

# The **STANDARD BEARER**

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

## **SPECIAL ISSUE** **on the** **Doctrine of Holy Scripture**

This is the third, and final, theme issue of the current volume-year. It is, we hope, an interesting, though not exhaustive, treatment of various aspects of the doctrine of Holy Scripture. We have tried, however, not to limit this issue to the doctrine as such, but also to include some contributions of a more practical nature. A special word of thanks is due to a guest writer in this issue, the Rev. Kenneth Hanko, missionary-pastor in Norristown, Pennsylvania.

## CONTENTS

Meditation —	
The More Sure Prophetic Word .....	434
Editor's Notes .....	437
Holy Scripture: Inspired and Infallible .....	437
The New Hermeneutics .....	440
The Clarity of God's Word and the Believing Reader .....	443
The Rule for the Christian Life .....	445
Scripture and the Covenant Home .....	447
The Survey Method of Bible Study .....	450
P.A.P.E. and A.P.E. ....	452
Book Review .....	454
News From Our Churches .....	455

## THE STANDARD BEARER

ISSN 0362-4692

Semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August.

Published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc.

Second Class Postage Paid at Grand Rapids, Mich.

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

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

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

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

Editorial Policy: Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions for the Question Box Department are welcome. Contributions will be limited to approximately 300 words and must be neatly written or typewritten, and must be signed. Copy deadlines are the first and the fifteenth of the month. All communications relative to the contents should be sent to the editorial office.

Reprint Policy: Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting of articles in our magazine by other publications, provided: a) that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; b) that proper acknowledgement is made; c) that a copy of the periodical in which such reprint appears is sent to our editorial office.

Business Office: The Standard Bearer  
Mr. H. Vander Wal, Bus. Mgr. PH: (616) 243-2953  
P.O. Box 6064  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49516

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

Subscription Policy: Subscription price, \$10.50 per year. Unless a definite request for discontinuance is received, it is assumed that the subscriber wishes the subscription to continue without the formality of a renewal order, and he will be billed for renewal. If you have a change of address, please notify the Business Office as early as possible in order to avoid the inconvenience of delayed delivery. Include your Zip Code.

Advertising Policy: The Standard Bearer does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$3.00 fee. These should be sent to the Business Office and should be accompanied by the \$3.00 fee. Deadline for announcements is the 1st and the 15th of the month, previous to publication on the 15th or the 1st respectively.

Bound Volumes: The Business Office will accept standing orders for bound copies of the current volume; such orders are filled as soon as possible after completion of a volume. A limited number of past volumes may be obtained through the Business Office.

## MEDITATION

## The More Sure Prophetic Word

*We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts. Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.* —II Peter 1:19-21

Take heed to it!

Ye do well to do so: for it is like a light shining in a dark place. And how will you ever know the way

and find the way in and through the darkness without that light of the prophetic word?

The purpose of this Word is evidently a practical



and spiritual one. Though this is one of the so-called classic passages concerning the doctrine of inspiration and infallibility, the apostle is not here developing a "dogmatics" of inspiration. And though, indeed, there is rich instruction here concerning the prophetic Word and its source and manner of coming, bear in mind that the purpose of the apostle is expressed in the words, "... whereunto ye do well that ye take heed."

"Until the day dawn, and the daystar arise in your hearts!" Then, when all prophecy shall have been fulfilled, and when the darkness is gone forever, and when the everlasting day shall have dawned, and we shall see face to face, then we shall no longer need the "more sure word of prophecy."

But until then, take heed!

\* \* \* \* \*

There is one "more sure" prophetic word!

Not merely to the prophecy of the old dispensation does the apostle refer. Nor merely the prophecy of the new dispensation is meant. Nor to some specific prophecy of one of the prophets or apostles is reference made. Prophecy is one whole. While there are many words of prophecy, many specific prophecies about many and various aspects of the gospel of promise, there is essentially but one prophetic word. It begins in the protevangel of Genesis 3:15, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." It continues throughout the entire old dispensation in the direct revelation given to patriarchs and prophets, in types and shadows, in dreams and visions, in the history of the old covenant, in priest and altar and sacrifice, in Davidic king and kingdom, in bondage and captivity and deliverance and victory and inheritance. It reaches its central fulfillment at the first coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His suffering and death and resurrection, and in His exaltation at the right hand of the Father in heavenly glory and majesty. Yet it does not cease then, but points beyond; and even in the new dispensation it continues to speak and to point forward, till in the Book of Revelation it comes to a close.

