

The **STANDARD BEARER**

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

. . . Does the world condemn? Does Satan plague us with his evil whisperings? Do our own consciences rob us of peace, of hope? By faith we must tell the world — and Satan — and even our own consciences: Be quiet I have Christ! I belong to Him!

See "If God Be For Us" — page 458

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MEDITATION

If God Be For Us

Prof. H. Hanko

"Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, Who is even at the right hand of God, Who also maketh intercession for us."

Romans 8:33, 34

Our salvation is complete and perfect! And this is true because all our salvation is the work of God!

This great truth the apostle has set forth in that well-known passage which has sometimes been called, "the golden chain of our salvation." "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate. . . Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He

also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified."

As the apostle contemplates this glorious truth, he asks a series of questions, questions which echo in the hearts of the people of God who ponder this truth with him. What shall we say to these things?

The answer is obvious and clear: If God be for us, who can be against us? But then more questions: Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? Who is he that condemneth? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? And, finally, triumphantly: "I am persuaded that nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?

It would seem to the beleaguered child of God in this world that everyone is always condemning. The wicked world in which he lives condemns him constantly. This is not surprising. This same world condemned Christ — He Who had never committed any sin, but went about preaching and doing good. They condemned Him to death though He had done no wrong. And He Himself warned His people that even as the world hated Him, so also they would hate us. And so it has been throughout all time. The prophets were killed; the people of God were hunted as wild dogs upon mountains; Paul himself experienced the condemnation of the world; the church has been condemned throughout history. Always charges are brought that the people of God oppose all that the world stands for, that they never fit in with the world, that they march to a different drumbeat, that they are misfits in history. And so their place becomes narrower as time goes on and as the world casts out those who confess the name of God. Even the apostle, a few verses later in the chapter, complains, "For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." We might surely respond to the apostle's question: "Why, Paul, how can you ask such a question? All men bring charges against us and condemn us? What can you possibly mean?"

But this is not the whole story. Behind the wicked world stands Satan himself and his host of foul demons who also bring their charges against God's people and condemn them. He is even called in Scripture, the accuser of the brethren. In the Old Dispensation he even had the brazen audacity to come into heaven with his charges. He brought evil charges against Job and he disputed with Michael over the body of Moses, claiming that Moses had no right to be in glory. At every opportunity he stirs up the world to hurl accusations against those who are faithful to God.

But perhaps worst of all, Satan brings his charges and accusations against us in the forum of our own consciences. He never ceases to remind us that we are sinners, and he tries in a frenzy to rob us of all our hope and comfort. He reminds us that we are no better than others, that we sin in all that we do.

And if we try to plead that we do, after all, pray, go to church, give to the poor, he is quick to respond that our prayers are usually mere empty words, that our worship is often lip service, that we give to the poor grudgingly and to be seen of men. How our consciences can themselves accuse us! How we can be robbed of whatever peace and comfort there is by the incessant reminder of our evils which we constantly commit.

These accusations are not empty words either. We have only to take a cursory look at our lives to see that whatever charges may be brought against us, they are usually true.

We have fallen in Adam our head. And we must understand that this involves a state of guilt before God. Before the tribunal of God's justice we are guilty — guilty for what Adam did; and therefore worthy of hell. But we are ourselves sinners as well. We are born in iniquity and come into the world with a sinful nature in which is no good thing. This very nature is God's punishment upon us for our involvement in Adam's sin. It is the just sentence of God's condemnation. And the result is that we multiply our guilt every moment until it is a mountain so high that it reaches to the heavens.

God condemns us! That is the worst of all. God cannot tolerate sin, for He is holy. He cannot wink at sin, overlook it, act as if it does not exist. We may try to dodge the frightening implications of this, but ultimately this is impossible, for we know that God is God, holy and righteous in His own perfect being. He must condemn sin and punish it in His wrath. He would not be God if He did anything less than this.

And so we lie under the penalty of sin, for death is our lot. Every step nearer the grave is God's Word of judgment upon the sinner. And when the grave swallows us up and opens the way into hell, it is only because God punishes the sinner.

What possibly can Paul mean when he dares to stand in the midst of the world and shout the challenge: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? Who is he that condemneth?" We are almost inclined to wonder a bit whether Paul knows the stark reality of life.

Yet the apostle means exactly what he says.

You must understand, of course, that these questions which the apostle asks are really rhetorical questions; i.e., they are questions which have no answers — need no answers; and they need no answers because the answers are so obvious. Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? Who is he that condemneth? Why, no one; no one at all. It is impossible.

Can you understand, people of God, the tremen-

dous power of these questions? Standing in this present world, surrounded by the enemy, plagued by Satan, burdened with a condemning conscience, dying a bit every day, the believer confidently shouts for all to hear: No one, ever, can lay anything to the charge of God's elect. It is impossible. It can never happen. Let anyone come forward with his accusations if he can. Who anywhere, both now and forever, in this world and before the judgment seat of Christ, can possibly bring any charges? None! It cannot be done.

What can be the reason for this?

Fundamentally, the reason is in that simple statement: It is God that justifies.

There are a few truths which are implied in this.

In the first place, other than verses 29, 30 of this same chapter, this is the only passage in Scripture which directly connects election and justification. Whatever, for the moment, justification may mean, it is rooted in the sovereign decree of eternal and unchangeable election. It is, after all, against God's elect that no one can bring charges.

Secondly, the reference both here and in verse 30 is to the truth of eternal justification. In the history of the post-Reformation church there has been considerable controversy, in years gone by, over the question whether justification is eternal or temporal. We need not be detained here by this question. Scripture is clear that justification is an eternal reality. In God's counsel, before the foundation of the world, God's elect people stand before Him as justified. They are never anything else but a justified people.

In the third place, this means that before God the elect are seen by God as without any sin whatsoever, as completely free from guilt, as innocent entirely, as worthy of God's richest blessing. Can you imagine this?

Perhaps the way to understand this the best is to consider the evil plot of wicked Balak and Balaam. Balak, king of Moab, was frightened by Israel and knew that he could not withstand Israel's armies. He understood, in his pagan unbelief, that this was because God fought for Israel. The way to defeat Israel therefore was to persuade God to abandon and curse Israel. To accomplish this evil goal, he hired a wicked prophet of Jehovah to curse Israel. Balaam was his name. You know the history. After one attempt failed, Balak took Balaam to a height overlooking the camp where Balaam could see only the outer edges of the camp where the mixed multitude lived. This was that wretched multitude which was the cause of all Israel's rebellion — and grief. It was Israel at its worst. Surely here Balaam would be permitted to curse. What were the words

which God put in Balaam's mouth? You can find them in Numbers 23:21. Read them and rejoice. "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel." Imagine. That wicked and rebellious people. God sees no iniquity in Jacob. That is the meaning of justification.

Finally, God causes the truth of justification to be preached throughout the world. He wants everyone in this world to know that whatever the world itself may do and whatever Satan may say, He never sees any sin in His people. He causes this to be proclaimed for all to hear, and when Christ comes again, He will announce this as the final verdict of history upon all His elect.

But how can this be? How can God declare a wicked sinner without sin?

We have to know this. How can it be, in the light of the righteousness of God, that we are declared righteous? We have to know this so that we can make this bold challenge of the apostle our own. God is holy. He cannot overlook sin. Yet he declares us to be without sin. How is it possible?

The apostle gives his answer. It is Christ that died! That is the answer.

Christ's death was not an ordinary death, for He died in our place. He died in our place because all our guilt and sin were put upon Him so that He became guilty for us. He assumed responsibility for our guilt and took it all away by His suffering. He went to hell while He hung on the cross so that when He died, all the debt of sin was paid for.

But that is not all. He arose again. Never would our righteousness be accomplished if He had remained in the grave. But when God raised Christ, God put the seal of divine approval upon Christ's work. He was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification.

Now He is in heaven. He rules at God's right hand over all our enemies and over all who condemn us. He rules to bring us eternal salvation and He gives to us all the blessings which He has earned for us by His Spirit in our hearts.

And in heaven He prays for us. Not once in a while does He pray, but every moment, bringing our needs before the face of God, perfecting our prayers, holding before the Father His blood as the perfect covering for our sins.

And so there is a firm ground for this verdict of God that we are innocent, a ground which we appropriate by faith. By faith we lay hold on Christ and make Him our own. And by faith we know then that our righteousness is perfect and complete.

So we can make this daring and seemingly impossible challenge our own. Does the world con-

demn? Does Satan plague us with his evil whisperings? Do our own consciences rob us of peace, of hope? By faith we must tell the world — and Satan — and even our own consciences: be quiet. I know that what you say is true. Oh, how well, I know it. But be quiet. I have Christ! I belong to Him! Now then. Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?

Put your trust in Christ. Do not look at yourself

or at your own works. Do not try to build your hope of salvation upon what you have done. Do not plead your cause by your life of goodness. This will only make your poor and troubled consciences toss about on the stormy seas of doubt and despair. But look to Christ. In Him is all your salvation for time and for eternity.

(Editor's note: Prof. Hanko graciously consented to write the meditation for this issue as substitute for Rev. M. Schipper.)

EDITORIAL

The Pot Calling the Kettle Black

Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

Thus I would characterize the recently published book by Dr. Harry R. Boer, **The Doctrine of Reprobation in the Christian Reformed Church** (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mich.; paper, 86 pp., \$4.50).

As anyone acquainted with recent developments with respect to this doctrine in the Christian Reformed Church would expect, Boer's book is bluntly critical of the treatment which his gravamen against Canons I, 6 and 15 received, of the decision taken by Synod, and of the Christian Reformed stance with respect to the Formula of Subscription. But with respect to the two main propositions of Boer's book, I would characterize it as a plain case of the pot accusing the kettle of being black.

To summarize the thrust of Boer's book I can do no better than to make the following rather lengthy quotation from the preface in which Boer explains "Why This Book Was Written":

The Form of Subscription, the signing of which is incumbent on all office-bearers in the Christian Reformed Church and all professors of Calvin College and Seminary, includes the affirmation that the teachings of the creeds "do fully agree with the Word of God." Those who sign the Forms thus commit themselves "diligently to teach and faithfully to defend" the doctrine of reprobation. In actuality, no teaching in the credal panoply of doctrines is more ignored, suppressed, and enveloped in silence, disregard, and neglect than this doctrine. Why, then, should we be disturbed about its existence? Why not write it off as an antiquated piece of rationalistic theology long since left behind?

