

The **STANDARD BEARER**

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

"Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall the fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, the fields shall yield no meat;...

"Yet I will rejoice in the Lord...."

Habakkuk 3:17, 18

See "Joy in the God of Our

Salvation" — page 74

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

Department Editors: Rev. Ronald Cammenga, Rev. Arie den Hartog, Prof. Robert D. Decker, Rev. Cornelius Hanko, Prof. Herman C. Hanko, Rev. Ronald Hanko, Mr. David Harbach, Rev. John A. Heys, Rev. J. Korterling, Rev. George C. Lubbers, Rev. Thomas C. Miersma, Rev. Marinus Schipper, Rev. James Slopsema, Rev. Gise J. Van Baren, Rev. Herman Veldman.

Editorial Office: Prof. H.C. Hoeksema
4975 Ivanrest Ave. S.W.
Grandville, Michigan 49418Church News Editor: Mr. David Harbach
4930 Ivanrest Ave., Apt. B
Grandville, Michigan 49418

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Business Office: The Standard Bearer
Mr. H. Vander Wal, Bus. Mgr. PH: (616) 243-2953
P.O. Box 6064
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506New Zealand Business Office: The Standard Bearer
c/o Protestant Reformed Fellowship
B. Van Herk, 66 Fraser St.
Wainuimata, New Zealand

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MEDITATION

Joy in the God of Our Salvation

Rev. H. Veldman

*"Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall the fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no head in the stalls:**"Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, and I will joy in the God of my salvation."*

Habakkuk 3:17-18

Thanksgiving Day! O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good: His mercy endureth forever. Give thanks unto the Lord — why, for what? Shall we give thanks for the peace which our country is enjoying, relatively speaking? Shall we give thanks for

the plenty we are enjoying, in spite of the inflation? But, what must they do who are deprived of all this "good" and live in lands characterized by misery and poverty?

Are we able to take this word of Habakkuk upon

our lips, really and truthfully? Would we be able to give thanks even if we lose everything? We would indeed be able, provided that we rejoice in the Lord and joy in the God of our salvation.

* * * * *

Wonderful contrast!

The time of Habakkuk is unknown, although, generally speaking, we may say that he prophesied as one of the last prophets before the Babylonian captivity. Verse 17 in this passage of Scripture speaks for itself. Habakkuk had spoken in verse 6 of chapter 1 of the coming of the Chaldeans, of Nebuchadnezzar: "For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwellingplaces that are not theirs." The sins of the people of God which occasioned the coming of this mighty nation are set forth in this first chapter of the prophecy of Habakkuk, particularly in verse 4. How God's covenant people had denied God's covenant and His law! And now the Lord would send the Chaldeans to Palestine. They were the rod of the Almighty. In this text we have a description of the national destruction which this heathen nation would visit upon the land. How terrible would be the fury of these Chaldeans of whom we read in this first chapter! They will not spare the land; Canaan shall become a wilderness.

Applying this to the church of the New Dispensation, perhaps someone may object that the conditions set forth in this Word of God do not apply to the church of God today. Do we not have peace and tranquility, be it in the outward sense of the word? Do we not live in a land of plenty, enjoying even the luxuries of this present time, although it is true that inflation has decreased the value of the dollar and that our crops have suffered somewhat this year because of drought? However, if it be true that "peace and tranquility" are our lot, is it possible that this may also be ascribed to the negligence on our part, that we are not conducting ourselves as antithetically as we should? Do we oftentimes hide our light underneath a bushel? Persecution and affliction will surely be visited upon the church of God and His Christ in the future. Of this the Word of God speaks plainly and abundantly. Even so, the question is pertinent: when we give thanks, why do we give thanks, and for what? Are we spiritually able to say that should the Lord take all this plenty and luxury from us, reduce us to absolute poverty, we have really not lost anything?

What a tremendous, wonderful contrast we have here in this Word of God! On the one hand, we must not weaken this Word of God. The text does not mean that, although we now suffer want and are in sorrow, conditions will change and we will

rejoice later. We must not separate the two verses of this text. We must surely read this scripture as follows: "Although, notwithstanding that all this shall occur, that I experience want and sorrow, I will nevertheless rejoice in the God of my salvation." This joy of verse 18 must not be understood as occurring after the afflictions and troubles of verse 17 have passed, but it must be understood as occurring in the very midst of it.

And, secondly, this contrast is so wonderful because we read here of joy. The text does not refer, we must understand, to the attitude of a stoic. A stoic is one who bears and endures suffering without revealing his own emotions, with bitterness of heart and soul, who would reverse the situation if at all possible. Neither does this Word of God refer to one who does not rebel (at least outwardly), who submits to his affliction and appears to bear it in all calmness and submission. And, of course, this text does not refer to a superficial indifference, that we must take the bitter with the sweet, and that these "ups and downs" will eventually balance out one another.

Here we read of joy in the midst of destruction and trouble. Strong is the language of this text. First of all, we read, "I will rejoice in the Lord." And then, to avoid all misunderstanding, he adds, "I will leap up for joy." Hence, the prophet leaves no doubt as to his meaning. To be sure, according to Habakkuk 3:2 and 16, the prophet, when he heard of the terrible Word of God, was afraid, his belly trembled and his lips quivered at the voice of the Lord. Yet, also in verse 16 he speaks of resting in the day of trouble. This surely does not refer to the rest of the grave. And then the prophet ascends the hill of faith, and he cries out, defiantly as it were, Although the land shall become utterly desolate, reduced, as it were, to a wilderness, nevertheless, in spite of all this, yea in the very midst of it, I will rejoice; I will not merely endure all this misery, simply "put up with it," submit to it, but I will bear it willingly and joyfully; in fact, I will leap for joy. When everything is destroyed, when grief and sorrow enter my home, when affliction and pain are my lot, when all things appear to be against me, then, standing as it were in the very midst of all these catastrophes, I will lift up myself above them, and I will cry out in joy and in song.

Do we know this wonderful Word of God? Do we experience this amazing joy during this season? What a tremendous contrast we have here! A picture of utter desolation and ruin, and, in the midst of it, a tremendous joy in the Lord!

* * * * *

What a glorious reality we have here!

Notice the Object of this joy, which is also its

content. First, we read of the God of my salvation. This salvation means literally "deliverance out of a strait, narrow confinement, into an open space, freedom." The word always has a twofold implication. Salvation is, first of all, redemption. Sin is guilt and guilt demands payment and punishment. Hence, to be saved means, first of all, that we are redeemed, bought free out of the guilt of sin and also out of its power, so that this power of sin may no longer reign in us. This, however, is but the negative aspect of our salvation. Positively, salvation means to be translated into an "open space," into freedom, into the glorious sphere of God's blessed covenant, that we enter into God's everlasting tabernacle with man. And, what is its meaning particularly in this text? We must remember that Israel, the people of God, has become a plaything of the nations, especially of the Chaldeans. Hence, this salvation for Israel refers to their deliverance out of this Babylonian bondage, which deliverance, typically, refers to our salvation, deliverance out of sin and death and translation into the Lord's everlasting covenant.

The God of my salvation! He is for Zion the God of salvation. God, here, is the Triune God, the Wholly Other, the Terrible God, the God worthy to be feared. And that He is the God of salvation means that all salvation is of Him, eternally in His counsel, and also in time, in Christ, and by His almighty and irresistible Spirit. Besides, He is the God of *my* salvation. Do not omit this personal emphasis. We may be ever so precise in all our dogmatical reasoning, and this is important, but it all means nothing if we cannot claim this personal participation in the salvation of the Lord.

Secondly, this God of my salvation is also the Lord, Jehovah. Jehovah is the I AM, the Unchangeable, in Himself and in relation to His people. Whatever our life's circumstances may be, however great our misery and troubles, Jehovah remains the same, unchanging in His love and mercy. Shall a mother forsake her sucking child? This, Isaiah writes, is possible. But Jehovah is ever the same, never forsakes His own.

Hence, rejoicing in the Lord, in the God of our salvation, we can rejoice even though, as in this text, the land be reduced to a wilderness. Why can we rejoice, leap for joy, when everything appears to be against us, in the midst of sorrow, pain, and misery? We rejoice in the God of our salvation. And this means that He is saving us, always, not merely in spite of all our affliction, but through them. Fact is, He is always for us the God of our salvation, always saving us, because He is Jehovah, always the Unchangeable, always leading us through all things unto His everlasting and heavenly covenant. To this must be added that we are unworthy sinners,

deserving only everlasting condemnation. To us, condemnable sinners, God is the unchangeable God of our salvation, causing all our present affliction to work for us an exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

* * * * *

We shall rejoice in the Lord, the God of our salvation. What is its only possibility?

Indeed, this rejoicing is exceedingly difficult. It is so easy to glory in victory when we are not involved in any struggle. Many more such examples can be cited.

To rejoice in the Lord and leap for joy in the God of our salvation is possible only as in God. This is objectively true. If we are to glory in the God of our salvation, if He shall be the content of our joy, then the first requirement is that we be in Him, as we read it in this text: I shall leap for joy *IN* the God of my salvation. I must be rooted in the Lord. I must be spiritually engrafted into Christ; the Lord must call me out of darkness into the light, out of death into life. By nature we are earthly and sold under sin. God must become my one and all. God must become my God through the irresistible power of His Spirit. Only then will God be the content of my joy.

This is also true subjectively. How often we cleave to the earth, the things that perish! Indeed, we must become heavenly in our spiritual longing and desire! We must reject the things that perish, cleave unto the heavenly, look at the present in the light of the future, view all these afflictions in the light of the glory that shall follow. Consciously we must stand in the God of our salvation. Always He, Jehovah, is and remains the God of our salvation.

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gift for the sick
or shut-in. Give
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EDITORIAL

The R.E.S. and the World Council — No, No, No . . . Yes?

Prof. H.C. Hoeksema

About a year ago the *Standard Bearer* commented on a report concerning membership in the World Council of Churches which will be coming before the Reformed Ecumenical Synod in Chicago in 1984. This comment was by way of a review of a Study Report entitled "Report to RES Chicago 1984 on Ecumenical Relations." The problem with which this report deals is the problem of dual membership in the RES and the WCC, concretely the problem of membership of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (GKN) in both the World Council and the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. For many years the RES has faced this problem without resolving it, being fearful of losing one of its largest member churches, the GKN. The report in question was supposed to resolve the problem finally. And the resolution of the problem is urgent because there are churches which have already left the RES because of it and because there is the threat of more churches leaving the RES. The RES Nimes decided "That the Synod determine that a final decision whether or not member churches of the RES may also be members of the WCC, must be made by the RES 1984 and not delayed beyond that meeting." To this end, a Study Committee was appointed; and this committee includes in its report ten recommendations. These recommendations essentially maintain a position which the RES has long held, namely, that membership in the World Council of Churches is principally wrong. To that extent we agree with the report. At the same time, however, the Report waffles when it comes to the concrete question of the GKN's membership in the World Council and proposes the following:

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

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

Concerning these recommendations we pointed out (Nov. 1, 1982 issue) that they do not constitute the "final" stand which RES Nimes called for, but that they leave the concrete issue of dual membership in the RES and the WCC *unresolved*, and therefore, in effect — if this is indeed a "final" decision — tolerate dual membership.