One word there is. Though it consists of many individual prophecies, it constitutes one word of prophecy.

What, in brief, is the content of that one word of prophecy?

What does it say?

Why is it a light shining in a dark place?

The prophetic word speaks always of *the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ!* About this the

apostle has been writing in the context: "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty," (vs. 16).

The power and the coming!

He is coming again with power and great glory! And always prophecy looks forward ultimately to that coming. It is His final coming. It is the coming when He shall finally and fully deliver us from all sin and suffering and death, from all pain and suffering and sorrow, from all that is of the earth earthy, into the glory of His everlasting kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth. And He is powerful to achieve that coming! His power is irresistible. Nothing can prevent Him from coming again. For all power has been given unto Him in heaven and on earth! And He wields that power always with a view to His coming. He opens the seals! He causes the sounding of the trumpets! He brings about the pouring out of the vials! He is coming! Quickly! Surely!

Ultimately it is always of this power and coming of the Lord Jesus that the prophetic word speaks. Of His power to overcome death, and of His ultimate coming to deliver us from death's power it spoke already when it promised that He would crush the head of the serpent. And in all the prophecies of the old dispensation the focus is on that power and coming. For did not the prophets search diligently "what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the GLORIES that should follow?" And was not that prophetic word partially and centrally fulfilled in the first coming of our Lord? And did not He testify personally, even at the time of His trial before the Sanhedrin, of His being seated at the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven? And do not the apostles continue to hold before us that same prophetic word concerning His power and coming, but now as those who were "eyewitnesses of his majesty"? And does not this united testimony of His power and coming hold before us an unspeakably beautiful hope: the hope of complete deliverance from all sin and imperfection, of participation in the divine nature and eternal life and glory, the hope of a new heavens and new earth in which righteousness shall dwell?

And is not that the light, the only light, the light that radiates from the face of Jesus Christ, that shines in all the darkness of this present time?

A more sure word!

Not that the prophetic word was not and is not always sure, as though sometimes it left room for



doubt: for always that prophetic word was sure. But the prophets of old saw from afar; they saw in visions and types and shadows. And their word was sure, so that they could always say, "Thus saith the Lord!" But now that prophetic word is even more sure: for as the apostle emphasizes in the preceding context, he and the other apostles were "eyewitnesses of his majesty" when they were with the Lord Jesus in the holy mount and when they heard the voice from heaven. And as such eyewitnesses they testify of His power and coming. Surer than sure, therefore, is the word of prophecy through them.

\* \* \* \* \*

Can we depend on it?

If we listen to that word of prophecy and let our life be guided by that beaconlight which shines, as it were, from yonder shore, will we not be deceived? Will that glory be there? Or shall we find that the light deceived us, and that the city which hath foundations is not there?

Is the "more sure word of prophecy" cunningly devised fables — as the false teachers in Peter's day called it and as many even today say? Are the Scriptures after all but a word of human invention? That would be terrible, would it not? For the sake of that which the prophetic word holds before us, after all, the people of God forsake the world and suffer many things. They forsake all and follow Him Who is the Light of the world.

But prophecy came not in old time by the will of man. Men, too, kindle lights. But if prophecy came by the will of man, it could have no value. It could not show the way out of the darkness. It could not be reliable. For all the light that is in men is darkness. Not the light of cunningly devised fables, not the light of philosophy, not the light of learned scientists or of enlightened humanists is this prophetic word.

No, this light shines from without. It is from above. It is from God, the God of our salvation, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and by His Spirit. The light of men cannot be trusted. They deny the one light that shines from prophecy, and instead

they call men to follow their light. But prophecy is not a matter of private interpretation. The light of prophecy shines from without, from above. The prophetic word is the Word of God Himself, testifying through the Spirit by the means and agency of holy men, who thus became witnesses of the light.

The prophets, all of them, gave an interpretation of things. They interpreted the future. They gave an explanation of the things which are in the light of the things which are to come. They spoke and wrote of the sufferings of Christ and the glories which follow.