We can make no greater mistake than to view the role of reprobation in Christian Reformed theological and religious thinking in this way. While not active in theological expression and pastoral practice, it is dy-

namically alive in the prudential mind of the church. No Christian Reformed minister or professor dares to write about election with the open assertion that there is no such thing as reprobation. None dares to repudiate the doctrine. None dares to say that it impugns God's holiness, love, sincerity, and redemptive concern for the whole of humankind. When the Reverend Harold Dekker, Professor of Missions at Calvin Theological Seminary, clearly implied just this in the *Reformed Journal* in December 1962 and February 1963, he unleashed a storm that did not blow itself out until a synodical decision in 1967, which settled nothing, gave all concerned to understand that the doctrine of reprobation sets limits not only to the efficacy of the gospel but also to Christian Reformed freedom of theological expression.

In 1977 I submitted to the synod of the CRC an official objection to the doctrine of reprobation, challenging its validity. My aim was to show that the Scriptures that are officially adduced to establish the teaching of reprobation in the Canons of Dort do not in fact do so; further, I requested that therefore the doctrine be "excised from or become a non-binding part of the creeds of the Christian Reformed Church." The synod appointed a nine-man study committee to evaluate the objection and report to the Synod of 1980.

This book tells the story of the theological argumentation and the ecclesiastical procedures that led to the unqualified rejection of my petition by the Synod of 1980 and the reaffirmation of that rejection by the Synod of 1981. The story that I have to relate is not an edifying one. In adopting without reservation the report of the three-year study committee and commending it to the churches as an "elucidation" of the teaching of the Canons on election and reprobation, the synod attributed meanings to this teaching that are theologically wholly alien to that carefully crafted creed. In the synodical position reprobation ceases to have its own decretal status and becomes instead an

"aspect" or "facet" of the decree of election. There appears to be no connection between God's eternal decree to pass some people by with his grace and the punishment of eternal death that will be pronounced upon them in the last judgment. Crucial statements in Canons I 15 (the classic statement of reprobation) receive either no attention or distorted attention in the report. The far-reaching significance of the literary structure of Canons I 6 and I 15 is wholly ignored. The report finds the decree of election, on which the whole of its theological case rests, a very imperfect doctrine at best. At the close of its argumentation, by an undeniably clear implication it concedes the central thrust of the objection to reprobation. In the course of these expositions God is made the "deficient cause of unbelief"—in contradiction of the Canon's clear statement that God is "in no wise" the cause of unbelief. Quite appropriately, in the pastoral section of the report the reprobation is in two headings printed as "Reprobation" whereas election in two corresponding headings is printed Election—without quotation marks. And last, but certainly not least, the traditional basis for the doctrine of reprobation is declared invalid, and in its place has become a new scriptural substratum for a doctrine of "limited election."

The questionable character of the study committee report is fully paralleled by the impropriety of the manner in which the synod acted upon it. Eight weeks after the report appeared in the Agenda the Synod of 1980 adopted it. Yet the church as a whole had no inkling of what it contained, nor had the members of synod seen it before the long and complex document appeared in the Agenda. Chapter 4 sets forth in some detail not only the impropriety but the crass illegality of this action, and also the highly peculiar endorsement of this procedure by the Synod of 1981.

It is, I believe, by no means without significance that as of this writing (December 1982) no meaningful exposition of or commentary on the new Christian Reformed teaching on reprobation has appeared in public print. The historic silence and evasiveness with respect to the incriminated doctrine remains in full effect. This, for a denomination that claims to have a particularly insightful understanding of the "full counsel of God," is not a matter of praise.

Consistories, classes, and synods are the appointed stewards of the creeds of the church. But they are *stewards* of them, not owners who may or may not let the church, the true owner, know how they have changed their meaning. This book is therefore written for the church. It is written for the theologically unschooled laity as well as for ministers and professors. The creeds belong to the church as a body of believers, and the Bible was not written for academics but for that same body of the faithful. Therefore theology as reflection on the faith that the church confesses must address that same body. If you who have this book in hand are of clear mind, cherish the well-being of Christ's church, and have appropriated its pastoral instruction, you should be able to read it with understanding. If you who have this book in hand are learned in theology as a minister or as a professor of

theology or otherwise, I invite you to apply your keenest thought and analysis to it, for the subject is large and needs the counsel of the wise as well as the understanding of the unsophisticated.

The doctrine of reprobation, openly incriminated from 1977 to 1980, was quickly and furtively vindicated by an uncomprehending synod and then, by general consent, reconsigned to the limbo of disregard as the favorite Christian Reformed manner of "confessing" it. Since we choose so to "hold" the doctrine, belief in which is alleged to bless the pious with "unspeakable consolation," we cannot but ask whether this state of affairs may be permitted to continue.

There are in Boer's book two main propositions which are closely related.

The first is that in connection with his gravamen against the doctrine of reprobation as taught by the Canons, the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church reinterpreted the doctrine of reprobation in order to rid itself of Boer's gravamen while it nevertheless allowed the Canons to stand unchanged. In connection with this first proposition Boer sharply criticizes the Study Report on his gravamen (and along with it the synodical decision). His criticism centers on such things as: 1) The fact that the Study Report agrees almost completely with Boer's criticism of the Scriptural grounds for reprobation adduced by the Canons. 2) The fact that the Study Report mistranslates Canons I, 15, thus limiting God's decree and His good pleasure solely to the element of preterition in reprobation. 3) The fact that the Study Report places the term *reprobation* in quotation marks. 4) The fact that the Study Report and the synodical decision reduce the doctrine of reprobation to "limited election."

Now with most of Boer's criticism in this regard I agree. I will not rehash that criticism at this time; the reader may recall that at the time when Boer's gravamen was under discussion I criticized the Study Report in many of the same respects as Boer does in his book.

My point is that this is a case of the pot calling the kettle black. Why?

Because Boer (the pot) accuses the Study Report, the Synods of 1980 and 1981, and his denomination (the kettle) of not believing and confessing the doctrine of reprobation as maintained by the Canons of Dordrecht.

The accusation is surely correct.

The moral right to make the accusation, however, is lacking. Why? Because the pot is as black as the kettle: they both deny the Reformed doctrine of reprobation.

Meanwhile, I was happy to note—though this is not the thrust of Boer's book—that Dr. Boer frankly admits that "The true relationship between them

(i.e. the decree of reprobation and the unfeigned call of the gospel—the latter understood, of course, as the free offer of 1924) can only be described as one of flat contradiction. "If this were Boer's thesis, his book would have been profitable!

The second main proposition of Boer's book is an accusation against his church and his fellow office-bearers that they are all violating the Formula of Subscription. This accusation rests upon the ground (undoubtedly factual) that no one is willing to maintain and to teach the doctrine of reprobation as maintained by the Canons of Dordrecht. "The doctrine of reprobation, openly incriminated from 1977 to 1980, was quickly and furtively vindicated by an uncomprehending synod and then, by general consent, recondemned to the limbo of disregard as the favorite Christian Reformed manner of 'confessing' it."

Again, Boer's accusation is undoubtedly correct.

But again, this is a case of the pot (Boer) accusing the kettle (the CRC) of being black. And the pot has no moral right to make the accusation: for it is as black as the kettle. Did not Dr. Boer himself violate the Formula of Subscription by disagreeing, in writing, with the doctrine of reprobation as early as 1965? Did he not violate the Formula of Subscription again when he published his objections to the doctrine of reprobation before he ever presented a gravamen to the Christian Reformed Synod of 1977? And is he not violating the Formula of Subscription by his on-going refusal cheerfully to submit to the judgment of synod, as that Formula requires?

Does this, perhaps, also date back to 1924, when the Formula of Subscription was unjustly used to oust ministers and elders who had in no sense of the word violated that formula?

THE DAY OF SHADOWS

A Comforting Pinpoint of Light

Rev. John A. Heys

If we take the position, and we should, that the introductory words of the book of Esther, namely, "Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus," are God's word to us that the events recorded in the book are fact and not fiction, and that all the incidents in the book happened in the history of this world, we will be able to say with the psalmist in Psalm 75:1, "Unto Thee, O God, do we give thanks, unto Thee do we give thanks: for that Thy name is near Thy wondrous works declare."

On the other hand, if we consider the interesting story that unfolds in the book as nothing more than a story with a spiritual lesson in it, we cannot say that God's name is near in the things written in the book, and that His wondrous works declare that name. For then the book does not speak of God's works and of a real, wonderful deliverance.

Indeed, a superb story is told in the book. Everything fits so perfectly. The right turn of events happens just at the right time. It does read like a story book. It all runs so smoothly, too smoothly it seems, and too good to be true. Yet it is a true story and one that does declare God's name in the wonderful works of God recorded in the book.

Now God's name, we may say, is His self-revela-

tion. It is all that which He reveals of Himself unto us. A man may make a name for himself. It may be a good name. It may be a bad name. God makes no name for Himself but reveals what His name is. He IS His name and eternally was that name. He is Elohim, the Almighty One, and Jehovah the I AM, the Self-sufficient One, the Sovereign One, the Unchangeable One, the Ever-Faithful Covenant God. And all this, and more, He reveals of Himself in His works, and in His Word which records some of these works.

When, however, I stated last time that God's name is to be found in this book of Esther—which many deny—I did not mean that it appears in the sense of Psalm 75:1. I meant that the name Jehovah, His personal name, can be found literally in the book. For in Esther 2:6 we read of those "which had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away." And that name Jeconiah means Jehovah is establishing. Strikingly enough, he is sometimes called Jehoiachin, which also means Jehovah is establishing. The only difference is that the element of God's name Jehovah appears in the first part of Jehoiachin in the Jeho, while it appears in the last part in Jeconiah, in the iah, which is a

contraction of the name Jehovah. Thus also we find in Psalm 68:4 that the psalmist exhorts, "Sing unto the Lord, sing praises to His name: extol Him that rideth upon the heavens by His name JAH, and rejoice before Him." In that context JAH can be no one but Jehovah. And in the name Jeconiah the last three letters can refer only to Jehovah. And so, in the name Jeconiah, God's name does appear in this book as surely as it appears in other books and names as in Isaiah, which means Jehovah is helper; Jeremiah, which means Jehovah is high; Elijah which means My God is Jehovah; Elisha, which means Jehovah is Saviour and many such names ending in iah. And we may be sure that the Jews in the day of shadows, including Esther and Mordecai, recognized Jehovah's name in these names ending in iah. And so as surely as we and our children recognize the name of God literally in such names (to mention only one of a whole series) as Godskind, a name found in the Wellington, New Zealand phone book, and no doubt in many other phone books across the world, and is a translation of the German name Gotteskind—the "i" in kind being short like in "kin," not long as in "kine"—and means God's child; and as surely as we and our children recognize His Son's name in such names as Christchurch, Christian, and Christmas, so surely the Jews recognized it in Jeconiah. We often give it little or no thought, but God's Son's name is clearly there. And God's name Jehovah is clearly in this book of Esther in that name Jeconiah.