Now, however, there are signs of a shift with respect to the WCC.

As most of you undoubtedly know, this past summer the Sixth Assembly of the Word Council of Churches met in Vancouver, British Columbia. At this assembly there were as many as eight Christian Reformed observers present. These men did not all represent the CRC officially as visitors and official observers. Two of them were denominational representatives, and others were present either as individuals or as representatives of various organizations within the CRC or in behalf of the CRC press. Among them was A. James Heynen, who reported extensively in *The Banner*. Among them was also Dr. Paul Schrottenboer, general secretary of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. The latter joined in a caucus of other evangelicals present as observer-visitors in various capacities, and with that caucus joined in a very favorable open letter concerning the WCC. *The Banner* (Sept. 12, '83, p. 18) reports as follows in this connection:

During Week One some of the evangelicals got together. Dr. Paul Schrottenboer, executive secretary of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, was one of those who organized the meeting. During the course of their discussion the group decided to write an open letter. But before a draft could be adopted, three men (Peter Beyerhaus, Germany; Arthur Johnston, USA; and Myung Yuk Kim, Korea) walked out. They had insisted on an attack against the WCC which the others refused to join.

In the end, the trio of critics created their own document claiming that "the WCC is in danger of becoming a mouthpiece of false prophecy."

Meanwhile, Schrottenboer and others sounded a very different note. They wrote an open letter in which they claimed to have seen "signs of growth and renewal" at this Assembly. The letter stopped just

short of a call for evangelicals to get aboard the WCC bandwagon. The letter decried "the distortions in the popular evangelical understanding" of the Council and its programs. The punchline: "Hence, we feel pressed to declare publicly our determination to be more actively involved in all efforts seeking the unity and renewal of the church."

Schrotenboer later admitted he "wished [the letter] were a little less laudatory, a little more critical." But he added: "I had no trouble signing it." Neither did the CRC's official observer, Calvin Seminary professor Henry Zwaanstra, who signed the letter because "it pretty well reflects my thinking."

By August 10, when the Assembly adjourned, the letter drafted by Schrotenboer and others had netted several hundred signatures. Orlando Costas pointed to the growing list of signees and said of the "other letter" (the one drafted by Beyerhaus and friends), "They don't speak for evangelicals. They represent nothing more than that they came to a meeting and walked out."

This report by *The Banner* is confirmed and strengthened by a report in *Nederlands Dagblad* carried by *Clarion* (The Canadian Reformed Magazine) in its October 21 issue (p. 442):

In an interview with *Nederlands Dagblad* (August 10, 1983), Dr. P. Schrotenboer, secretary-general of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES), gave a very positive assessment of the current course of the World Council of Churches (WCC), evident at the last Assembly at Vancouver, BC. He signed the declaration of the so-called "radical evangelicals" who see a place for themselves within the structures of the World Council. Schrotenboer said that past criticism on the WCC (e.g. that the WCC is only concerned with social developments and is not interested in confessional and theological matters) no longer is warranted. He cited as proof the report of the WCC on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM Report). "Also, the Vancouver Assembly had much more attention for mission than previous assemblies. The Biblical witness is more strongly felt here. These are things which must give us joy," said Schrotenboer.

Schrotenboer admitted that the theology of the WCC is still based "too much on experience and not enough on the Scriptures" but nevertheless felt that the declaration of the "radical evangelicals" was timely.

Asked if his position would have consequences for the matter of dual membership within the RES, Schrotenboer answered, "It's too early to tell. I don't want to say that dual membership in the WCC and RES will now become less problematic. But you know that a brochure of the RES on this issue states that dual membership as such is not unacceptable."

There were also eight observers from the Christian Reformed Church at the Vancouver Assembly. Schrotenboer stated, "They do have criticism, but also much appreciation for the Assembly. Only one of the eight (observers) will present a [negative] minority re-

port, although also in the report of the seven others no position will be taken about possible membership [of the CRC in the WCC]. The Synod must decide on this."

Dr. Schrotenboer retained definite reservations about the WCC. "The only thing is that I — together with other evangelicals — see positive developments at this Assembly. And then I say: in such a World Council I will try to work together, strengthening the good that I see."

Now Dr. Schrotenboer may say that "a brochure of the RES on this issue states that dual membership as such is not unacceptable." The fact of the matter is, however, that his very favorable assessment of the WCC, even to the extent of saying, "in such a World Council I will try to work together, strengthening the good that I see," is an altogether different position from that taken by the Study Report referred to in the beginning of this editorial. It is true, of course, that the Study Report waffles when it comes to the concrete question of the GKN's dual membership, thereby spoiling the report. Nevertheless, as to the issue itself, the Report is certainly opposed to the WCC and offers an evaluation of the WCC which is quite different from Dr. Schrotenboer's.

I assume that as an official observer of the RES Dr. Schrotenboer will be reporting his evaluation of the WCC-Vancouver to RES Chicago in 1984. If he reports there as he is reported to say in the quotations just made, it seems to me that the RES will have to choose between its Study Committee and its General Secretary. Further, if the RES believes its General Secretary, it seems to me that it will follow his leadership and "try to work together in such a World Council." That, of course, will mean the end of the RES. Furthermore, it will prove that the GKN were right all along in cooperating with the WCC — though perhaps a bit ahead of the rest of the RES. And in that case, the RES, when it bows out, should do so with apologies to the GKN for having condemned the latter's position all these years.

Meanwhile, when I read other reports concerning the WCC-Vancouver, reports which are less favorable than those which I found in *The Banner* and *Calvinist Contact*, I begin to wonder if an attempt is being made to sell the World Council to both the RES and the CRC. In my opinion, the statement by that minority of evangelicals headed by Peter Beyerhaus, for example, furnishes much food for thought — very much — and is far more realistic than the statement of the so-called radical evangelicals.

Read The Standard Bearer

TAKING HEED TO THE DOCTRINE

Our Calling and Election (2)

Rev. H. Veldman

We concluded our first article on this subject with the observation that the infralapsarian conception of the doctrine of Election cannot be maintained in the light of Scripture, and that the Lord sovereignly willed a people whom He would save in the way of sin and death through faith in Christ Jesus unto everlasting glory and heavenly immortality, provided that we understand that this way of sin and death through faith in Christ has been divinely and sovereignly willed and decreed.

We also remarked in our preceding article that the word election, as far as the word itself is concerned, is infralapsarian. The word means, literally, "to choose out of." Does this not indicate that the human race was there, and as fallen, when the Lord elected, chose out His own? This is the view of the infralapsarian, is it not? How, then, must this word election be explained? The explanation is not too difficult. We place ourselves, then, upon the historical standpoint of the development of God's counsel. Scripture appears to be infralapsarian because it treats God's counsel in the light of its fulfillment. When we build a house, what was decided first is carried out last. We first decide to build a house. Then we decide the type of house we desire. Finally, we decide to buy a lot and lay the foundation. In the carrying out of this plan, however, the execution occurs in reverse order: the foundation is laid first and finally we live in the house. This is also true of Scripture. First, God created the world; then He also created man; man sins, the whole human race falls into sin, and finally Christ comes to seek and to save that which was lost; then, at the end of time, we have the new heavens and the new earth. Now, if we place ourselves, historically, in the midst of this fallen human race, we say, with the Word of God, that God has elected, chosen out of this human race His people. Does this necessarily mean that thus it also was in God's eternal counsel, that in God's counsel the human race appears as fallen and that the Lord chose out of this fallen human race? Indeed not! We read, do we not, in Isaiah 43:3-4: "For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in My sight, thou hast been honourable and I have loved thee: therefore will I give

men for thee and people for thy life." And in Romans 9 we read that the Lord loved Jacob and hated Esau before either did good or evil, that the Lord is the Potter Who of the same lump makes one vessel unto honour and another unto dishonour, and that He raised up Pharaoh in order to show His power in him. But, viewing this fallen human race we simply say that God has elected, chosen out of it His own. And, secondly, "election" has historically this result that, as a result of God's election, His own are indeed separated from out of the world and are called to be God's own covenant people — hence, God's election is nothing else than God's sovereign choosing of us which has as its result that we are separated from the world; God's election is, historically, therefore, always a "choosing out."

The election of this Word of God is therefore that sovereign and eternal action of the Lord God whereby He has positively willed a people, together with the equally sovereign and eternal rejection or reprobation of others. The apostle admonishes the church of God throughout the ages: "Give diligence to make *your* calling and election sure." Indeed, the doctrine of election presupposes the doctrine of reprobation. Election implies that God has elected *some*, not everybody. The Lord has not only sovereignly chosen and willed a people, but He has also sovereignly willed others who would be the objects of His wrath. This doctrine of reprobation is denied almost universally today. And if you deny reprobation you cannot maintain election. Sovereignly the Lord loved Jacob and hated Esau. Incidentally, Scripture also uses other words to denote the doctrine of election, words such as "to know, to love." For these elect the Lord has laid away a heavenly glory, the blessing that they will walk with Him and have fellowship with Him in His eternal tabernacle, everlastingly to walk in His light and to be clothed with honor and glory. Some were ordained unto that eternal glory, others unto eternal ruin and damnation. Indeed, although our Confessions are infralapsarian, clearly the sovereign character of Divine Predestination (election and reprobation) is set forth in the Canons, as in Article 6 and 7 of the first head of the Canons and in Article 15 of the same first head. Indeed, make *your* election sure, writes the apostle. This implies that we do not rea-

son concerning this election as a cold, dogmatical subject, but we are dealing here with the personal assurance of the fact that the Lord has separated us from the world to form a part of that wonderful company whom God has loved from before the foundation of the world. Never shall we glory in ourselves. Never shall we exalt ourselves above those whom the Lord did not choose to be His own. That the Lord chose us was not because of any good in us. We are all by nature objects of wrath and children of disobedience. All the people of God can do into all eternity is to thank the Lord upon bended knee for His sovereign mercy.

