby notifies our churches that the Synod of 1983 will convene, the Lord willing, on Wednesday, June 1, 1983 at 9:00 A.M. in the Hope Protestant Reformed Church, 1550 Ferndale S.W., Walker, Michigan. The pre-synodical service will be held Tuesday evening, May 31, 1983 at 8:00 P.M. The sermon will be preached by Rev. J. Kortering, President of the 1982 Synod. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the Consistory before the service. Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Don Lotterman, 1382 Su Lew Dr., Walker, Michigan 49504. (Phone 616/453-6552)

Don Lotterman, Clerk

News From Our Churches

I am glad to receive responses to certain news items. I am informed that "The Reformed Witness Hour has not been on WJBL-FM on Tuesday at 12:30 for a number of years." The same person wanted to know if the Reformed Witness Hour broadcasts over ELWA on a regular basis. ELWA is not one of the radio stations of the RWH. The tapes they receive must be the cassette-taped copy of our broadcasts that Mr. Jake Kuiper sends out every month overseas for the Reformed Witness Committee of Hope P.R.C. in Walker. Rev. Harbach has provided me some useful information concerning ELWA. "Responsible for radio station ELWA is the Sudan Interior Mission, broadcasting gospel programs in forty languages to all parts of Africa and the Middle East and offering Bible correspondence courses to a constituency of some ten thousand." Apparently, they also appreciate our taped sermons of the RWH. May God bless this means of proclaiming His truth.

The Evangelism Committee of South Holland Protestant Reformed Church "will begin broadcasting over station WKDC (1530 AM) in Elmhurst on March 6. This will be a fifteen-minute broadcast at 9:00 A.M. every Sunday morning, on the Fundamentals of the Reformed Faith." Also regarding radio work, the consistory of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church "has decided to continue the broadcast through the end of the year." That would be over WJBL-FM (94.5), at 9 P.M., Saturday.

I will now quote from a report on the Mission Field in Birmingham, Alabama, that Rev. VanOverloop has sent me.

"The greatest development is seen in the spiritual life of those who faithfully attend the worship services. Together we can see ourselves grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and in the knowledge of the God Who sent Him....

"Those regularly in attendance number about twenty-five. Our worship services are at 9:30 A.M. and 6:00 P.M. We are using the facilities of the Baptist Deaf Church....

"Two catechism classes are conducted for children. Of the fourteen who attend these two classes, six do not attend our worship services....

"....Pray that the zeal of the Lord may characterize our lives and conversations. Pray that the Lord of the harvest will give us some of the sheaves He has promised." We wholeheartedly agree with Rev. VanOverloop.

Regarding the missionary labors of Rev. den Hartog, I quote in part from the bulletin of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Wyckoff, N.J. "Rev. den Hartog reports that the E.R.C.S. has finally had its registration as a church approved by the Singapore government. '...This will make the running of the Church go a lot smoother.' Doon Protestant Reformed Church has asked the E.R.C.S. to consider the need for a second missionary in Singapore. The den Hartog's also have a new address 'by government decree' even though they have not moved: Pacific Mansion, 16 River Valley Close #15-22, Singapore 0923...."

By the time this news appears in print, Rev. Heys will have returned to the U.S.A. after visiting Singapore. "We do not intend to come directly but to stop and visit our children in California and Colorado.... Imagine leaving this area at 5:30 P.M. Saturday and arriving in Los Angeles 10:10 A.M. Saturday!" Welcome home Rev. and Mrs. Heys.

Rev. Houck has also been busy travelling. He visited the East in March and then flew out to California to work with Rev. C. Hanko in the Ripon area. They will be working for an indefinite period of time with a group of interested families.

The following quote regarding the instruction of handicapped children in our churches was taken from the bulletin of Faith Protestant Reformed Church. "On March 16th an interesting meeting was held at Hudsonville Church.... The group decided to organize a society to do this. A Committee was appointed to draw up a constitution; another committee was appointed to investigate regulations governing such a venture.... May our Covenant God bless this venture to His glory and benefit of our Covenant seed."

Remember to attend the annual spring lecture at First Protestant Reformed Church, May 5, 8 p.m. Rev. Joostens will speak on, "The Church's Calling in Missions."