Now Jeconiah came from a long line of godless kings in Judah. His father was Jehoiaakim, whose name also means Jehovah is establishing. His grandfather was Jehoahaz, and of both his father and grandfather it is stated in Scripture that they did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. There was one king who served God after the reformation in Hezekiah's day, namely, Josiah, but among Jeconiah's forebears were also wicked Manasseh and his son Amon. And Jeconiah's name did not need to be included in Esther 2:6 to tell us why Judah was sent into captivity. Long before his reign we read in II Kings 23:26, 27 after the good reign of Josiah, "Notwithstanding the Lord turned not from the fierceness of His great wrath, wherewith His anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked Him withal. And the Lord said, I will remove Judah also out of My sight, as I have removed Israel." From that point of view his name could have been left out of Esther 2:6. God—as it were—slipped it in to leave a witness of Himself, but also to tell us something which in a moment I will make plain.

What is more, the inclusion of his name that includes God's name belongs to the matter we considered last time. All things come out of God's

counsel. In that counsel God decreed that a king with this name would reign at the time of the captivity, and that the secondary author of this book would make mention of him when reporting of the captivity. Understand that a king on the throne at that time with a name like Rehoboam, Asa, Ahaz, Manasseh, or Amon, all names without God's name in them, and all kings of Judah, would mean that if his name were recorded here in Esther 2:6 there would be no name of God found in the whole book. God saw to it that there was a reference to Himself in the book, in a unique way for a very significant reason. We, therefore, should not say that the name of God does not appear in the book. Instead we should say, for that is true, NO ONE in the book uses the name of God to speak to Him or of Him. There were some golden opportunities to use His name. There were times that demanded the use of His name to call upon Him in prayer and supplication as well as to render praise and thanksgiving. Instead there is the silence of the cemetery. And though unbelievers will not confess God, He sees to it that His presence is made known, and that for the good of His church as well as for His own glory.

And, really, what mockery that Jews in the day of shadows gave their children names that included God's name when they themselves refused to confess Him. Why give your children names that reminded them of the God you want to forget? Why promote and hand down to your children the name of the God Whom you will not recognize or confess?

But consider that although it seems like such a little and insignificant matter in the whole book to have God's name mentioned in the last part of a man's name, and thus only in passing, we have here the very message of the book: Jehovah is establishing our salvation! He, Jehovah, appears here as only a pinpoint of light in some very dark clouds. But that little pinpoint of light breaking through these dark clouds assures us that behind all that happens, as recorded in this book, is the God of our salvation. He is behind it all, and through it all is establishing our salvation and preparing the way for our everlasting glory.

The element in Jeconiah's name that can be translated as establishing, is translated 86 times in the Old Testament, as preparing. In fact it is translated that way more often than establishing. God is preparing our salvation, and is using wicked, unbelieving persons to do so.

Consider those dark clouds. There is a godless king reigning over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, and that includes every spot on this earth where the royal seed of David lives, and out of which the Christ must come, if there is to be any

salvation for us. There is the king's right hand man, Haman, who has his heart set on killing all the Jews in the realm. These are perilous times!

Then there is that gross apostasy among the Jews who will not use God's name because they do not believe in Him. It is not only dark *for* the church, it is dark *in* that which still calls itself church. And though there was a remnant of believers in Jerusalem and Judea at this time, the books of Ezra, and of Nehemiah especially, reveal apostasy and gross wickedness. And we need that pinpoint of light to assure us that all is well. God is still on the throne and is constantly establishing His church and preparing her salvation.

One thing is sure, however. Even though men will not confess God and will not be faithful witnesses of Him, He is there and remains faithful to His promise and causes to come to pass all that which He in His Son promised to His church.

No matter, also today, what calamity strikes the church, He is there using that calamity for the good of His church. The calamity, the woe, the events that hurt and cut deeply into the flesh were not accidents. They did not occur because He was looking the other way. They were not due to a loss of control for the moment. These troubles all come out of His counsel and are sent in mercy and grace. Always, as is so evident in this book, God is establishing His church. Salvation is being prepared and will be prepared through all the dark days ahead. And we had better be very careful not to take the position that we know better than He does what it takes to establish His church and to prepare a full and free and everlasting salvation.

And we ought to train ourselves to see Him in "little" things as well as in big things, and rest as-

sured that He decreed the minutest detail in our lives and in the events in this history of this world. His Son declares, "Behold I come quickly; and My reward is with Me to give every man according as His work shall be" (Revelation 22:12). And it is only because we do not know all the details of what He must do to appear on the clouds of heaven, we are in danger of accusing Him of slowing down. Nothing is further from the truth. One of those details is that the measure of iniquity must be full (I Thessalonians 2:16 and II Thessalonians 2:1-4). As that measure is today being filled at a record pace, remember that God has not been dethroned, and in ALL things is preparing our salvation.

Find comfort in that truth, and in the truth that this book was not only written and included in the canon of the Scriptures, but that it has been preserved for us today—in spite of a host of enemies who desire to destroy it and us—in the end of the ages. Many there are, not simply one Haman, who would destroy the church and all the true doctrines of the Scriptures. If we do not go along with them, they are out to get us. If we do not join them and give women equality in the offices in God's church, we will be accused of discrimination and our church doors will be closed, if indeed the churches themselves are not taken away and given to those who will teach man's philosophies. All is being prepared to silence us and all who hold to the truth of the Word of God.

But read Esther 2:6 thus for your comfort, "Who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity which had been carried away because Jehovah was preparing salvation and establishing His church." And remember that truth in the days when the Antichrist will not let you buy or sell, in order to silence you and get rid of the church.

IN HIS FEAR

The Distinctive Traits of the Godly Home (II)

Pastor Arie Den Hartog

The Christian home must be characterized by a certain orderliness and discipline. God Himself in His Word has set forth the order that should characterize the godly home. There is first of all the order of the relationship of husband and wife in that home. Many are the forces of the devil and of the ungodly world that seek to destroy this order.

All through the ages men have lived in wicked tyranny over their wives. Especially recently the godless woman's liberation movement has sought to overthrow the order of God for the home. Nevertheless in the Christian home it must be different. There the husband is still the head of the wife and over the family. In the Christian home the husband

does not use this position to abuse and mistreat his wife and to gain his own wicked and selfish ends or to boast in his own strength and glory. The husband in the Christian home rules over his wife in love and for her good. He rules her to lead and guide her in the way of God's righteousness and truth. The husband is the head of the wife to nourish her and keep her, to protect her and provide for her in love. The wife in this home is not rebellious and self-seeking. She submits to her husband for the Lord's sake. She is selfless and gives her self to serve her husband and family in love. This is a beautiful and blessed order. It serves for the good of the whole family and the glory of the name of God. In this God-ordained order both the husband and wife are able to realize all of their potential, using all the gifts which the Lord has given. Both the husband and wife find satisfaction and fulfillment in this order. There is no need for either to seek to "liberate" themselves from this order. There is no better order. The world's order in which the vain notion of a democracy between husband and wife is sought is more blessed neither for the husband nor for the wife.

The order of the godly home is also that the home is the place for the woman. In that home she brings forth children according to the command of God. The order of God for the godly woman is to be a keeper of the home. She is to keep the home for her husband and her children. She is to devote her life to this. She is to use all the gifts that God has given to her unto this end. This too is a beautiful and blessed aspect of the godly home. In this order the wife and mother finds her glory in the sight of God. The mother does not find glory in forsaking her home for a career in the world. Doing this she disrupts the God-ordained order of the home, she leaves her children to fend for themselves, to go unrestrained and undisciplined and uncared for. This will have terrible consequences for the godly Christian home. The godly home is the home where mother is faithful to her calling and loves her husband and her children and serves them. She does not care for what the world may call glorious and what the world may despise. She knows that all that matters is her standing with God. How different the home of the godly is in this respect. How many homes are losing their true Christian character because wives and mothers think it more rewarding and more glorious to be out in the world. How foolish and sinful these women are and what disorder and confusion they will bring to their homes.

The order of the Christian home involves the proper discipline of children. Children in that home are taught to honor their parents for the Lord's sake. Children there are taught that disobedience is

a great sin in the sight of God. The permissiveness of the world in the rearing of children does not characterize the true godly home. There is discipline in that home, discipline that is firm and has as its goal the correction of the children and the leading of them in the way of righteousness and obedience. This is love. Whom the father loveth he chasteneth and correcteth. Greater love is this than all the world's foolish and evil philosophy of leaving a child to develop on its own. In the Christian home it is known that children are conceived and born in sin. If left to go their own way they will most certainly go into the way of great sin and wickedness. It is clearly understood that real genuine concern for children in the godly home means admonition and discipline. In the home of the godly, children are taught that indeed discipline is love and concern. They grow up really to appreciate this. They grow up to live an ordered and disciplined life according to the Word of God.

The godly Christian home is characterized by spiritual-mindedness. By this we mean two things. By spiritual-mindedness we mean holiness and separation from the world and all of its evil lusts. By spiritual-mindedness we mean what is the opposite from worldliness and carnality. Because of this spiritual-mindedness the evil corruption and the abomination of the world is kept out of the godly home. The book shelves of this home are not filled with the filthy, dirty, immoral books of the world but with wholesome and genuinely Christian books. The ungodly beat of rock music and strains of the world's music are not heard in this home. Rather one hears the singing of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs of praise and thanks unto the Lord. If there is a television at all in the Christian home it is very seldom on because it is known that much of the programing that is shown on it is an abomination in the sight of God, filled with the wickedness of violence, adultery, and murder. Such things cannot serve for the edification and entertainment of the true Christian. Furthermore, as the world adds its new inventions to the television it only increases in becoming an instrument for the propagation of the great evil and abomination of the world. I am thinking for example of the advent of the videotape machine. It now has become possible for the world to watch a wider range of wicked and evil movies in the privacy of their own home where it is thought that none will see and know. But God sees and knows and judges. The Christian home must be far from all of these things. This becomes increasingly more urgent as we approach nearer to the end of the world.