Wonderful is the knowledge of this election, unspeakably wonderful! This knowledge surely refers to the calm, blessed certainty that I belong to the people of God, that I shall therefore receive the glorious crown of victory at the end of my earthly pilgrimage, the final victory over sin and death, over all the powers of darkness and hell. For God's election is Jehovah's unchangeable and eternal purpose of love towards us. This election is in no sense dependent upon our righteousness and good works, does not rest upon anything in us, is not based upon the fact that we were holy and blameless, in order that no flesh should boast. This election never rests upon man but only upon God. God's election is God's eternal purpose of love and mercy towards us, not because we were holy, but that we should be holy, according to Ephesians 1:4. Therefore this election of God's people is as immovable as the mountains, as sure as the Lord God Himself, the eternal, all-sufficient, unchangeable Rock of all the ages. And the knowledge of this election is the knowledge that, before the world was, the Lord God chose me, knew me, loved me, willed me to partake of His life, to be conformed unto the image of His Son, and that in unspeakable and heavenly glory. Therefore this also implies that we, knowing to be elect in Christ, share in Christ's work, His suffering and death, His atonement and glory, and that therefore nothing can separate us from His love, the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Indeed, it is the blessed assurance that from before the foundation of the world an eternal and all-wise God elected me in Christ unto eternal life, and that therefore, according to Romans 8:28, all things must work together for my good. This knowledge of our election in Christ Jesus from before the foundation of the world, not because of anything in me, inasmuch as what we receive follows from that eternal love of God, is surely the basis for our comfort, our strength in the battle, our courage amidst all danger, our patience in suffering, our endurance to continue unto the very end. A cold doctrine? A doctrine to be rejected as making men careless and profane? A doctrine to be silenced in the preaching?

How absurd and terrible! The Lord has sovereignly willed to bestow upon us eternal life; and we shall repudiate it, silence it? It is the rock, the sole rock of our salvation. To it we shall surely cling.

This election, now, we must make sure. Shall we discard this doctrine? Shall we refuse to make it our own? Shall we fear to preach this truth, also and especially upon the mission field, because it will interfere with the saving of sinners? Has the eternal love of God ever prevented a single sinner from being saved? It is the love of God which alone saves the sinner. Of course, in our preaching we must adapt ourselves to the ability of an audience to understand the message of the gospel. Of course! But, shall we not concern ourselves with the doctrine of election? Does not the apostle Peter refute this conception in this scripture when he exhorts us to put forth all diligence to make our election sure? Hence, we must and shall concern ourselves with it. The Lord commands us to do this very thing.

We must make sure our election. Does this mean that God's election of His people lies in the realm of uncertainties? We, now, must establish, make sure that election. This is alone possible through our perseverance unto the end — this is left to us. Whether we are saved unto eternal life, also in God's counsel, is not definite until we are victors and receive the crown. This, then, is why Peter exhorts us to make our election sure. What an impossible view! This would merely be an election, awaiting the end of the race, based upon foreseen faith and our perseverance. In other words, the Lord has elected but we determine that election. This is surely not Reformed, but Arminian, which teaches a conditional election, an election based upon foreseen works. How comfortless is this view! It deprives us of all assurance, inasmuch as it presents this comfort as dependent upon the sinner. This view, however, is also contrary to this Word of God. It is surely not the idea of the apostle that we make sure this election. How can we make sure God's election? How can we make sure and seal the Lord's decree? What the apostle means is that we make this election sure for ourselves. We must stand fast in its knowledge. That knowledge must stand fast in our consciousness. We must be personally sure that the Lord has elected us, that we therefore do not stumble, believing today and not believing tomorrow. Make this election sure for ourselves.

Secondly, this scripture also overthrows the idea that this making sure of our election is really vain and impossible. Is it not a vain effort to attain unto that assurance in this life? Is not this knowledge of our election altogether too high and too wonderful? Is it not ridiculous even to conceive of this, to enter-

tain its possibility? Will this the rather not be the case, that we merely strive after that assurance, that that much desired object will always escape us, even as the foot of the rainbow who would pursue after it? Moreover, is not our election too deep a mystery, that we should concern ourselves with it? We cannot look into God's book of life. Is it not better to control our curiosity; in fact, is it not really sinful and should we not be satisfied with but a stumbling to heaven's gates, always uncertain, ever wavering, never sure that we shall receive the victory? Besides, why fight and struggle for the crown when we already know the outcome before the

battle begins? Besides, are not the hidden things for our God? Must and may we concern ourselves with them? Moreover, who, I ask you, concerns himself today with his election? Today the preaching is generally Arminian. Besides, it is even stated that this doctrine of election tends to make men careless and profane. However, the apostle Peter in this Word of God enjoins upon us to make our election sure. He surely refutes the charge that this making sure of our election is really vain and impossible.

The Lord willing, we will continue with this discussion in our following article upon this subject.

IN HIS FEAR

God's Revelation In His Law (1)

Rev. Ronald Hanko

The matter of the Christian's relation to the law has been a subject of debate in the church since the days of the apostle Paul. Both his Epistles to the Romans and to the Galatians deal with this issue as it affected the Apostolic churches. Paul argues especially against those who desired to force the cruel bonds of legalism upon the New Testament churches. Not only did they propose to bring the churches back to the ceremonies and civil regulations of the Old Testament, but they also taught that these things were necessary for salvation.

Such legalism is still to be found in the church. It is found in its worst form in the Romish church where sacrificial rites and priestly ceremonies are regarded as the heart of true religion and the only way of salvation. It is also found in Protestant churches among those who find the essence of Christianity in regulations and rules, even among preachers who preach the law only as an endless list of "dos" and "don'ts."

On the other hand, James and also Paul bring the Word of God to bear upon those who maintain either in their teaching or in their practice that the law has nothing any more to say to him who is justified in Christ Jesus by faith alone. Even today among those in whom this attitude has taken deep root, any reaching or application of the law to the Christian is strenuously resisted.

Now, it is not my purpose to attempt to add anything to the volumes that have been written in explaining, defending, or repudiating either the one or the other of these false doctrines. Rather it is my

purpose to point out that fundamental to our understanding of the law and its place in our lives is the fact that God reveals Himself in His law. The basic principle of the whole law is that it is the law of God, not only or even especially in the sense that it is from Him, as it surely is, but in the sense that His glory, His perfection, and His holiness shine forth in every precept of the law. In this and in following articles I hope to show how this principle applies in connection with each of the Ten Commandments by showing what God reveals of Himself in each commandment. Then, too, we shall be able to understand how God's law teaches us to fear Him as we ought.

This principle is implied in the common Hebrew word for the law, the word "torah." The word meaning "teaching" or "instruction." This is clear, for example, from Proverbs 1:8 where "instruction" and "law" are synonymous. This instruction which the law gives is not an arbitrary code of morality, but instruction in the very nature and being of God Himself as the only foundation for morality and right living. It is, to use the words of Scripture, instruction in "the praises of the Lord and His strength" (Ps. 78:4).

This principle is also clearly taught in Psalm 119. It is found especially in the first section of the Psalm because it is the most basic truth concerning God's law, and the basis for all that David says in that Psalm about the law. In harmony, therefore, with the parallelism of these verses, we are reminded that "keeping His testimonies" is the very same

thing as "*seeking Him with the whole heart*" (vs. 2); or that "*learning His righteous judgments*" is no different from "*praising Him with uprightness of heart*" (vs. 7). Later on, David returns to this thought when he likens the teaching of God's statutes to God's making *His face* to shine upon His servants (vs. 135).

It is, then, only because David understands this principle that he can say, "I have rejoiced in the way of Thy testimonies, as much as in all riches" (vs. 14). To rejoice in God's testimonies is to rejoice in the riches of God Himself. So also he speaks of beholding wondrous things out of the law (vs. 18), and testifies, "Thy statutes have been my song in the house of my pilgrimage" (vs. 54). And when he comforts himself with the knowledge of God's judgments, it is clear that this comfort is found in God and nowhere else (vs. 52).

That same principle lies behind the teaching of our Belgic Confession in Article XXV:

We believe, that the ceremonies and figures of the law ceased at the coming of Christ, and that all of the shadows are accomplished; so that the use of them must be abolished among Christians, yet the truth and substance of them remain with us in Jesus Christ, in Whom they have their completion.

In order to see here this principle of which we are speaking it is necessary to look at several other important truths taught in this beautiful confession.

First of all, we ought to note that the law itself is not abolished (cf. Matt. 5:17, 18), but rather that "the truth and substance" of it remain with us. Only the ceremonies and figures of the law have ceased. These ceremonies and figures are a reference to all the civil and ceremonial regulations which God used to teach Israel what is called here "the truth and substance" of the law. We no longer need to be taught by these regulations since we have the Spirit of the risen Christ as our great Teacher. These ceremonies and figures, then, must be abolished.

Yet, and in the second place, the truth and substance of the law do remain. An example of this is found in the law which forbade the Israelites to plow with an ox and an ass together (Deut. 22:10). The law no longer forbids this, but the truth and substance of that commandment still remain with us in II Corinthians 6:14, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." So it is with all the laws of the Old Testament.

That truth and substance of the law is God's own revelation of Himself in the law. That is true even in connection with the passage from II Corinthians. That command to be separate from unbelievers is not an arbitrary requirement, but finds its source in the holiness and purity of God Himself. He is the

Light and in Him is no darkness. We are light *in Him*, and therefore must be a separate people, for "what fellowship hath light with darkness?" (vs. 14). As Peter says in another place, we must be holy, not according to any standards of our own, but as the Lord our God is holy (I Pet. 1:15, 16).

We ought not forget either, in this regard, that there was law before Sinai, not in the sense of a written code, but because God reveals Himself in all of creation. Also that revelation of God is a law which governs the whole of man's existence. To know Him is to be under obligation to serve Him. God's law, then, is from the beginning and finds its truth and substance in the declaration of the heavens and all creation concerning His glory.

Paul makes it abundantly clear in Romans 1:19-25 that God's revelation of His power and divinity in the creation brings all mankind under the obligation to glorify Him as God and to be thankful. Failing to do so, man is left without excuse and becomes worthy of death. This is also proved by the universal reign of death during the time from Adam to Moses. Without law there is no sin imputed, and without the imputation of sin death has no power over us, yet death reigned from Adam to Moses (Rom. 5:13, 14). God's law, therefore, as a revelation of His own glorious being was given first of all in the things that are made and later engraved in tables of stone.

Because of sin, however, that revelation of God, whether in creation or from Sinai, can only bring down wrath upon us. We are exposed in all our corruption by the law, for the law, shining with the glory and holiness of God, shows that we have "come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). It is sin which kills us, and sin finds its power and opportunity in the law (Rom. 7:10, 11).

Of utmost importance, therefore, is the statement of our Confession that the truth and substance of the law remain with us *in Christ*. Apart from Him the law can only curse us and bring death upon us, but in Christ that power of the law is destroyed, for "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: as it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth upon a tree" (Gal. 3:13).

Nevertheless, in taking away the curse of the law Christ did not take away the law itself. He only changed our relationship to the law. Formerly the law was our master through its power to curse and destroy, but when that power is taken away through the suffering and death of our Lord the law becomes our servant and a means for our salvation.

It is our servant especially in two ways. First of all, it is our servant with its power to reveal sin. The law has not lost that power, only its power to curse

when sin is revealed. Now, in revealing sin, it is a schoolmaster, and teacher to lead us to Christ. Always it reminds us through its revelation of God that we cannot stand before Him in ourselves, and that knowledge drives us, not once, but again and again all our life long to the cross. Understand, the law itself has no power to take away the burden of sin, but by grace its power is to lead us to Calvary where burdens are lifted. This it did also for Israel.

In the second place, the law serves as a guide in the way of gratitude. It organizes our life as those who are called out of darkness into light to show forth the Lord's praises. And it does that exactly because it reveals the praises of Jehovah our Saviour. That was the purpose of the law-giving at Sinai. Through the giving of the law Israel, redeemed by the blood of the passover lamb and the baptism of the Red Sea, eating daily the heavenly manna and drinking of the Rock Who followed them, was organized as the people of Jehovah to worship Him and to live before Him as the people of His care.

For Israel as for us, the law could serve this purpose only through Christ and the promise of His

coming. Already at Sinai, in pictures and types, God showed Christ to His people, not only by reminding them of the blood of the passover lamb and the water of baptism, but also by giving them the law "in the hand of a mediator" (Gal. 3:19). Moses as a mediator between God and the people, was a type and shadow of Him Who was to come. In Christ promised, therefore, Israel appears before God as washed and sanctified, to receive the law not as a way of salvation, but that in holiness of life, she might glorify Her Saviour God. So also do we, the true Israel of God, receive the law from Him.

The law, then, teaches us to fear Him as we ought, not with the terror of the ungodly, but with a holy awe and reverence that will not allow us to glory in anything but in the cross of Christ; an awe which drives us to the cross for peace and pardon, and which causes us to return from the cross with a new resolve to live as children of the light for the praise of Him Who delivered us out of darkness. Thus the commandments become also for us, with their revelation of the majesty and holiness of God, "our songs in the house of our pilgrimage."

THE LORD GAVE THE WORD

Missionary Methods (19)

Prof. Robert D. Decker

With this article we shall conclude our study of the views of Dr. John L. Nevius. The "Nevius Method or Plan" to which the growth of the Presbyterian Mission in Korea has been attributed may be summed as follows:

1) Missionary personal evangelism through wide itineration. This means missionaries should not remain in one group or congregation. They should preach the gospel from place to place and in as many places as possible. They should not become, in effect, pastors of the mission churches.

2) Self-propagation, with every believer a teacher of someone and a learner from someone else better equipped than himself.

3) Self-government, with every group under its own chosen but unpaid leaders; circuits (several groups in a given region) under their own paid helpers who will later give place to pastors; circuit meetings training the people for later district, provincial, and national leadership.

4) Self-support, with all places of worship (often private homes) provided by the believers, each

group as soon as founded beginning to pay towards the circuit-helper's salary; even schools to receive only partial subsidy, and no pastors of single congregations to be provided for by foreign funds.

5) Systematic Bible-study for every believer under his group leader and circuit-helper; and for every leader and helper in the Bible classes conducted by the missionaries.

6) Strict discipline, enforced by biblical sanctions.

7) Co-operation and union with other bodies, or at least territorial division.

8) Non-interference in private lawsuits or any such matter.

9) General helpfulness on the part of the missionaries, where possible, in the economic problems of the people.

(cf. Peter Beyerhaus, Henry Lefever,; *The Responsible Church And The Foreign Mission*; pp. 91, 92)

Of these Nevius and his followers would con-

sider points 2, and more especially 4 and 5, to be the most important. Point 4 is usually regarded as the most characteristic of his method. Nevius himself was firmly convinced that financial support from the foreign or home church of the missionary would endanger and inhibit the growth and development of the mission church. The development of the native churches into autonomous congregations and an autonomous denomination with a sense of responsibility toward its own calling to engage in mission work would be hindered, not fostered, by foreign subsidy. In other words, Nevius would have considered it very wrong for the Protestant Reformed Churches to train and pay the salaries of native pastors on some foreign mission field.

It would be incorrect to imagine, however, that Nevius' concern was chiefly an economic one. He saw the economic factor as an element of the spiritual life of the native church. The wrong kind of support, in his opinion, is bound to lead to spiritual laxity and to what he called "rice Christians," people who come to the church and who seek the ministry only for financial reasons. For this reason, over against the old policy of providing everything (church buildings, salaries of full-time native pastors), Nevius outlined his own method which, from an economic point of view, provided for self-supporting churches from the moment of their inception.

Apart from the support of the missionaries, the sending church was to provide funding for nothing. The first Christians were not to be provided a church building or a paid, native pastor. They were to meet in the home of one of their number. When they grew and became too numerous for meeting in homes they were to construct their own building at their own expense. At this point the missionaries would select certain capable and more advanced members. These would exercise a certain amount of oversight on a voluntary basis. These would be trained, especially in the conduct of worship, by the missionaries. If sufficient progress ensued, the groups would be organized into congregations, and paid assistants would be appointed until such time as native pastors could be trained. The latter would then replace the missionaries. The final fruit would be the establishment of an autonomous, self-supporting church.

Following Nevius' advice (given in 1890) the Presbyterian missionaries in Korea placed a high priority on Bible study, not only for the leaders but for every member of the church. From the very beginning the missionaries, with the help of the Bible Societies of that day, devoted themselves to the translation of the Scriptures. They printed the Bible in the older Korean script, which was easier to read than the Chinese characters. These translations

were distributed throughout the land. This, coupled with the fact that the Korean Christians were literate, made the "Bible Class" system work. Each believer received instruction from his leader. The leaders and circuit-helpers were instructed by the missionaries. We are told that "In 1890, the year in which Nevius visited Seoul, the Mission started its first Bible-class there with seven members. In the 1930's each of the 3,000 local congregations held an annual Bible-Study Course for which the members left their every-day occupations completely, generally for a week. The missionaries created a system by which the whole Korean Church, from the tiniest village congregation to the largest city church, studied the Bible. For many, this system culminated in theological training for the ministry." (Beyerhaus, Lefever; *The Responsible Church And The Foreign Mission*, p. 94)

A bit later the Mission expanded the work of the Bible classes by opening in all its stations self-supporting Bible Institutes in which "humble church-workers, men and women, 'exhorters', deacons, group-leaders, elders, assistants and Bible-women, could study for one or two months each winter, the whole course taking from five to six years. In 1936 there were 4,509 men and women studying in these Bible Institutes . . . In this way the Korean Church gained a whole army of lay assistants who shouldered the main burden of parish work and evangelism without over-burdening the Mission or the young church financially or forcing the Church to depend on the Government for subsidies. Only ordained ministers could administer the Sacraments, and after 1907 the number of these men grew rapidly. Their Bible-knowledge was thorough, and as a result they were gifted with spiritual insight and evangelistic zeal." (Beyerhaus, Lefever; pp. 94, 95)

As we have pointed out in previous articles, there certainly are commendable features in the "Nevius method." These ought to be incorporated into our own mission thinking and practice. If understood biblically the three main tenets of this method — self-government, self-support, and self-propagation — are correct. The mission church ought to be instructed and led to the point where it is possible to ordain native pastors, elders, and deacons. These ought to be independent of the church which sends the missionaries. The new church must be self-propagating in the sense that it sends out its own missionaries in obedience to the command of Christ. The mission church, we believe, ought to be from its very inception self-supporting. We ought to learn from the experience of the church of the past that it is wrong to build church buildings for the converts. It is wrong to pay native pastors. It is wrong to do these things, for the rea-

sons Dr. Nevius and others have stated. We are not saying it is wrong to manifest the benevolence of Christ to those who are truly poor and in need. Obviously there is a place for this on the mission field. What we are saying, however, is that we must not do for mission converts what Scripture commands them to do for themselves. This we firmly believe applies to the church in every nation. Each church must be a manifestation of the Body of Jesus Christ in its own time and place. Each congregation must have its own officebearers. For its pastors each congregation must provide.

The emphasis which Nevius placed upon Bible study, as well as the Bible Study Classes which evolved from that in Korea, are commendable. Certainly the missionary, in addition to his regular preaching, will have to devote himself to teaching the converts from the Word of God. In fact, in the broader sense, we believe this to be a part of preaching. After the example of the apostle Paul the missionary must teach God's people "publicly, and from house to house" (Acts 20:20-27). To this belongs the translating of Scripture into the native language so that the converts are able to read and study the Scriptures. Great stress ought to be placed on all of these matters.

Aside from differences in unimportant detail or emphasis there is a major weakness in the "Nevius

method." There is little, in fact almost no emphasis at all, on the preaching of the Word, at least in the initial stages of the work. The house groups are under an unordained, voluntary leader. The leaders are under an unordained, paid helper. Only after considerable development is the stage reached where an ordained, native pastor takes over the work. At this point, according to Nevius, the missionary must go elsewhere. The native church is able to stand on its own. In this direction the church ought not go in its mission work. Preaching must be the chief part of the work of the missionary. The New Testament is altogether clear on this point. (Cf. I Cor. 1, Rom. 10, *et. al.*) As the Lord gives positive fruit upon the preaching, the missionary must seek out gifted men to be trained for the office of preacher, as well as for the offices of elder and deacon. The church does not need leaders and helpers; it needs officebearers through whom Christ will cause His voice to be heard, through whom Christ will rule and minister His mercies. Out of that will flow Bible study, spiritual growth. By that means the church will be gathered out of the nations. When the last elect shall have been born and gathered into the Body of our Lord He will come again to make His church perfect in the new heaven and earth. God's great and immeasurable glory will radiate from His church forever.

FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

The Nicene Creed

Rev. James Slopsema

Article 3: . . . *Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man . . .*

The fundamental thought and concern of this third article is that of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Jesus "was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary." The word "incarnate" literally means "in the flesh." It is not a biblical term but a theological one. It indicates that the eternal Son of God has come in the flesh. It means that God's Son has taken upon Himself our flesh and become one of us.