The godly home is not a place where one finds riotous living, drunkenness, gambling, and wild parties. In times gone by, these things were con-

sidered by most Reformed Christians to be great evils. Today many Reformed Christians open their homes to this awful worldliness and seek somehow to excuse themselves from the holiness and separation which the Lord requires of His people.

The godly home is spiritually-minded also in the sense that materialism does not reign there. It is possible that one can find much difference from one home to the next as far as the amount of earthly possessions each has. Neither is this wrong. It is certainly in the providence of God that some of us are more wealthy than others. The home of the godly however is not a place where material things, the riches of this world, are worshipped and sought as an end in themselves. The family in the Christian home is not ruled by greed and lust and covetousness. Material things in that home, whether there are few or many are always seen as being of only secondary importance. If the Lord in His providence gives much material wealth to the Christian home then the Lord is humbly thanked and there is an earnest desire and purpose to use all material wealth only in the service of the Lord and for His glory. If on the other hand the Lord gives only few material possessions to the godly home, then there is contentment and satisfaction with whatever the Lord has given. Perhaps one of the best tests of whether materialism is present in a home is how much that home is willing to give and sacrifice for the church and kingdom of God.

In the center of the godly home stands the altar of the Lord. We are very much struck in Singapore by the heathen homes here, how the altars to the heathen idols occupy the center and the absolutely most prominent place in those homes. The most obvious thing of the pagan home is that it is a home of pagan worship. How much more ought it to be true that the most obvious thing of the Christian home should be that it is the place where the only true God of heaven and earth and His Son Jesus Christ is worshipped. The altar in the Christian home is spiritual, for the God Who is worshipped there is Spirit and Truth. The altar in the Christian home is the place where the family gathers for the worship of God and the praise of His wonderful and blessed name. The altar of the Christian home is where many prayers are offered as sacrifices of praise unto the Lord. The Christian home is a place where one hears many songs exalting the name of the Lord and giving thanks unto Him. Morning by morning, prayers of thanks are heard in that home for the newness of God's mercy, for life and breath and health which are all known to be the gracious gifts of God. At that same altar of the Lord many supplications are made for the grace and blessing of the Lord, for it is understood in the godly home that we are absolutely dependent upon that grace of the

Lord for all of life. Routinely the whole family gathers together at that altar. The father of the Christian family is there heard to lead the whole family in prayer. The prayers that are heard there are not mere ritual repetitions of stock phrases. The prayers that are heard there are sincere and genuine and proceed from the heart. The family is prayed for specifically by name. All the affairs of the home are prayed for day by day. No significant decision is made in the godly home until it is first committed to the Lord in prayer. It is through the constant prayers at this altar that the Christian family is seen to get all of its spiritual strength and blessing from the Lord.

Sins are dealt with in the Christian home. They are not just ignored or left to stand. It is clearly understood in the Christian home that all sin is awful. It is awful first of all because it is committed against the holy and righteous God of heaven and earth. It has most dreadful consequences because it brings upon the home the displeasure of the Lord and separates the Christian family from the blessings and fellowship of the Lord. Therefore sin is confessed in deep and sincere repentance before God. Sin in the Christian home is daily brought in prayer to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. Every one of the sins of the Christian home are brought there. They are brought there specifically and repeatedly until forgiveness and cleansing have been found. There are times in the Christian home when one hears weeping because of the awfulness of sin. There are also times when one hears rejoicing because of the blessedness of forgiveness and righteousness in Christ.

Sin is also dealt with in the Christian home when it involves the members of the home with each other. In the home of the ungodly, sin is allowed to stand. It is allowed to increase more and more. Such refusal to deal with sin brings bitterness, division, and hatred in the home. That increases more and more until it ends in divorces and broken homes and all kinds of terrible misery and judgment. When members of the Christian home sin against each other they confess their sins one to another, they forgive one another. Reconciliation is brought about and peace again reigns. Children in the Christian home are taught also to confess their sins to each other and before God. By nature, children are prone often to quarrel with one another. Parents in the godly home repeatedly admonish their children concerning the sin of this and exhort them to confess their sins to each other and before God.

The godly home is a place where the Word of God is obeyed. The Word of God is read in that home regularly. All the affairs of that home are ordered according to that Word of God. This too makes the home of the godly so entirely different

from the homes of the world where there is rebellion against God and a continual ignoring of the demands of the Word of God. The Word of God is very really the standard and rule of the godly home. Daily wisdom and guidance are sought from the Word of God. How beautifully this is described in Deuteronomy 6:7-9: "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates." Out of the Word of God the family reads of the wonders of the Lord, of His glorious and blessed attributes, of the great and mighty deeds that He did in the days of old, of His unchangeable faithfulness to His covenant and especially of His wonderful works of salvation in Jesus Christ. All of this causes the Christian home to put its trust and hope in God.

The godly home is characterized by trust in the Lord. This trust is especially evident when troubles and trials come to the Christian home. It is evident when there is sickness and death in the Christian home. None of this brings despair to the Christian home. The Christian home is where the Lord the Almighty God is. He is the eternal refuge of that home and under that home are the everlasting arms of the Lord. This is known in the Christian home and therefore there is peace and security there.

The godly home is characterized by contentment with the Lord. One does not hear there complaining and murmuring against the Lord. One does not find there dissatisfaction with the troubles and trials of life. Even the most severe of hardships and the

greatest of earthly wants are endured in the Christian home. For it is known there that God works all things for good for them that love God. It is known there also that this life on earth is temporary and there is a hope and expectation of the glory and blessedness of the life to come. Therefore the Christian family can endure the present sorrows, knowing that they are but for a moment and that they all work towards bringing us to glory.

Finally, the Christian home is characterized by joy. There is first of all a joy in the Lord. God is known in all of His goodness and blessedness in that home. His wonderful salvation has been experienced in that home and its final and perfect realization in heaven is looked for. This is the source of the great joy of the Christian home. Therefore one often hears singing of joyous songs of praise and thanks unto the Lord in that home. The godly home is the place of joy also because there is great joy when God's people by His grace faithfully perform their calling. There is great joy when children who have been faithfully instructed by their parents grow up to fear and love the Lord. Much could be said about this too but our space is running out. There is no better way to conclude the discussion about this aspect of the Christian home than by quoting the beautiful versification of Psalm 128 that we have in our *Psalter*. "Blest the man that fears Jehovah, walking ever in His ways; By thy toil thou shalt be prospered and be happy all thy days. In thy wife thou shalt have gladness, she shall fill thy home with good, happy in her loving service and the joys of motherhood. Joyful children, sons and daughters, shall about thy table meet, olive plants, in strength and beauty, full of hope and promise sweet."

GUEST ARTICLES

Separation or Isolation

Pastor Wayne Bekkering

The calling of the child of God to live a holy and a spiritually separate life is very difficult. There are the extremes on either side that must be avoided. On the one hand there is the extreme of living along with the world in its lusts. On the other hand there is the extreme of seeking to flee the world in the physical and local sense of the word. After we have identified the two extremes we still have the rugged and toilsome way in which most of our battles are fought. The way to which God calls us is blessed,

but not easy. Let us consider this subject, following the division mentioned above, first looking at the extremes, and then considering the way of our calling.

The extreme of living along with the world in its lust is a very attractive way. Let's be honest about it. But can we justify such a course? The Word of God is very clear: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all

that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (I John 2:15-16); "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? 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); "And be not conformed to this world but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:2).

One may say that all this is true, but don't we have a calling to let our lights shine, and to be witnesses of God in the world. We ought to be strong enough to stand against the temptations of the world. A true and wise soldier of Christ, however, will not reason that way. A true and wise soldier knows himself and the enemy. He knows that even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of the new obedience. He therefore prays for God's help in temptation because he knows that he is so weak in himself that he cannot stand for a moment. He will not pretend to be wiser than God Who has prepared a place for His people so that they can be in the world without being of the world. That God-ordained place for His people is Zion, the church. There is the safety of God's people. That is the camp of the saints; the place from which God's people wage war against the enemy. A true and wise soldier does not believe himself so strong that he can leave the camp of God's people and go right into the camp of the enemy to fight against them. What would happen to such a soldier? Quickly he would be overtaken and be bound in the enemies' camp. Then what would become of his boast of strength and of his light and witness?

A true and wise soldier of Christ will soon learn how important the church is to him in the spiritual battle. It is for him food for his soul. It is the repository of all the spiritual armament that he needs. The church is the source of his strength both from the defensive and the offensive point of view. If the Christian soldier forgets this or becomes enamored with his own strength, immediately he is in a very weak and vulnerable position. When I am strong (in myself), then am I weak is the converse of what God's Word teaches in II Corinthians 12:10.

The opposite extreme of living along with the world in its lusts is world-flight, in a local and physical sense of the word. World-flight is the attempt to achieve a holy life by isolating oneself from the world. For the child of God there is a strong attraction to such an idea. The principle behind the "isolation for holiness" idea is that if one puts him-

self far enough away from the influences and temptations of the world, that one can escape them. There are many variations of the world-flight mentality, yet all of them hold the possibility of escaping sin and temptation through isolation. Others may not seek to escape sin through isolation yet are seeking an easy and simple way to a holy life. The hard fact is that there is no easy way to holiness.

In the Middle Ages and before, there were the monasteries and other places of seclusion. These were vain attempts to flee the world and achieve a higher holiness. The experiences that Martin Luther records of his time in monasteries shows the futility of that way of life in the pursuit of holiness.

Later came the various Anabaptistic world-flight movements such as the Amish, Hutterites, Mennonites, and others. These movements have continued up until the present with little modification of their basic presuppositions.

The fundamental flaw in all these systems is a wrong view of sin. Sin is viewed by the isolationists as being in the outward act almost exclusively. They fail to understand the effect of the fall and of sin upon the very nature of man. What Martin Luther came to realize in the monastery was that the world was in him.