The incarnation of the Son of God has taken place only through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. As the Nicene Creed states it, Jesus Christ "was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary." The Apostles' Creed is

perhaps a little more specific at this point. There we read that Jesus was "conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary." The incarnation therefore is to be explained by the miraculous operation of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary. That which was conceived in Mary and born from her was not the result of the natural union of man and woman. It was rather the result of the direct operation of the Spirit of God in Mary. In short, it was a wonder of grace.

The fact of the virgin birth is more and more being disputed today. Writes Geddes MacGregor in his book, *The Nicene Creed*, page 57,

The doctrine of the Virgin Birth (that is, the assertion that Mary, the mother of Jesus, conceived Him in her womb without any human male cooperation) seems to those who account themselves "liberal" in

their approach to the Christian faith a peculiarly incredible, not to say ludicrous notion and perhaps the most conspicuous obstacle to an acceptance of the traditional Catholic views. Embarrassment about this doctrine, however, is not entirely confined to "liberals"; many thoughtful "conservatives", Roman Catholic and Reformed, Anglican and Lutheran, feel ill at ease with it.

The view that is more and more accepted today is that Jesus was simply the product of a natural union between Joseph and Mary. His conception and birth were no different from that of any other. Jesus had a human father just as any one else. There was nothing miraculous at all about His birth.

To take such a position of course requires that certain Bible passages be "explained away." Thus, for example, there is the well-known passage of Isaiah 7:14 that foretells the birth of Jesus: "Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and call His name Immanuel." Then there are the two very well known gospel accounts of Jesus' birth. First, there is the account of Luke. In Luke 1:26-38 we have the record of the appearance of the Angel to Mary and the announcement that she shall mother the Christ-child. In this account Mary is called a virgin (vs. 27). And it becomes clear from the message of the angel that as a virgin she should bring forth the Christ-child. "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (vs. 35). Next we have the account in Matthew 1. According to this passage the word of the angel has come true and Mary is great with child. Joseph has not been informed either by the angel or by Mary as to God's wonder work in her. All he can conclude is adultery on the part of Mary. Hence, he determines to put her away privately. But then the Angel appears to Joseph in a dream and reveals all. "Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost" (vs. 20). In this connection Matthew also cites Isaiah 7:14 and finds in this event the fulfillment of this particular prophecy (cf. vss. 22, 23).

The response of those that deny the virgin birth is essentially threefold.

First, it is pointed out that only two of the gospel accounts mention the virgin birth, Matthew and Luke. And these two accounts are obviously to be understood allegorically. By this is meant that the events recorded in these passages did not necessarily take place as they are recorded. These "events," in other words, are not to be understood literally but figuratively. They serve merely to point us to some deeper truth and meaning. The

Bible, we are told, is full of such allegories.

Secondly, it is pointed out that the virgin birth is not mentioned at all in the rest of the N.T. It is not mentioned in the epistles. Nor do we find it in the book of Acts which records the missionary labors of the early church. In the book of Acts all emphasis is laid on the resurrection of Jesus; but no mention is made of the virgin birth. This only confirms therefore that the accounts in Matthew and Luke concerning the virgin birth are to be understood allegorically. If the early church had understood these accounts as literal history, more emphasis would have been placed on the fact of the virgin birth in the rest of the N.T.

Finally, it is pointed out that the word translated "virgin" in most English translations of the Bible does not mean virgin at all but simply "young woman" or "maiden." The Hebrew word *betullah* and the Greek word *parthenos* simply refer to an unmarried woman. Furthermore, we are told that in the O.T. times this did not imply virginity at all. In early Hebrew, as in other primitive societies, girls were normally married very early, shortly after puberty, so that the question of virginity did not arise at all. Hence, when Isaiah prophesied concerning the birth of Christ, all he was saying was that a young, unmarried woman would conceive and bear a son and call His name Immanuel.

In response to this we wish briefly to point out several things.

First, we must point out that the two gospel accounts of Jesus' birth are obviously not to be understood allegorically. It is true that there are allegories in the Bible. But all sound rules of interpretation militate against understanding the gospel accounts of Jesus' birth allegorically. They are so obviously intended to relate historical fact. If these two passages of Scripture are to be understood allegorically, then there is no passage of Scripture that we can assume accurately relates to us simple historical fact.

Secondly, it is quite obvious that Isaiah 7:14 does not simply foretell that a young, unmarried woman shall conceive and bear a son. This is evident from the fact that this conception and birth were to serve as a sign in Israel. Notice what the prophet said, "Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." The point here is that to serve as a sign there must be something unusual about this conception and birth. It must partake of the nature of the miraculous. But certainly this would not be the case if "virgin" is translated "young woman." There is nothing extraordinary in that a young, unmarried woman should conceive and bring forth a son. This has happened repeated-

ly throughout history. But there is something unusual if this young woman is a virgin. And this is undoubtedly the idea of Isaiah. A *virgin* would conceive and bear a son.

Finally, it is true that the virgin birth as such is not mentioned in the N.T. except in the birth accounts of Matthew and Luke. We must not fail to see however that the fact of the virgin birth, although not expressly mentioned, certainly is implied throughout the N.T. It is implied in the truth of the incarnation which runs as a golden strand throughout the entire N.T. Scriptures. Time and again, in many different passages, we are taught that Jesus Christ is the Son of God come in the flesh. This in turn necessarily implies the virgin birth. How else can you possibly explain the incarnation? In fact, the virgin birth and the incarnation of Jesus are so inseparably connected that where the one is mentioned the other need not even be expressed! The one simply presupposes the other. And this is undoubtedly the reason why in the N.T. the fact of the virgin birth is not mentioned other than in the two gospel accounts of Matthew and Luke. Some things are so obvious they need no more be mentioned.

This in turn brings us to the central issue. The real issue here is whether Jesus is the eternal Son of God or merely a man. Those who deny the virgin

birth do so because they have already denied the true divinity of Jesus Christ and therefore the idea of the incarnation. Once you deny these, then, to use the words of Geddes MacGregor whom we quoted earlier, the virgin birth is "incredible," "ludicrous," an "embarrassment," and a "conspicuous obstacle." It must at all costs be destroyed. For the virgin birth points to only one thing — the incarnation. However, if, in turn, we by faith accept the simple teaching of the Bible concerning the incarnation — that Jesus is the eternal Son of God come in the flesh — then the way is clear also to accept the very clear teaching of the Bible concerning the virgin birth of Christ.

In the third article of the Nicene Creed the early church confessed her faith in the incarnation and virgin birth of Jesus Christ. She confessed that Jesus "was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man." This confession simply followed from the truth she had confessed in the previous article — that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, very God of very God.

This confession of the incarnation and the virgin birth of Christ has also been the confession of the true church of Christ down through the ages. He who will not also make this his confession can not claim to be a part of that church.

GUIDED INTO ALL TRUTH

Doctrine of Scripture: Introduction

Rev. Thomas Miersma

The early new dispensational church, following the death of the last apostle, had received from God His completed Word. The cornerstone of the church had been laid through the cross, in Christ as our Redeemer and exalted Head. The Word of Christ had been given unto His church, and the foundation of the new dispensational church had been laid in the doctrine of the apostles. It is at this point in time that we begin our study of the history of doctrine, of the Spirit's guiding His church into all the truth.

It is our intention to begin that study with a consideration of the church's doctrine of the Word, her doctrine of Scripture. How the church of Jesus Christ views that Word of God, how she confesses the truth of that Word, materially affects her development and appropriation of the truth of that

Word. That written revelation of God is the touchstone of all her doctrine, faith, and life. It is the standard of truth. How the church therefore views that Word, her understanding of the way in which it is to be interpreted, and the value she places upon it must necessarily shape the course of the history of doctrine. When the church has a low conception of that Word and places her trust more in reason and in the philosophy of men, we can well expect that not only will little development of the truth take place, but that errors and heresy will enter the church. The church's regard for Scripture and the development of the truth go hand in hand. When other standards of truth, whether traditions of men, decisions of councils, or the philosophy of the world, are placed alongside the Scriptures or coordinated to them in authority, the truth declines in the church.

History repeatedly shows this to be the case. In the Middle Ages when the authority of tradition, church councils, and the pope supplanted the authority of Scripture, the church declined into error, so that the only remedy for the church was reformation. When dead orthodoxy settled upon the Reformed churches after the Synod of Dordt in the seventeenth century, and human reason was elevated to a place of authority alongside Scripture, the Reformed churches also went through a period of decline. This continued until the time of the secession from the state church in the Netherlands. So also is it in the Christian church-world today and among Reformed churches in particular. Regard for the Word of God has declined under the guise of a more enlightened approach to Scripture, an approach which is not really new or enlightening, but rather a darkening of the church's appreciation of her sole doctrinal foundation. With this approach errors multiply about us rapidly and pour into the church. So much is this the case that on every side we see Reformed churches departing from the rich heritage of God's Word, and selling it for a mess of warmed-over pottage.

In a very real sense of the word it may be said that the history of doctrine and the development of the truth has always paralleled the church's understanding of the doctrine of the Word of God. By the grace of God this parallel is not absolute. There have always been men who have treasured that Word of God, have studied it, and have brought the truth to light and enriched it. This was true even in the darkest periods of the church's history. Yet even then this development went hand in hand with a high personal regard for Scripture and careful biblical exegesis.

A study of the development of the doctrine of Scripture and its formal expression may therefore serve also to give to us an overview of the history of doctrine itself and the course and direction of that history. We must not expect, however, that the church formally set forth a doctrine of the Word of God early in her doctrinal development. The church began immediately to labor with that Word of God, receiving and confessing that Word in faith. It needed no formal declaration of the doctrine of the Scripture, nor was such a declaration possible. For that doctrine also must be developed from Scripture itself, which is its own interpreter. The need to make such a formal declaration arose as errors crept into the church, errors of interpretation, errors of doctrine. Instead the church occupied itself first of all with the fundamental questions concerning the doctrine of God, Whose Word it was. Nor was it always the case that the doctrine of the Word of God was first corrupted and then heresy arose in the church. Rather, in the

history of doctrine, heresy is often first and a corruption of the church's doctrine of the Word often follows upon its heels. This is necessarily so. Heresy, to maintain itself in the church, cannot abide a sound doctrine of Scripture or sound principles of interpretation, lest it be exposed for what it is, a departure from the truth.

Nevertheless, there has always been in the mind of the church, if not formally expressed, a doctrine of the Word of God which has guided the church in her study of the Scriptures. We often see the opposite situation today. A church or denomination may indeed have in its creeds a formal expression of the doctrine of Scripture, but it has little or nothing to do with what in practice is believed in the church or with that which functions in the daily life of the people of God. Thus, while a formal expression concerning the doctrine of Scripture does not fully appear until the time of the Reformation, yet in the writings of the church fathers and in the actions of the church, one can yet discern and glean an implicit doctrine of the Word.

It is particularly in the formative elements found in the early church, as she struggled to understand that Word, that the seeds, both of truth and of error, were sown, which later bore fruit in the church's doctrine of the Word. That fruit led to the darkness of the Middle Ages and to the rise of apostolic tradition and of the clergy as the trustees and interpreters of that tradition. And the seeds of truth bore fruit which led to a return to the Word of God which began already with the pre-reformers and came to formal expression in the creeds of the Reformation. These things we shall consider.

It must not be thought, however, that the early church with which we begin our study, merely possessed the Word of God in its entirety, ready to hand. True, the revelation of God was complete and that Word had been given. But, for the early church, the Word of God was present in a scattered and fragmented form.

The Old Testament the church received as a completed entity in itself. However, there were also in use in the early church certain apocryphal books. These books, which are mentioned in Article 6 of our Confession of Faith, were also in use in Jesus' day in the church of the old dispensation and passed into use also in the New Testament church. There were other such books as well. The status of these books, their place and authority, if any, had to be determined by the church. This process was not wholly complete, as Article 6 indicates, even up to the time of the Reformation, for the Roman Catholic Church holds these books to be on a par with Scripture, while we as Reformed churches, reject their authority.

Moreover, the New Testament church was predominantly Gentile in its makeup and had little access to the Hebrew language of the Old Testament. Even among Jews living outside of Palestine, Hebrew was little known. The result was that the Old Testament was largely available only in translations. The main translation in use was the Greek version, called the Septuagint, which became the Old Testament Bible of the New Testament church. This version varies in the quality of its translation, from what we would consider excellent to what we would call a paraphrase, and at times a bad paraphrase.

As to the New Testament Scriptures, these had not yet been gathered and collected into one whole. The letters of the apostles were written to various churches and the original copies usually remained with the churches to which they were written. While it is evident that some of them were soon copied and circulated among the churches, indeed some almost immediately, yet by no means all of the books of the New Testament were in the hands of every church at the time of the death of the apostles. The church had to go through a period in which, under the leading of the Spirit, it deter-

mined what belonged to the Scriptures and what did not. Nor were copies of individual books readily available. There were no printing presses; each book had to be copied by hand. There were other books and letters which also vied for a place in that New Testament, and the canonicity or inspiration of some books, and in particular some of the smaller letters of the apostles, was not soon decided by the church.

The Spirit first had to lead the church into a recognition of the contents and scope of her heritage of the Word of God. This process took time. It began already in the lifetime of the apostles and continued after their death for several centuries. The apostle Peter himself points us to the beginning of this process in II Peter 3:15, 16 when he writes, "...even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction." This process was continued until a general consensus of the church was reached in approximately A.D. 350.

GUEST ARTICLE

God's Patience

Rev. Robt. C. Harbach

"And the Lord passed by before him and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, *longsuffering* and abundant in goodness and truth" (Ex. 34:6).

The word *longsuffering*, found four times in the King James Old Testament, is the term there used for *patience*. It is closely connected with and is a display of God's mercy; "and it may be observed that wherever God is said to be *longsuffering*, He is represented as gracious, merciful, of great mercy and kindness" (Gill). This biblical fact ought to warn us that "common grace" has not the support of Scripture, and it ought at least introduce us to the principal truth that God's ethical attributes are in Himself absolute and independent and, in their communicable form, always particular. The word in the Hebrew is *erekh appayim* and means, literally, "long of nostrils," and sometimes is translated, "slow to anger" (Neh. 9:17; Ps. 145:8). (In anger, the nostrils dilate and contract, alternately.) The New Testament verb-form for *longsuffering* is

makrothumeo, "to be strong-spirited," so as not to lose heart, "to be patient in bearing the offences and injuries of others; slow to anger, slow to punish." The noun-form is *makrothumia*, "patience, endurance, steadfastness, perseverance, *longsuffering*, forbearance" (Rom. 3:25). These terms, in both Testaments, denote "an attitude of God toward His people, whom in His sovereign mercy He is desirous to save" (*Reformed Dogmatics*, H. Hoeksema, 116).

In Luke 18:7 we read, "And shall not God avenge His own elect, which (who) cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them?" On that last clause, in the KJV, there are two different renderings of the original text, one with the verb *makrothumei* (present indicative), and the other with *makrothumoon* (participial form). Both the Englishman's Greek New Testament, Stephens, 1550 and the Majority Text of the Greek N.T., 1982, prefer the reading with the participle, which H.H. says is "the correct reading." We then render the

clause, "and is He being longsuffering over them?" He will not long delay His help to them, for that would contradict the "speedily" of v. 8. He is being longsuffering (and that is a mercy) "over His people" (ital., RCH) conceived of as being objects of hatred and persecution in the world" (H.H.). The idea is that the Lord "is longsuffering toward us" (the "beloved" of the II Pet. 3:9 context).

According to Romans 9:22, God endures "with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." It would be easy, but wrong, to interpret this to mean that *longsuffering* here denotes an attitude of God's favor toward the reprobate wicked. What the text says is that He endures the vessels of wrath (and their wickedness), doing so with much longsuffering, or while He endures the wicked (the tares), He experiences and reveals longsuffering to His people. It is like a loving father witnessing His children being beaten by muggers. He for a time endures their being painfully afflicted (that they through a measure of suffering may learn to endure hardness). Those wicked oppressors (cp. the Egyptians) He endures and endures, until He must finally say, Enough is enough! and rescue His own (cp. the Israelites) from their frightening beatings. Of course, all the while He endured those violent enemies He was longsuffering over His children! (See also *Reformed Dogmatics*, H.H., first two paragraphs, p. 121). God's waiting out the wicked is in order "that He might be gracious" (Isa. 30:18) to His people. Grace is both revealed only in Christ and only to those in Christ. This then of necessity goes for His longsuffering and patience (aspects of His grace). Jesus Christ, our faithful Savior, fully satisfied for all our sins to lay down the ground for manifestations of His longsuffering. Then this mercy is not common, showered also on the wicked, but is particular, experienced only by the righteous. For "the longsuffering of God is (not merely has a tendency to) salvation" (II Pet. 3:15). Then no comfort is there for the wicked that God endures them until He cannot stand them any more.

The question remains as to whether this attribute of longsuffering is apart from God's people and essentially in Him. There is reason to believe that this is the case. God is longsuffering in Himself. He is patient in His very nature. This does not make us Patirpassionists. God in His goodness, blessedness, and mercy is the eternally happy God, even though passion, grief, and suffering are ascribed to Him. Longsuffering, we see from the above Scriptures, springs from His truth, goodness, kindness, grace, and mercy, fountain virtues essential to Him. Longsuffering is an extension of these. Considered in God's essence, longsuffering is a facet of His immutable goodness according to which He loves and

delights in Himself and is eternally jealous for the honor and glory of all His perfections.

Since this attribute is rooted in God's goodness and mercy, it is an abuse and dishonor of it to take God's name in vain. This is exactly what we do when we use such expletives as "My goodness!" (For there is none good but God; only *He* may say, *My goodness!*) In the nominal Christian community we hear such exclamations as, Goodness! Gracious! (or Goodness-gracious!), or, as in the childish CB highway jargon, "Mercy me!" The latter, supposedly, is an acceptable conformity to an FCC regulation against using profanity over the air, but nevertheless a slur on the Cross, apart from which there is no mercy. Nor is there any mercy for blasphemers. These are all profane abuses of God's patience and longsuffering. There was an ancient form of swearing in the utterance, "s'truth!" (by God's truth!). This is terrible! But the more modern jocular oaths are also a degradation of God's virtues, for they are His names. For one, there is, "Holy cow!" In this Aaron's and Jeroboam's calves are parodied, or India's ubiquitous cow is trivially raised to a farcical "holiness." It is just as bad to say, "Holy smoke!" — a genial but profane reference either to the cloudy pillar of the tabernacle (symbol of God's presence), or to the smoke ascending from the altar of burnt offering and the altar of incense. Irish Catholics have an abusive way of cheerful profanity in, "Faith! and begorra!" (by God!). But God is jealous for His holy name (Ezek. 39:25), and will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain. Therefore, these and the like expressions must neither be heard nor tolerated among us.

Patience (hupomonee, "to remain under" longer) and *longsuffering* are, for the most part, New Testament terms, and the former seems to refer to every instance of occurrence to a sanctified human action and not to a divine attribute. Nevertheless, God sets forth Himself as a pattern of *all* longsuffering (I Tim. 1:16), and that means that in, whatever you call it, patience or longsuffering, we are to be followers of God as dear children. That means we ought to follow patience as exemplified in our Savior's life. The martyrs did, following the pattern of, "as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth" (Isa. 53:7). When Christ was led to slaughter, He was as quiet as a lamb. Under the shearers He made not a sound. Pilate, in exasperation, blurted, "Answerest Thou nothing? Behold how many things they witness against Thee!" Also before Herod and Caiaphas He was not impatient because of the pain and shame suffered at their wicked hands. When taking a blow in the face, He never replied in language like, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall!" When spit defiled

His face, He did not say, "For which of My many good works do you do this?" He did not speak, did not accuse His enemies to His Father. He could have called down twelve legions of angels on them. He could have cursed them in the name of the Lord as Elisha did the apostate children of Bethel. But He came to bear the curse, and be made a curse for us. He could have struck all these world-rulers and religious rulers with a plague so that they would have been eaten of worms. As with Ananias and Sapphira, He could have struck them dead on the spot! He could have made the hill of Calvary a belching volcano to swallow all the jesting, jeering mob. But He was there on the Cross, not in power, but in weakness, and meekness (strength in control). Power was there, but not on display except as used over Himself rather than against His enemies. Omnipotence was there, but held in control by redeeming love to bear all the divine wrath aimed against the sins of His people. There He suffered trumped up charges, fraud, injustice, malice, shame, and murder, so much over which He could

have exploded in natural indignation. But He was meek, silent, and patient to the end. The reprobate Jews had eternally and irrevocably cursed themselves with their awful cry, "His blood be upon us, and our children!" But while His blood flowed down from the Cross, He never said anything against any one of us like, My blood be upon you (to damn you)! Zipporah had said to Moses at sight of her bleeding child, "Surely thou art a bloody husband to me!" But He never complained on the Cross of His Church, O My Spouse, at what a cost of blood! A Lamb shorn and stripped of everything, He cried, "I can tell all My bones! They look and stare upon Me!" Yet there was not a murmur at what we gave Him — our cruel sins. Patience (hupomonee) He exerted in *unflinching endurance* until He bore our sins away. This He did "for the joy that was set before Him, enduring the Cross, despising the shame." "Let us earnestly seek grace to emulate this divine excellency. 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect' (Matt. 5:48)." (A.W. Pink).