We must emphasize that the way of holiness for God's church in the world is not in isolation. Jesus, in John 17 prays not that the church be taken out of the world, but that God would keep her from the evil one. It is clearly God's will that the church be in the world, but not of the world. This truth emphasizes the spiritual character of the church's separation from the world. The antithetical difference between the church and the world is not local and physical, but spiritual.

The way of spiritual separation rather than isolation must be chosen as the way of working out holiness for God's people. Isolationism is an attempt to achieve holiness by human strength and therefore carries with it a false sense of security. It engenders a "holier than thou" attitude toward all others. Isolationism takes what truth it has and buries it. It tends therefore to be negative, defensive, and critical. Because isolationism has not the proper understanding of God's truth, it becomes fearful to move forward with the truth. Thus its vigor withers and becomes unhealthy and unproductive. It is as salt that has lost its savor and is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men.

On the other hand, spiritual separation finds its strength in God; and although it is not ignorant of the power of the enemy, yet it has true security. Spiritual separation has a realistic view of itself before God and man and conducts itself in a humble

manner before all. Understanding the great treasure of truth God has given, spiritual separation holds up that truth for all to see. Spiritual separation is open and undefensive because it trusts the power of the truth to silence its enemies. Because spiritual separation is grounded in the Word it has a lively optimism in the promised victory in Jesus Christ. Since spiritual separation has its roots in the truth, it continues to grow and be healthy, and therefore flourishes in the fruit of the spirit which is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (Gal. 5:22-23).

One may raise the point that the Bible in many places commands the child of God to flee sin. I grant that it is so. God says, "flee fornication" (I Cor. 6:18); "flee from idolatry" (I Cor. 10:14); "O man of God, flee these things," i.e., many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition (I Tim. 6:11); and "flee also youthful lusts" (II Tim. 2:22).

Do these commands of God disprove our emphasis that the character of the church's separation from the world is spiritual and not local? Not at all. If you look at these passages in their context you will see that the flight commanded is spiritual and not local. I Timothy 6:11 is a good example to make the point. "But thou, O man of God, flee these things, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness." God doesn't say

that we should follow the way of isolation, but the way of spiritual separation. All of the virtues listed as the way to follow are eminently spiritual. In fact, they are nearly identical to the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5.

The reason why we must approach the battle in the way of spiritual separation and not isolation is threefold. First we have the enemy within us through the old man of sin in our evil natures. We cannot flee the world in the local and physical sense of the word, for wherever we go we carry a world of iniquity within us. Secondly, our enemy is not physical and local. Ephesians 6:12 tells us, for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Thirdly, the weapons that we use are not physical and local. "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds" (II Cor. 10:3-4). The implication here is that if our weapons are carnal then we are weak and can never gain the victory. But the victory in this warfare is ours, as Ephesians 6:10 and 13 shows us. "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

The Promise

Rev. Steven Houck

While the Arminian boasts in the fact that *he* "asked Christ into his heart" and *he* "promised to give his life to God," the Scriptures teach us that salvation is not the result of man's will and works, but it is the gift of the sovereign grace of God alone (Eph. 2:8-9). If we are to boast, therefore, we must boast not in what *we* have done, but in what *God* has done for us and in us. "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord" (I Cor. 2:31). God alone is our Savior.

This becomes even more evident when we consider the fact that we can do *nothing* to save ourselves. We are sinners who are "dead in our trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). Our very wills are held in bondage to sin, so that we can not even *choose* God apart from His grace (John 8:34, 44). If we are to be saved, it must come from God. God's saving grace is our only comfort and hope.

This fact is very beautifully set forth for us in the Scriptural doctrine of the covenant, and more particularly in the *promise* of the covenant. Our hope of salvation is not based upon something that *we* say or promise. It is based upon the *promise of God*. We with the apostle Paul can rejoice in "the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers" (Acts 26:6), for God has indeed made a most blessed promise. He has made a promise to all of His elect people, the church of all ages. A promise so rich and abundant that it encompasses every aspect of our salvation from beginning to end. There is absolutely nothing left for us to do. God has promised to do *all* that is necessary to redeem us from destruction and give to us everlasting salvation. So wonderful is this covenant promise in all of its parts, that the apostle Peter refers to it in the plural and speaks of "promises" that are "exceeding great and precious" (II Pet. 1:4).

That the promise is indeed "exceeding great and precious" can be seen very easily from the Holy Scriptures. They are filled from cover to cover with the promise of God as it is progressively revealed in all of its details and implications.

Consider the promise, first of all, as it was given to our father Abraham, for here we find the very essence of the promise. God said to Abraham, "And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, *to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee*" (Gen. 17:7). God promised Abraham that He would be his God and the God of his seed. Is that not a blessed promise? This is the promise that God will be our *Covenant God*. The promise that He, as our God, will be our Friend and that we, as His people, will be His friends. He will be our God, not as He is the God of all, as their Creator, but in a very special way. We will have a relationship of friendship and fellowship with Him. He is not our enemy. He does not seek to destroy us. He is not filled with wrath and indignation against us. Rather, He is filled with *love* for us. He knows us and loves us as His own peculiar people, chosen by Him before the world was. God takes us up into His own blessed covenant life, that we in a creaturely way may partake of that life. This promise is the promise that God will establish His covenant of friendship with us.

That this promise is intended, not only for Abraham, but also for the new dispensational saint is clear from the fact that the apostle Paul applies this promise to us. Quoting the Old Testament he says, "as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.... And I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (II Cor. 6:17-18). This is substantially the same promise that God made to Abraham. Yet, after having written these words the apostle says to the Corinthian believers, "Having therefore these promises..." (7:1). He applies *these promises* to new dispensational saints. They had these promises and so do we today. The promise of God is fundamentally the same in every age.

It must be seen, moreover, that in this one promise God has promised to us all that belongs to salvation. There are many aspects to that promise, but they are all encompassed in this one fundamental promise — God will be our God and we His people. This one promise implies all others.

It is no surprise, then, that the promise of the covenant includes also the *promise of Christ* as the Savior. Because we are sinners, God can not be our God and we His people apart from Christ. We need

a Savior to pay the price of our sins. We need a Substitute to bear the wrath of Almighty God on our behalf. That Savior, God Himself promised to provide in His own Son, Jesus Christ. The apostle made reference to that fact when he preached at Antioch. He said, "Of this man's seed (David's) hath God *according to His promise* raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus" (Acts 13:23). God Himself raised up Jesus as the Savior of Israel, His elect people, and He did that according to His promise. The covenant promise is the promise of *Christ*.

Thus we see that throughout the old dispensation Christ was promised as the One Who would come in the name of God to deliver His people. The very first promise, the one God gave to Adam and Eve after the fall, was the promise of Christ. He is the promised Seed of the woman Who bruised the head of the serpent on the cross (Gen. 3:15). He is the Seed of Abraham in Whom all the nations of the earth are blessed (Gal. 3:8, 16). He is the promised Son of David Who sits on David's throne and reigns over the house of Jacob forever (Luke 1:32-33). He is the Branch spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots" (Isa. 11:1). He is the promised "Redeemer" Who "shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob" (Isa. 59:20).

As the Redeemer, He is the One of Whom it was promised, "He is despised and rejected of men; a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.... Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.... But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and *with His stripes we are healed*." (Isa. 53:3-5). When God promised Christ the Redeemer, He promised *the cross* and the *shed blood* which redeems us from our sins.

Oh yes, God has promised us the Savior. He has promised not only His death, but also His resurrection from the dead and His exaltation to the highest heaven (Acts 13:32-33). In fact, God has even promised that He is coming again to give to us the perfection and fulness of the promised salvation. When the scoffers asked, "Where is *the promise of His coming*?" the apostle Peter could answer, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness... but the day of the Lord *will come* as a thief in the night" (II Pet. 3:4, 9, 10). Christ is coming again. We can have that blessed hope, because God has promised.

But there is more. For if God merely promised to accomplish for us an objective salvation on the cross and then left it up to us to appropriate that salvation by our own works, we would still be without hope. Such, however, is not the case, for the

promise is so great and precious that it also encompasses the application of salvation to our hearts. The promise of the covenant is also the *promise of the Holy Spirit*.

It is impossible to speak of the promise of Christ without also speaking of the promise of the Holy Spirit. As the apostle says, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law... that the *blessing of Abraham* might come on the Gentiles *through Jesus Christ*; that we might receive the *promise of the Spirit* through faith" (Gal. 3:13-14). Christ received the promised Spirit after His death and resurrection (Acts 2:33) and He poured forth that Spirit as His own Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, upon His church in accordance with the promise (Acts 2:39). Thus through the promised Spirit He applies all of the work of the cross to His people.

In the promise of the Holy Spirit we have the *promise of regeneration and conversion*. Thus God promised through the prophet Isaiah, "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour *My Spirit* (Holy Spirit - S.H.) upon thy seed, and My blessing upon thine offspring: And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses" (Isa. 44:3-4). The giving of the Holy Spirit is like the pouring forth of water upon a dry land. He brings life out of death, He makes the dead desert-like sinner to be as a beautiful lush green garden. This figure is very similar to the one Jesus used when He spoke of Spirit-wrought regeneration. He said, "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14).

It is, however, in the prophecy of Ezekiel that we see very vividly that the promise is a promise of *faith, repentance, and even obedience*. God promises, "And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: *that they may walk in My statutes and keep Mine ordinances, and do them*: and they shall be My people, and I will be their God" (Ezek. 11:19-20). Here God promises that in the giving of His Spirit, He also gives to us all that we need to comply with the demands of the gospel. For when He gives us "an heart of flesh," when He regenerates us by the mighty working of the Spirit of Christ, He gives to us also repentance and faith, so that we walk in His statutes. Faith and repentance, then, are not "Man's part" in salvation. No, we have *no part* in that great work. The promise of God is that *He converts us* so that we comply with the demand of the gospel. He makes us obedient servants who keep His ordinances. He, by the power of the promise, makes us to be His people who walk with Him and

talk with Him, who serve Him and worship Him, who know Him and love Him forever.