FROM HOLY WRIT

Believing All the Prophetic Scriptures

Rev. G. Lubbers

Chapter IX

Dispensational-Premillennial teaching, which follows in the footsteps of the Scofield Bible "notes," teaches "seven dispensations."

We have thus far taken notice of the first four of these so-called dispensations, in which God then deals from a different principle with man, as a "means of testing." These four "dispensations" which we have studied are: the dispensation of "Innocence," of "Conscience," of "Human Government," of "Promise."

Presently we come to our investigation of what Scofield calls "the Fifth Dispensation": LAW. Writes Scofield, "This dispensation extends from Sinai to Calvary, from the Exodus to the Cross." Writes Scofield, "The history of Israel in the wilderness is one long record of the violation of Law. The testing of the *nation* by law ended at the Cross."

Furthermore, we read in the "notes" (idem) the following details.

"(1) Man's state at the beginning (Ex. 19:1-4)

"(2) His responsibility (Ex. 19:5, 6; Rom. 10:5)

"(3) His failure (II Kings 17:1, 7, 17, 19; Acts 2:22, 23)

"(4) His judgment (II Kings 17:1-7, 20; 25:1-11; Luke 21:20-24)."

Now it ought to be kept in mind that the Scofield presentation of "law" is understood as a *principle of testing*. It is each time a different manner of dealing with man as he is given a kind of "New beginning." Exodus 19:1-4, according to Scofield, depicts man's state at the beginning. Of course, in the "notes" no exegesis is given at all. These are all mere statements, allegations with some appended Scripture references.

The principle of testing here is "law," just as the period from Abraham till Sinai was the principle of testing of the promise to receive the inheritance of the earthly land of Canaan. To substantiate this position of "law" as a "testing device" of God, reference is made to Romans 15:5, where we read, "For Moses describeth (writes: *graphei*, in Greek) the righteousness which is out of law: that the man

which doeth those things shall live by them." Paul is here quoting Moses from Leviticus 18:5: "Ye shall therefore keep My statutes, and My judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD." The Westminster fathers refer as explanatory texts to Ezekiel 20:11, 13, 21; Romans 10:5; Galatians 3:12. It is evident from these passages that here the LORD comes as the unchangeable JEHOVAH, the I AM THAT I AM.

Hence, these passages indicate not a new and different principle of testing man, but refer to the new and unchangeable ordinance of God to His covenant people in Christ Jesus.

We will come to explain this more fully later.

At this point we merely are interested to demonstrate that it is fair and just to say that the "law" in Scofield's teaching is a *law-principle*, as it stands opposite to saving grace, excluding it; that in so doing Scofield refuses to believe all the prophetic Scriptures, as they find their perfect end in Christ, the end of the law for righteousness to every one who believes, the Jew first and also the Greek! Does not Paul write in Galatians 3:12, "Now the law is not out of faith, but the man which doeth them shall live in them?"

It is good to understand an opponent's writings, and that, too, rather thoroughly. We must, therefore, also inquire into what Scofield calls man's "responsibility" (see above). For this responsibility he refers to Exodus 19:5, 6. Does this beautiful and rich passage from the mouth of God Himself refer to a work-righteousness whereby man may save himself, a certain *law-principle*? Read Exodus 19:1-6 from your own Bible. It is evident that this is the false teaching which Dispensationalists would distill from this passage. But this is nothing less than foisting their own opinion, private notion, upon the text which clearly does not sustain such false constructions. When Israel replies, "all that the LORD hath spoken we will do" (Ex. 19:8a), is it a rightly dividing of the Word to jump at the conclusion that Israel is assenting to a mere *law-principle*, whereby the promise of God's grace to the church of all ages is abrogated? To ask this question is to answer it.

Far be that from us thus to teach!

The trouble with Scofield is that he has both an erroneous interpretation of what he calls "Man's State In The Beginning" (Ex. 19:1-4) and of man's "Responsibility" (Ex. 19:5, 6; Rom. 10:5). Let us bear in mind that Exodus 19:1-4 does not at all speak of "Man's State In The Beginning." The text does not speak of mankind, but refers to the new state of Israel in God's Covenant of grace. It speaks of the wonderful place of *Israel of God* in the tender mercies and loving care of Jehovah God, as He is

fulfilling the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of whom God is not ashamed to be called "their God" since He has prepared for them a city (Heb. 11:16).

Briefly we should notice the following main points in Exodus 19:1-8:

(1) That at this point in Israel's history they have been already delivered from the cruel bondage of Egypt by the mighty saving hand of Jehovah. They had been saved pinpointedly in and through the tenth plague upon Egypt, which laid Pharaoh prostrate, and which culminated in his utter destruction in the Red Sea. God had passed over Israel with the angel of death in that awful night over Egypt land, and had said, "when I see the blood I will pass over." And Moses had instituted the passover by faith (Heb. 11:28; Ex. 12:40-51). God had fulfilled His covenant promise to Abraham spoken of in Genesis 15:8-18. Hence, Israel at the foot of Mt. Sinai was not simply in a state and condition of "Man's State of Beginning." They stood in the covenant mercies as the firstborn sons of God (Num. 23:22; 24:8; Hosea 11:1; Matt. 2:15). God has called His firstborn out of Egypt land!

(2) That at this point Israel had been baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; already they had eaten of the manna of heaven, angel's food, and they were under the divine pedagogy where they must learn that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceeds from the mouth of God. And these are covenant words of Jehovah! They must walk in newness of life, in simple childlike faith (Ps. 78:22-25; Ex. 16:15; 24:7, 8; I Cor. 10:1-13).

(3) That Israel now receives the law of the ten commandments, as this word of God's covenant comes directly, orally, from the mouth of the great, righteous, holy, and merciful Jehovah, Who will shew His mercy in thousands of generations of those who love Him. And they hear: I am the Lord thy God, thy Redeemer; walk before Me in sincere and godly thankfulness (Ex. 20:1ff.).

We are of the settled and holy conviction that we rightly divide the word of truth, as outlined above. And we therefore humbly submit that the Israel here addressed, and which answers to Jehovah, is the elect people of God, as they are destined to bring forth the Christ, the Seed, called out of Isaac (Gen. 21:12; Rom. 9:7b).

When we look at the disobedience of the children of Israel for forty years in the wilderness, and when we attempt to answer the soul-searching question as to the real character and nature of this "disobedience," we must not jump at hasty conclusions. We must patiently listen to the Scriptures, believing all of them. And then it is crystal clear

from Hebrews 3:19 that the Israel which did and could not enter into the promised rest were those who apostatized from the living God, as revealed at Sinai, after being delivered by God's outstretched hand out of Egypt, the house of Satan's cruel bondage. They would not walk as those walked who were redeemed by the blood. They were those of Massa and Meriba, those in the provocation in the desert. They could not enter because of their unbelief. God had sworn with an oath that they should not enter into His rest. They were not the true Israel of God (Num. 14:30; Heb. 3:18, 19). This was true of all those whose carcasses fell in the wilderness (Num. 14:22, 23; Ps. 106:26).

It was not merely disobedience to some "law-principle," but it was the disobedience of stark unbelief, a falling away from the living God!

This we must keep in mind for our very life's sake!

The substructure of the law-giving is that Israel in the way of faith and obedience of faith will inherit the promise, while it is called "today." In this way they will exhibit that they are a new creation of God, a kingdom of priests. Ever there was the remnant according to election of grace. These kept God's covenant, they faithfully fulfilled their

holy vow before the face of God; they kept the vow uttered as recorded in Exodus 19:8: "All that the LORD hath spoken we will do." These vowed and paid unto Jehovah, their God. These endured to the end.

The "failure" of Israel to keep the law was not that the saints had only a small beginning of the new obedience. These the Old Testament saints too had, just as we. These were the sins and weaknesses of the people, for which God raised up merciful high priests, who bore the sins of the people in the sacrificial offerings, particularly on the great Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:16; Heb. 2:17; 5:2; 7:27, 28; 9:7). No, this "failure" was the sin of unbelief, which refuses to look for redemption in the Blood, which speaks better things than Abel. It is the sin of those who "were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift" — have tasted of the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, and who have fallen away from the living God in stark and hopeless unbelief. And their carcasses fell wilderness . . .

They vowed and did not pay unto Jehovah!

Let us believe all of the Scriptures!

(to be continued)

TRANSLATED TREASURES

A Pamphlet Concerning the Reformation of the Church

Dr. A. Kuyper

(In the preceding paragraph Kuyper has talked about reformation which comes about through a split between a local congregation and the church federation. In this paragraph he speaks of reformation by means of a split between the individual and his own congregation.)

58. Concerning Reformation By Means Of A Break With the Existing Congregation.

The calling of God's child is serious when he comes to a break with the existing organization of his church. This calling becomes still more serious if the matter comes to a break with the federation in which that church is connected with other churches. But yet incomparably more serious is the Christian's calling if it comes to a break with the congregation itself.

Think of the fact that by a break with the organization as well as by a break with the church federa-

tion, the believer never faces the question if the once true church has perhaps unnoticed turned into the false church. He sees that the government in his church is not according to the requirements of God's Word and also that the manner of life is not according to the balances of God's sanctuary, even that the connection with other churches has become unholy. But his church itself remains for him always the church of Christ. He does not think of getting out.

But in the third chapter of this pamphlet concerning the deformation of the church, it became evident to us that corruption in Jesus' church can also proceed to the extreme of desecration. A church which was once the church of Christ can degenerate into the church of Antichrist, and thus can continue to exist as the false church under a

deceptive appearance.

The possibility of this appears in Jesus' own words when He said that the synagogue of the Jews after His death on the cross, had degenerated into the synagogue of Satan. Thus the Lord wrote to the church of Philadelphia: "Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews and are not, but do lie."

The synagogue of the Jews was initially recognized by Jesus as the synagogue of Jehovah. Otherwise He would not have gone up into its courts of prayer, and much less would He have brought His disciples into it. More yet, we know that Jesus Himself took a part in the service of these synagogues, and thus it is certain that these synagogues were originally recognized by Jesus as the genuine church of God. But by and after His crucifixion, this changed. The synagogue fell under the Sanhedrin and did not oppose that Sanhedrin even when the Sanhedrin, by condemning to death the Son of God as a blasphemer, broke forever with the church of God. In relation to Christ, the synagogue had to build itself up or die. It did the last. When the Sanhedrin passed sentence and the priests incited the people and the leaders of the people to cry: "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" and the women to cry: "His blood be on us!" then the Spirit of the Lord sorrowfully went away from the church of the synagogue to allow Satan's spirit to enter. Thus the church of the Jews became a synagogue of Satan, or, what we would call a false church.