The promise, however, does not leave us at this point either, for it carries us all the way to final glory. Thus the apostle writes that we have the "*promise of life* that now is, and of that which is to come" (I Tim. 4:8). We, according to the promise, have eternal life. In fact, it was promised to us in eternity. The apostle speaks of the "*hope of eternal life*, which God, that can not lie, promised *before the world began*" (Titus 1:2). We have that blessed eternal life in principle now and we will have it in all its fulness in glory. *God has promised* to raise us from the dead even as He did our Lord (Acts 26:6-8). Indeed, we shall not remain in the grave. Death has lost its sting. We shall not rot in the corruption of our sins. For we are heirs of the world. We have been called of God that we might "receive the *promise of eternal inheritance* (Heb. 9:15). We, in hope, are waiting for that promised day of the Lord when the end of all things shall come and we shall stand with our Savior and be like Him. As the apostle Peter says, "Nevertheless we, *according to His promise*, look for new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness" (II Pet. 3:13).

Surely then, our salvation is not dependent upon *our wills, our works, our words, and our promises* to God. It is not what we have said that counts. The all-important thing is that *God has promised* it. For if God promises to be our God, if God promises to save us through Jesus Christ in the power of His Spirit, if God promises to give us eternal life and an inheritance in glory, then *He will do it*. Therefore, we by the power of the promise must be like our father Abraham, of whom it is written, "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform" (Rom. 4:20-21). Indeed, we children of the promise have a blessed hope, for our Covenant God is faithful. What He has promised, He will perform.

*The Standard Bearer
makes a thoughtful
gift for the
sick or shut-in.*

The Adoption of Sons (1)

Rev. Ronald Hanko

The word "adoption" is a word which is used only five times in Scripture and all five times in the New Testament. Nevertheless, the concept is found throughout the Old and New Testaments and is a very important and comforting part of the gospel of God's grace. Adam himself is called the son of God in Luke 3:38, and though perhaps his sonship differs in some respects from ours, it is still a sonship by virtue of adoption. So too, one of the most common names given to the saints in Scripture, and which implies the truth of adoption, is the name "children of God" or "sons of God."

In spite of its importance in Scripture, however, this truth of adoption tends to be somewhat neglected. In most Dogmatics textbooks, for example, it is treated in connection with the truth of justification as one of the benefits of justification, and though this may be the proper place to speak of it, it receives there at best a very cursory treatment. Even in our creeds adoption is only mentioned twice, once in connection with the divinity of our Lord Jesus in Lord's Day XIII of the Heidelberg Catechism, where Christ's Sonship is distinguished from ours, and once in Canons V, 6 where, in connection with the truth of perseverance, we are assured that even in our falls God does not suffer us to lose the grace of adoption. Besides these two there are only some indirect references to our sonship in the creeds and nowhere is this truth developed there. Thus this article.

There are two things that must be emphasized in our development of this truth. First of all we must remember that Scripture uses the truth of adoption to make clear to us that our salvation is all of grace. Adoption must be gracious or it is not adoption. Lord's Day XIII connects grace and adoption when it speaks of the fact that in distinction from Christ Who is the eternal and natural Son of God, we are "children adopted of God, by grace, for His sake." It is here too that Adam's sonship is somewhat different from ours. He was first of all a son of God by virtue of his being *created* in the image of God. For us, adoption takes on a new meaning, since we are born in this world children of the devil (John 8:44), "strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). This grace of adoption is also prophetically revealed in Hosea 1:10 where the prophet tells the church "that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God."

The second thing that we must bear in mind in

connection with our adoption is that the use of the word adoption to describe our salvation is not a figure of speech. Sometimes our salvation is described with figures of speech, as in John 15:1-8 where the figure of a vine and its branches is used. Adoption is a reality. If it were only a figure of speech, the most that could be said of us is that we are *like* children of God; but John says, "Beloved, now *are* we the sons of God . . ." (I John 3:2). So much is this true that the earthly adoption which we practice in this life is only a very faint picture of the glorious spiritual reality and falls far short of it. This too we shall see as we look at the testimony of God's Word concerning our sonship and adoption.

In the spiritual reality of adoption there are four steps or stages distinguished by Scripture and each of these can be compared with the earthly shadow. Scripture speaks of election as part of our adoption, first of all. Then the work of Christ on the cross in the second place and the work of the Spirit of Christ in the third place belong to our adoption. Lastly, there is a final glorious revelation of the sons of God in the judgment day. We may say then that our adoption is predestinated from eternity, prepared in Christ, possessed through the Spirit, and perfected in heavenly glory. In election is the eternal reality of our adoption. The work of Christ provides the legal basis for sonship, and that sonship we have a right to in Christ is applied to us by the Spirit of adoption. Finally our adoption is realized perfectly and revealed gloriously in heaven. Those are the four aspects of our adoption of which Scripture speaks.

The grace of God in adoption is revealed first of all, then, in our election. There are two passages of Scripture which are important here: Ephesians 1:3-6 and Romans 8:28-30. In verse 4 of Ephesians 1 Paul speaks of our election, that God has "chosen us in Him (in Christ) before the foundations of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him." In verse 5 he tells us that there is something even more basic and fundamental than our election, and that is the love of God which marks us out (predestinates us) for sonship. In other words, election is God's sovereign choice of some in Christ to be His sons and daughters; but behind this choice lies God's decree that He shall have many sons in His house and that His only begotten Son shall be the firstborn among many brethren. When Paul says, "In love having predestinated us . . ." that love of which he speaks is the love of God the Father *according to which* He

chooses us from all eternity to be His children.

Paul emphasizes the wonder of this in various ways. We must remember first that Paul is speaking to common ordinary people, fathers, mothers, and children, artisans and workers, even slaves, and to them he says, "God has marked you out for sonship from all eternity." And what is even more amazing is that he says this to those whom he describes in chapter 2 as "children of wrath." From every point of view it is a wonder of grace. It is "in Christ." There is no reason at all in us that we should be the sons of God except that in Christ the good pleasure of His will is revealed. It is an amazing wonder in that God takes such as we are and chooses us to dwell in the closest possible relationship with Him; as Paul says, "He has predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself" so that we may dwell with Him, the living God, forever.

This same truth is presented in Romans 8:28-30. Here too Paul teaches that God's purpose to make His Son the Firstborn among many brethren lies behind even our election. The foreknowledge of which Paul speaks in verse 29 is the same as the love of God in Ephesians 1—a love of a Father for His children. That love is the deepest reason for our election. Our adoption begins, therefore, with God's eternal and unchangeable love and with the choice that proceeds forth from that love.

Paul also makes it very clear here that our adoption is no afterthought in God's work. Adoption is not a repair work to restore that which we lost in Adam. It is not a new plan which God made when Adam fell, but our adoption in Christ and the setting forth of Christ as the Firstborn in the house of God is His eternal and unchangeable purpose. From all eternity He determined to lead us to sonship through the deep way of the fall and sin and grace. This is also taught in Colossians 1:15-18, where the Apostle teaches that Christ is before all things as the Firstborn and as the Head of the body, the church. The fall and sin, then, are part of God's plan to lead many sons to glory through Christ the Firstborn, and all for the glory of His Name.

This electing love of God can be compared to the earthly adoption that we know. To make this comparison will help us see the grace of God in our adoption and will show us how much more glorious the heavenly reality is.

Just as in our adoption God's love and God's choosing are first, so it is in the earthly picture. Scripture's testimony is that "We love Him, because He first loved us" (I John 4:19). The earthly picture reflects that. When parents adopt a child, the very first thing they do is go to the adoption agency to choose a child for their own. They do not

choose the child that loves them the most. All the children there are strangers. Their love and their choice is first. And as that love which they bestow and the choice they make is free, so also with our adoption. The child does not choose his parents, but he is chosen even before he can say "my father" or "my mother." So God chooses us to be His sons and daughters without any regard for what we are or what we will be, in sovereign freedom. Thus it is that the glory of the riches of God's grace is revealed. An adopted child has no right to the love and care of his parents before he is adopted. There is no blood tie which he can claim as a basis for asserting his right to a place in their home. He is given those rights by the goodness and good will of those who adopt him. God's children are also without any rights or privileges, not only as fallen creatures, but simply as creatures. Adam, even in the state of innocence, had not any right to God's favor and love. His relationship with the living God was a gift of grace from God and even when he did all that was required of him he was still an unprofitable servant in God's sight—he had not earned anything, neither the right to dwell with God as God's son (cf. Luke 17:10). In the basic character of election, in its freedom, and in its glorious character the spiritual reality and the earthly shadow agree.

Nevertheless, the earthly shadow falls short of the reality. When we adopt children then our choice is not completely free. We are limited in our choice to the number of children at the agency to which we go, and even there we are attracted to one child and not another by something we see in that child. Again, having made our choice and taken the child as our own we may be disappointed. God's choice is completely free in that He chooses us before we are born, before we have done good or evil, nor is He limited to what is available, but sovereignly He determines to create His children in Christ and by the Spirit of Christ, and to create them in such a way that He is never disappointed in them, but forever delights in them.

This grace of God in adoption, then, reaches back into eternity and is a marvellous revelation of the amazing wonder of God's goodness to us. Understanding this, we exclaim with the apostle John: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us that we should be called the sons of God" from before the foundations of the world (I John 3:1a).

Read and Study
The Standard Bearer

STRENGTH OF YOUTH

Our Approach to the Problem of Alcohol (3)

Rev. Ron Cammenga

Last time we listed the "Twelve Steps" of Alcoholics Anonymous. The "Twelve Steps" contain A.A.'s basic approach to recovery from alcoholism. Without going into great detail, we have serious objections to A.A., objections which make it impossible for us to recommend the use, especially the extended use, of A.A. What are these objections?

First of all, we object to the view that A.A. takes of alcoholism, a view that does not regard alcoholism as sin. In the "Twelve Steps" alcoholism is called many things. It is referred to as something that makes the alcoholic's life unmanageable, as taking away the alcoholic's sanity, as bringing injury to others, as a defect of character and a shortcoming. But the "Twelve Steps" come short of describing alcoholism as sin against God.

This failure to view alcoholism as sinful shows itself in all of the A.A. books and pamphlets. In a pamphlet entitled, "A Clergyman Asks About A.A.," this question is asked: "Does A.A. regard alcoholism as a sin?" The answer is given:

As a fellowship, A.A. is committed to no theological concept of alcoholism. A.A. members may be said to be concerned more with handling the problem of alcoholism than with defining it. Within the Society, there is, of course, complete freedom for the individual to express his own viewpoints on this question. Most members regard alcoholism as an illness that cannot be cured but *can* be arrested by alcoholics who honestly attempt to practice the Twelve Suggested Steps in all their affairs.

Very obviously, A.A. refuses to regard alcoholism as sinful. A.A. refuses to take a biblical view of alcoholism, and rather than regard alcoholism as sin against God, regard alcoholism as an illness for which the alcoholic cannot ultimately be held accountable.

Secondly, the God presented by A.A., the "Higher-Power" whose help the alcoholic is to seek, is definitely not the God of the Scriptures and of the Reformed faith. A.A. does profess belief in a god. In several of the "Twelve Steps" mention is made of God and of "God, as understand Him." In "A Clergyman Asks About A.A." we read:

Reliance upon a Higher Power is, however, central

to the success of most men and women who have achieved sobriety in A.A. To many members, this Higher Power is a personal God, to whom they turn for help in achieving and maintaining sobriety. (p. 10).

In *Hope For the Children of Alcoholics* we read:

We don't have to get hung up on God, or imagine Him as a Person. If we can't think of the "Higher Power" as God, we can interpret this step as realizing we don't know everything and other people can help us. The group can be our higher power. If we keep an open mind and really listen for new ways to handle our problems, we will find we won't have to be alone. (p. 13).

For the most part, A.A. does not attempt specifically to define God, or this so-called "Higher Power." His identity is left indefinite. In the "Twelve Steps," after "God" is usually added the phrase "as we understand Him." Yet, in a way, A.A. does in fact define its god. From all the A.A. literature it's very clear that the god of A.A. is not the Sovereign God of Scripture and the Reformed faith, but a weak, helpless, beggar-god who is dependent upon man. He is the kind of God that we conceive Him to be. He is the god of the universalist who loves all men and desires to make all men happy and secure. And above all, He is a god who does not have a Son, Jesus Christ, who saves men from their sins. Never does A.A. speak of Jesus Christ. Because of this false, unbiblical teaching concerning God, we disapprove of A.A.

Thirdly, we object to A.A.'s view of man, which is essentially a Pelagian and Arminian view of man, teaching that a man is saved by his own efforts and his own will-power. In the book *One Day At A Time*, the alcoholic reader is reminded, "I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul," and, "God helps those who help themselves." This Pelagian-Arminian view of man comes out in the "Twelve Steps," especially in Step #3: "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as we understood Him."

Ultimately, A.A. puts the cause for deliverance from alcoholism, not in the sovereign, saving grace of God, but in the power and efforts of the alcoholic himself. Alcoholism is a terrible thing, but not so

terrible that man cannot save himself. Ultimately, the alcoholic is his own savior. On account of this very clear denial of man's total depravity and salvation by grace alone, we cannot recommend A.A.

Besides, in the fourth place, we are concerned about the fellowships and associations struck up through A.A. All different kinds of men and women attend the A.A. group sessions. Many are agnostics, atheists, and humanists. Not only are they not Reformed, but they are outright godless and unbelieving. Attendance at these meetings, we believe, encourages fellowship with unbelievers. These meetings are for encouragement and for mutual support. How is this possible if the majority of an A.A. group are not children of God? It is the testimony of more than one of our ministers that attendance at A.A. meetings, especially by young men and women, was a means to wean these people away from the church, so that they eventually left the church. Because we are concerned with fellowship with unbelievers, we cannot recommend the use of A.A.

Our Approach to the Alcoholic

We cannot use the approach of A.A., we feel. But what, then, must be our approach? Will we approach the alcoholic? Or will we abandon him? We must approach him.

Our basic approach must proceed from our insistence that alcoholism is sin. Oh, this brings out the urgency of our need to reach out and help the alcoholic. Don't you see: alcoholism is sin. That means that the alcoholic is on the road to hell. He needs our help desperately! We **MUST** make an approach to the alcoholic! The officebearers must, the pastor and the elders. So must the members of the congregation. We're not always so ready to do that. We hear about someone's alcoholism and our first reaction is that we have contempt for the brother, we put him at arm's length, and deliberately avoid him and his family. But this is wrong. Just ask yourself: Where would I be if the Lord took this kind of attitude toward me on account of my sins? We must approach the alcoholic.

In our approach to the alcoholic, we must not only recognize that alcoholism is itself sinful, but we must recognize that usually alcoholism is caused by other sins. Usually other sins lead to the sin of alcoholism. The alcoholic is filled with fear, anxiety, is unable to cope with the responsibilities and pressures of life. For some reason the alcoholic is unable or unwilling to face the realities of his life. He cannot handle life. And so he turns to alcohol, the bottle becomes his "enabler," his god. Basically, the sin lies behind his alcoholism in his refusal to trust in God. This deeper sin is especially the sin we must address in our approach to the alcoholic.

We mustn't be concerned only with his alcoholism, but with what lies behind his alcoholism.

This doesn't mean that there is no place for a treatment center for alcoholics. I believe that there is such a place, even an important place. But I believe that their use should primarily be for what is technically called "detoxification," that is, for getting the alcoholic sober and free from his physical dependency on the alcohol. He must be "dried up," after all, before you can bring him God's Word and before he's in a condition to receive instruction from God's Word. In my own mind, I've thought of it like this: Suppose a promiscuous fornicator, a whoremonger, comes to me for help. As a pastor and as a Christian, I'm called to help that man. But the help that I give the man is spiritual help, instruction out of the Word of God concerning a holy life. But for this man's venereal disease, I send him to the doctor. As a minister I *can't* treat his venereal disease, and it's not even my calling. For that aspect of the problem he needs a doctor. The same applies, I think, to alcoholism. This sin, too, has consequences in our physical life. For those consequences the help of a treatment center may legitimately be sought. But for what is the root of the problem, the sin problem, what is needed is the Word of God. And since it is the church which preaches and teaches the Word of God, the place where we must seek help for alcoholism is in the church.

We must bring to the alcoholic the Word of God, the whole Word of God. First, we must bring to the alcoholic the Word of God concerning his sin. We mustn't be afraid to confront him with his guilt. For God exactly uses the conviction of the guilt of our sins to bring us to repentance. Secondly, we must speak to him the Word of God concerning God's grace in Jesus Christ for the repentant sinner. We must speak to him of the blood of Jesus which is able to cover any and all sin. And finally, we must bring to him the Word of God concerning a thankful, holy life.

In this way our approach will be an approach that brings about reconciliation between the alcoholic and God, as well as between the alcoholic and the church. The church must receive the repentant alcoholic with open arms. It's a shame, a dirty shame on us that the recovered alcoholic has to go to A.A. for fellowship and encouragement because he can't find it in the church. We must be the kind of people who receive the repentant alcoholic and who stand ready to assist him and encourage him in his life-long struggle against this besetting sin.

Let it be emphasized that our approach to the alcoholic must be a humble approach. We must

never approach the alcoholic with a holier than thou attitude. But we must approach him humbly. That means that we must approach him in the consciousness that we ourselves are sinners, the chief of sinners. His sin is not foreign to us. The apostle points this out to us in I Peter 4:3: "For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when WE walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries." We are given to excess of wine. This is our nature, too. And if you don't know that about yourself, you don't know the depravity of your nature. The alcoholic's sin is our sin. We too are those who do not trust in God, who

often are driven to despair because of the problems and trials of life. What causes him to turn to alcohol, causes us to turn to other things. We know his sin in our own experience. Because we do, we approach the alcoholic humbly. We don't point the finger at him, but together with him we go to the cross and with him beseech forgiveness in the blood of Christ. We may be confident that this approach will be blessed by God. James puts it like this in James 5:19, 20: "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

Book Reviews

THE FAITH OF THE CHURCH, A Reformed Perspective on its Historical Development, by M. Eugene Osterhaven; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982; 248 pp., \$11.95 (paper). (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko)

The church of our Lord Jesus Christ lives in an inseparable relation to the church of the past; and this relation is especially characterized by her *doctrinal* unity with the church of past ages. For this reason there is a great need for a book on the Reformed perspective of doctrinal development. It was therefore with eagerness that I picked up Osterhaven's latest publication. And there is no doubt about it that the book provided many hours of enjoyable and instructive reading. It is surely to be recommended to God's people who are interested in the question of how doctrine developed in the church over the ages. Especially his lengthy discussion of the Reformation (which takes up almost half the book) is scholarly and worthwhile.

Yet the book left me troubled. It took a bit to understand why, but there are, I think, especially three reasons why the book is not really "a Reformed perspective."

The first error is a failure to distinguish clearly between the Scriptures and the *object* of the church's theological reflection and the *source* of her doctrine, and the development of doctrine itself. Osterhaven repeatedly characterizes the Scriptures themselves as being a part of the *history* of doctrine. While this is, in a certain sense, true—if one speaks of the progressive nature of revelation—it nevertheless remains a fact that there is the sharpest of distinctions between Scripture as the infallible record of God's revelation to His church on the one hand,

and the church's study of that revelation under the guiding influence of the Spirit of Truth, by which study she learns and confesses the doctrine of Scripture on the other hand. Osterhaven blurs this distinction. He repeatedly speaks of the Scriptures as the *confession* of the church in the same way in which we confess the truth throughout the ages. While Osterhaven would not, I think, deny that, at least in some sense, Scripture is the record of God's revelation, he suggests the higher liberal view of Scripture, sometimes called, "*Gemeinde Theologie*" which makes Scripture nothing else than the church's confession of God. This is serious. He writes, for example:

The doctrine of the Trinity *as such* is not found in the New Testament. But the conviction which gave rise to that doctrine lies behind the New Testament in the experience of the people; and the New Testament is the record of that experience, a record which enabled the early church in its struggles over the faith to work out, state and embrace the doctrine of the Trinity just as the New Testament record presupposes the belief (p. 37).

Secondly, although Osterhaven devotes nearly half of the book to a study of the Reformation and discusses many doctrines of the Reformers, he does not mention the truths of God's absolute sovereignty, predestination, sovereign grace, and the doctrines which have become known as "Calvinism" as not only being taught by the Reformers but as being an essential (if not *the* essential) aspect of their teachings. Strangely he finds the chief contribution of Calvin to the development of doctrine in Calvin's teaching concerning "order and the Holy Spirit" (p. 163). What a strange and unhistorical treatment of Calvin. One can hardly say that this is

then a "Reformed" perspective on the history of doctrine.