This shows that a church in which we were born and in which we once found salvation and often received the seals of the covenant, can degenerate into a false church. This dreadful truth now lays upon God's children the duty to investigate, in connection with the deep fall of the churches, prayerfully, sharply, and very closely, whether the church in which they live is still the true church of Christ or perhaps has gone over into the form of Satan's synagogue. This task is extremely painful because there is so much at stake. If it is still the true church, then a Christian may not separate from it. But also, if it has become the synagogue of Satan, then he may not a moment longer remain bound to it. He must get out.

Thus one sees that the question of separating or staying is in the absolute sense not a disputable point concerning which one can argue for or against, or discuss according to mood or fancy, its good and bad points; but rather that in times of church decay each child of God comes in the depths of his own soul before this most serious question. He must carefully consider that in answering it he is found faithful before his God. It would be a fearful thing to continue to live in a church of which Jesus witnessed to His apostles:

"This is a church of Satan which says that it is Reformed, and it is not, but it lies." But it would also be terrible if we went out through departure or separation from the church which was still a manifestation of the body of Christ and thus condemn as a synagogue of Satan that which was still an organ of the Holy Spirit.

Both sins are equally serious and it cannot be too deeply impressed upon the hearts of God's people that they must seek from the all-wise One light through prayer and entreaty in order to be protected from error and kept free from a false choice.

At least a few symptoms come clearly to mind with which many children of God escape this serious and earnest question, such as, externality, rashness, thoughtlessness.

Just as, alas, there are many who believe three states of faith in the soul, many also judge in good faith that three conditions of the church are thinkable.

They imagine that a soul can be either dead or living or concerned. In the same way they have the idea that a church can be either true or false or something in between.

Yet every instructed and initiated soul knows better. It is definitely established for him on the ground of God's Word that every soul which is not dead is alive, and that every soul which is not yet alive is entirely dead. In the same way appearances of concern are entirely dead; but true concern already means translation from death to life.

This also applies to the churches of our Lord. What is not yet false is still the true church, and what is no longer the true church is entirely the false. An in-between state does not exist. Also for churches on earth a purgatory is unthinkable. Each church is the true or already the false church. To think of a mixture of true and false is absurd.

This also condemns the rash act of many who judge that they can, if they wish, come out, but who would rather stay in; and also of those who think that they can remain, but yet, coming out, nevertheless still support the rejected church as half and half true even after their departure.

One of the two is true: if you see, taste, know that your church has become a synagogue of Satan, then you must get upon your feet, go out over her threshold, and shake off the dust of your feet against her. But if you see, taste, and know that it has not yet become a synagogue of Satan, then you must not send in a letter of separation but your obligation is to remain in it.

This makes it of deep concern for the children of God that they be clearly instructed in the marks by which they can distinguish what is still the true

church and what has already become the synagogue of Satan. Because of this principle we will venture in a modest way in the following paragraphs to give our brothers and sisters some light on this question. Now, however, we will let the question rest for a bit and proceed in this paragraph on the assumption that a child of God is a member of a church which actually has become a false church. Our purpose is to investigate further how such a child of God must then participate in the work of reformation.

We purposely write how he must engage in the work of reformation and not how he must walk out of the church.

That last is an unspiritual conception of the matter. It could be that the end is that he quite alone without any others leaves that false church. But he may not begin with this without great guilt and he may not formulate the question in this way without great lack of love.

To say: "I am walking out," is an egotistical, self-seeking thought. One cares for himself and shows that he has no more heart for his brothers than for the church. Or, worse yet, by a lack of heart for his brothers and for the church, one runs the risk of lacking a right heart for himself.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On November 26, 1983, the Lord willing, MR. AND MRS. PETER ROY WESTRA will celebrate their 35th wedding anniversary. As their children and grandchildren, we would like to thank them for the years of love and covenant instruction they have given us. We thank the Lord for preserving them and pray that He will continue to bless them in the years ahead.

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

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| Art and Karen Flier | Gary and Jeralyn Westra |
| Pete and Jan Westra | Bruce and Laura Westra |
| Marlin and Sandy Westra | Janice Westra |
| Ed and Verna Westra | and 14 grandchildren |

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Senior Mr. and Mrs. Society of Hope Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan takes this opportunity to express sincere sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Roger King, in the loss of his mother, MRS. JESSIE KING.

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

Prof. H. Hanko, Pres.
Peggy Komphuis, Sec'y.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies Aid Society of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan, mourns the loss of a faithful member, MRS. JOE OOMKES, whom the Lord took to Glory on October 5, 1983. We express our sympathy to her family and pray that the Lord will comfort and bless them with His Everlasting mercy.

"For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21)

Mrs. Peter Decker, Pres.
Mrs. Gerard Bylsma, Sec'y.

This will become most evident if we show the proper way for a child of God to walk under such circumstances.

If the reformation of the church is on the foreground for a godly man, and not only the desire to have for himself a desirable church, then such a child of God, when his trouble with the church begins, will feel a sadness towards God over the miserable state into which his church has sunk. That sad state of his church shall weigh on his soul as the judgment of God. He will be grieved because of the name of the Lord, and yet he will not complain and grumble, but will confess that God the Lord is righteous in His judgment because the people of the Lord have earned this judgment three times over by their unfaithful deeds. Himself belonging to that people of God and knowing his soul as shut up in the small bundle of the living, he will include himself in that guilt of his people before God. This comes about not in this way of reasoning: the people are guilty, he is of that people, and thus that guilt rests also upon him. No, it comes about in the spiritual way of the conviction of sin. His own makeup will be a hindrance to him and his own unbelief and lovelessness and coolness for heaven will be so fearfully bound on the soul that he will consider the Lord's deeds to be righteous even though there is no other reason for God's judgment than his own sin.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of the Hope Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan, expresses its Christian sympathy to Mr. Joe King in the death of his wife, JESSIE KING.

"Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee, He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." (Psalm 55:22)

J. DeVries, Pres.

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Mission Committee has published a reprint of the booklet, *The Three Forms of Unity*. Those who desire copies of this pamphlet for use in their catechism classes (price is 50¢ per copy) should contact:

Mr. Seymour Beiboer
2193 Clyde Park
Wyoming, MI 49509

Copies for mission or church extension work are available free from:

Faith Prot. Ref. Evangelism Committee
c/o Mr. Gus Huber
931 Village Lane
Jenison, MI 49428

ANNOUNCEMENT

Redlands Hope Protestant Reformed Church will be celebrating our 50th Anniversary and dedicating our new church building, D.V., on December 1 and 2, 1983. Rev. C. Hanko will be the speaker on the first evening and on the second evening we will have a dinner and a program. Everyone is cordially invited to join us and celebrate God's faithfulness with us. Commemorative booklets will be available. If you are interested in a copy, please contact Edwin Gritters, 934 College Ave., Redlands, Calif. 92373. Phone (714) 792-4923.

News From Our Churches

November 1, 1983

First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids formed another trio of names for the Jamaican Mission Field: Revs. W. Bekkering, R. Flikkema, and R. VanOverloop. At a special congregational meeting held after the evening service of October 30, Rev. Bekkering was chosen to receive the call.

Candidate Barry Gritters has been busy filling the pulpits of our local churches. He also led the Young People's Fall Retreat at Camp Pendalouan near Montague for two days. Our other Candidate, Ken Hanko, "has begun his work in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania. He and his family arrived there . . . and he will be conducting worship services for about two and a half months," according to the October 9, bulletin of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church, New Jersey.

A letter from Rev. Arie and Sherry den Hartog found in a recent *Across the Aisle* reads in part, "Two weeks ago we had a couple and a young brother here from Trengganu. They shared with us all the troubles and trials which they are facing in the church in Trengganu, Malaysia. They also requested the church here to help them. The first thing we are going to be doing to help them is to speak for their camp in November. I have been asked to speak there on three consecutive evenings on the general theme 'By The Word.' . . . I have been asked to speak on two evenings in connection with Reformation Day at the end of October. The theme for these messages will be 'THE WORD OF GOD AND THE REFORMATION.' . . . For the next three Sundays I will be preaching a special series of messages at the Toa Payoh Mission on Marriage. We are holding these special messages in connection with what has come to be known in Singapore as 'The Great Marriage Debate.' . . . It is a big debate on various questions on marriage and child-rearing . . ." If you think that Rev. den Hartog is the only busy person in Singapore, the following quote will change your mind, "Pastor Lau is just as busy as I am. Usually the speaking engagements for the various meetings are pretty well divided between the two Pastors. He is presently preparing for a series of messages for the December camp of the church."

Prof. Hoeksema gave a public lecture on October 27, on the theme "Reformation With A Return To True Repentance." Rev. Bekkering gave a public lecture at Kalamazoo Protestant Reformed Church November 4, on the theme "The Reformation and the Miracle of Christian Worship." A cassette recording of Prof. Hoeksema's address can be purchased for \$3.00 by sending your request and payment to Mr. Wes Koops, 8500 Ottogan, Holland, Michigan 49423.

Since we are talking about cassettes, Southeast Protestant Reformed Church has "approximately 300 taped sermons available for your personal use in our tape library. These sermons are indexed by text reference and name of minister." That announcement appeared in their September 25 bulletin. Doon Protestant Reformed Church has also become involved in producing sermon tapes. Their September 25 bulletin reads, "The Consistory has appointed a sermon tape committee responsible for taping, cataloging, and distributing sermon tapes."

The September 18 bulletin of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church read, "At the Building Committee meeting last Friday, (they decided) to proceed with work on the driveway and parking lot The approximate cost for this part of the work will be about \$40,000, an amount which is less than our original estimate." Redlands Protestant Reformed Church reports in its October 9 bulletin, "The New Church Building is nearing completion." And in its October 23, bulletin, "There will be a Congregational Meeting . . . to consider the financial needs of our new Church building. (an est. \$20,000 more will be needed to complete this project.)"

Redlands is also celebrating a 50th Anniversary-Dedication on December 1 & 2. They are requesting everyone to dig up any *old* pictures of churches, present or former members, pastors, Consistories, etc.

I will conclude with an item I forgot to mention earlier. The address of Candidate Hanko is: 305 Benson Manor, Township Line, Washington Lane, Jenkintown, PA 19046.

DH