In connection with this, and in the face of much evidence to the contrary, Osterhaven denies that Augustine taught double predestination (p. 79). Polman in his book, "The Doctrine of Predestination in Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin" has clearly shown that this is not true.

Finally, in the last three chapters, dealing with the Post-Reformation period, Osterhaven characterizes this age as an age of the development of "Experiential Christianity," and of the idea of the kingdom of heaven—which idea is taken mainly from men who laid the foundation for the social gospel (Pannenberg, e.g.); and finds the relevance of the doctrine of the church today in that kind of social emphasis. This all can hardly be characterized as *Reformed*, much less as a correct evaluation of the development of doctrine in the modern age.

THE RELATION OF THE BIBLE TO LEARNING, by H. Evan Runner; Paideia Press, Jordan Station, Ontario, 1982; 195 pp. (paper). (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko)

In 1959 and 1960, Dr. Runner presented a series of lectures in Unionville, Ontario, sponsored by the Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship, which operates the Institute for Christian Studies. These lectures were printed in book form and this book is the fifth revised edition. The book has become the "Bible" of the entire A.A.C.S. movement, which has had such great influence in Canada, the United States, and even in some foreign countries.

It is not necessary in this book review to criticize the A.A.C.S. movement; the interested reader can find extensive criticism in various earlier articles in the *Standard Bearer*. But this book lays down the philosophical (the philosophy of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven) foundation of the movement. The book is therefore necessary reading for all who wish to understand the philosophy which undergirds the "Toronto School."

I use the word, "understand" reluctantly, because this book is not easy to understand. This is not due only to its philosophical emphasis, but also the fact that key concepts of the book are never clearly defined. The criticism has been leveled against the thinkers of the Toronto School by others (also in the Christian Reformed Church) that precise definition of concepts is a great lack among these thinkers; this book bears out the legitimacy of that criticism.

While this is true of many different concepts in the book, it is strikingly true of the concept, "the Word of God." I doubt whether there is any one

more important concept than this one—the whole "system" of thought is based upon it. Yet one looks in vain in this book for a clear and precise definition of what Runner means by the Word of God.

Perhaps the main thought of the whole book is summed up by Runner himself when in his conclusion to his first series of lectures he says:

But when you have seen the nature of God's THESIS and of the variety of human ANTITHESES there can be no hesitation as to the course we must pursue. *No synthesis*; not even in the form of the emasculated message: Jesus saves. But a "seeing" from out of the religious Center of how the lines of reformational activity are to be drawn throughout the length and breadth of God's creation, to bring our subjective life *integrally* into conformity with the Law of creation, the creation-ordinances. That is the Message of God's Kingdom of *Righteousness*! (p. 110)

It is, undoubtedly, with a view to Runner's view of the Word of God that in this quotation Runner speaks of the "Law of creation" rather than the law of God and that he capitalizes the word "Law." The Word of God in Dooyeweerdian thought is not only the Scriptures, but is especially the creation Word or Creation Law; and this "Word" is the basis for all Christian endeavor outside the church. Here is the fundamental flaw.

It is for this reason also that, while the title of the book speaks of the relation of the *Bible* to learning, there is almost no discussion of this idea at all. While certain Scriptural passages are mentioned from time to time, the teachings of Scripture are never related to learning. The title of the book is deceptive.

Along with this, it is striking that there is almost no mention in the whole book of sin and its effect upon man and upon the creation. One would almost think, from reading the book, that sin did not exist; that man is unaffected by sin and that the creation is really not under the curse. But this too, is understandable in the light of A.A.C.S. philosophy.

That does not mean that some of the emphases of Runner are not worthwhile. Runner repeatedly and forcibly warns against the rampant humanism of our day, stresses correctly the power of the antithesis in all intellectual endeavor and pleads for a truly "reformational" starting point in all our work in the kingdom of Christ. If only Runner had a truly biblical conception of what the kingdom of Christ really is according to Scripture.... "My kingdom," Jesus says, "is not of this world."

**Take time to read
*The Standard Bearer***

NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING of the REFORMED FREE PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION to be held at the SOUTHWEST PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCH on September 22, at 8:00 P.M.

Rev. C. Hanko will speak on the subject — "CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH." Three Board members are to be chosen from the following nominations: Tom Bodbyl, Leonard Holstege, Charles Kalsbeek, Dave Kamps, Henry Kamps, Robert Pastoor. **ALL** members are urged to attend!

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On September 4, 1983, the Lord willing, MR. AND MRS. HENRY VANDER VENNEN will celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary. We, their children and grandchildren, give thanks to our Lord in heaven for God-fearing parents, and the Christian instruction and guidance He has provided through them.

"Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth" (Psalm 119:90).

John and Linda Van Uffelen
Dan, Lora and Geff

Daryl and Sharon Kuiper
Kristin and Katie

Cindy Vander Vennen
Kathy Vander Vennen

NOTICE!!!

The telephone number of Mr. Seymour Beiboer, Secretary of the Catechism Book Distribution Committee, has been changed to (616) 247-6640.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Sr. Mr. and Mrs. Society of Faith Protestant Reformed Church expresses its sincere Christian sympathy to Gary and Marilyn Reitsma in the death of her father, MR. PETER REITSMA.

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;" (II Corinthians 4:17).

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On September 4, 1983, the Lord willing, our beloved parents, MR. AND MRS. JACK VAN DYKE, will celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary. We, their children and grandchildren, are thankful to our Heavenly Father for the years they have had together and for the years we have had with them.

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children" (Psalm 103:7).

Sheri Van Dyke

Dave and Nancy Van Baren
Melissa and Brenda

Julie Van Dyke
Jim Van Dyke

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies Society of Hope Protestant Reformed Church expresses its Christian sympathy to Mrs. Maynard Veenstra, Mrs. Jacob Kuiper, Mrs. Henry Velthouse and Mrs. Richard Bloem in the death of their mother, MRS. ISSAC KORHORN, at the age of 98 years.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Psalm 116:15).

NOTICE!!!

The Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches announces its coming **CONVOCATION** to be held, the Lord willing, at Southwest Protestant Reformed Church, Wednesday, September 7, 1983, at 8:00 P.M. Prof. Robert Decker will bring the convocation address. All our people are urged to attend. (Refreshments.)

CELEBRATING 15 YEARS OF COVENANT EDUCATION

You are invited to help celebrate 15 years of history at Covenant Christian High School on Saturday, October 8, 1983. The activities will begin in the early afternoon with games for the young people and children. A light supper will be served followed by an early evening program. If you are interested in participating in the Alumni Choir and Band numbers, call Mr. Vern Huber, (616)-669-9863 or the school, (616)-453-5048. Those not able to attend may get a copy of a commemorative booklet being prepared, by contacting the school, 1401 Ferndale S.W., Grand Rapids, MI 49504. A special invitation is extended to all our 580 alumni to use this happy occasion to fellowship together and to renew their friendship. Ours is a "—goodly heritage marked out with a gracious care."

*Know the standard
and follow it.
The Standard Bearer*

News From Our Churches

July 18, 1983

The ministers of our congregations held a conference at the Spring Valley Campgrounds near Bloomingdale during the month of June. Professor H. Hanko spoke on the subject, "Sanctification and Our Nature."

There are a couple of decisions that Synod made that were not detailed in the last issue. First Church was instructed to proceed in calling a missionary to Jamaica and to send a retired minister or another minister to assist him full-time or for from six to nine months out of the year. In addition, approval was granted to the Committee of Contact to send as observers two of its members to the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America in Beaver Falls, PA. the week of June 25. One of their members attended part of our Synodical meeting as an observer. As a last remark, remember that next year's Synod is scheduled to meet in Hull on June 13, 1984.

Loveland Protestant Reformed Church has made a change in their communion service. Their bulletin of July 3, 1983 reads in part, "This morning we join one another at the table of our Lord Jesus Christ. May the great King of the church feed us with this heavenly bread and wine. Beginning at this communion service, we will eat the bread and drink the wine in unison (together at the same time). The reason for this change is that it will help us express the unity which we have as God's people both with our Lord and with one another as we eat and drink together. The bread and wine will be distributed and you are asked to hold it in your hand or if need be place the wine glass in the holder provided, until we are exhorted to take, eat and drink in remembrance of Him...."

South Holland's bulletin of June 19, 1983 had this to say about another decision made by Synod: "South Holland's overture to include the Trinitarian creeds in our *Psalter* was adopted." The Trinitarian creeds are the Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. The Nicene Creed settled the question of the nature of Christ, whereas the Athanasian Creed established the doctrine of the Trinity. Both creeds spoke out against Arianism.

In regards to the group seeking organization in the Byron Center area, I have this information taken from Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church's bulletin of July 10, 1983: "The consistory at its last meeting decided, at the request of a number of Hudsonville's families, to begin official preaching services at Byron Center beginning Sunday, August 7. The meetings will be held in the Byron Center Christian Jr. High School." If you know of any other people who have expressed interest in this endeavor, please encourage them to attend these services. The Correspondence Committee is confident that a new Protestant Reformed Church will become a reality in this area.

Redlands Protestant Reformed Church has extended a call to Rev. S. Houck to serve as home missionary in Ripon, California.

Concerning the educational scene, I have these two statements from Southwest's bulletin. "A special society meeting of the Hope School Society will be held on July 25 at 8 p.m. Two proposals will be considered at this meeting. These proposals are: (1) to approve of roof repairs, and, (2) the method of final payment on the land contract in Hudsonville." "The society for Protestant Reformed Special Education is having a public meeting August 6 at Spring Grove Park in Jamestown, at 4 p.m. There will be guest speakers, activities for special children, and a covered dish supper. We encourage members of the society and all friends to attend. For more details contact F. Haney at 457-4408." The Board for Protestant Reformed Special Education says in their newsletter, "Being members of the covenant, handicapped children need God-centered education. With the Lord's blessing, it will become a reality. We ask for your support, both prayerfully and financially."

Covenant Protestant Reformed Church of Wyckoff, New Jersey carried this information in their June 26th bulletin, "If anyone is interested in receiving 'The Reformed Witness' a two page Scripture study put out by our sister congregations in Doon and Hull, Iowa, the address is Box 181, Doon, Iowa, 51235."