But their prophecies were not a matter of private interpretation. Whatever interpretation of things they gave in their prophecies was not an invention of their own minds, did not come about by their own will. The will of the prophets had nothing to do as such with the origin and the content of their prophecies. They did not offer their private opinions of things. They did not present humanly conceived views and offer humanly conceived solutions of problems.

On the contrary, they were holy men of God — men who were themselves saints, who looked for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, they were designed and chosen to be such precisely in order that they might be the instruments of revelation. And they were moved by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of Christ, controlled their minds and their wills. The Holy Spirit enlightened their minds and revealed things concerning the power and coming of the Lord to them. The Holy Spirit moved them to speak (and write) and guided them in speaking and writing, so that what they spoke and what they wrote constituted the Word of God. Scripture is not of men. It is not partly of men and partly of God. It is the very Word of God!

\* \* \* \* \*

Fix your eye of faith and hope on that guiding light!

Heed it! Contemplate it! Study it! Discern it! Trust it! Follow it! Soon the daystar shall arise in your hearts! Then we shall see face to face, and know even as we are known!

HCH

*The Standard Bearer makes a thoughtful  
gift for a friend or relative.  
Give a gift of the Standard Bearer.*



## Editor's Notes

*Index.* If you are planning to reserve a copy of the new index which covers the first 58 volumes of the *Standard Bearer*, make work of it immediately. The deadline, I have been informed by the committee, is August 31! There will be no extra copies printed; hence, if you want a copy, you must write in promptly! No final decision can be made on cost at this time; the committee's estimate is \$25 to \$30 per copy. Send your reservation to our Business Office.

\* \* \* \* \*

*New Magazine.* If you are interested in a magazine emanating from Orthodox Presbyterian circles, let me recommend a new publication,

*Journey.* It is published bi-monthly at a price of \$12.00 per year. I would classify it as coming from the conservative wing of the OPC. The address is: 1021 Federal St., Lynchburg, Virginia 24504.

\* \* \* \* \*

My lead article for this special issue, you will notice, is a big longer than normal. This was occasioned by the fact that a promised guest article did not materialize. To make up somewhat for this lack, I took the opportunity to expand on some of the key elements of my assigned subject.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Holy Scripture: Inspired and Infallible

There is probably no single doctrine of the Christian faith that has, especially during the past two centuries, been attacked more frequently than and in as many ways as the doctrine of Holy Scripture, particularly in the twin aspects of inspiration and infallibility. This is not the place to enumerate and to describe all these attacks; but a study of modern and recent church history would surely confirm this claim.

From a certain point of view this seems strange and inexplicable: for does not a church deny its very right of existence and, so to speak, cut its own throat and commit ecclesiastical suicide when it denies Holy Scripture and its authority? How foolish, then, not to guard this foundation-truth and to maintain it zealously! Yet, from another point of view this phenomenon need not surprise us. For as surely as the doctrine of Holy Scripture constitutes the foundation of the entire structure of the truth, so surely we should expect that the devil and his allies will attack at this point — not because this is the weak point in that temple of the truth, but because it is foundational. If they can move the church or the individual child of God from that foundation, they win the battle!

The two truths of inspiration and infallibility belong together, and they are absolutes. The Scriptures are either inspired, i.e., from God, and that, too, in their entirety; or they are not the Word of God at all. There is no middle ground. The same is true of infallibility. It is true that some have tried sometimes to distinguish between infallibility and inerrancy, so that the former term somehow leaves room for error in Scripture, while the latter leaves no room for error. But this is a myth. Actually the term *infallibility* is the stronger of the two: for it denotes that both the work of inspiration itself and the product of that inspiration are *not capable of error*. And this, too, is an absolute: either Scripture is infallible, or it is not. There is no middle ground. We must remember, too, that this is true in actual practice, in life. Once this truth of infallible inspiration is in the least compromised, the Scriptures and their divine authority are lost; and there is no end to the flood of heresies and errors which inundate a church. Finally the Scriptures are reduced to a merely human book: a religious book, a good book, a book containing many truths and much wisdom. But withal a human book, no more divine than any other writing. Herein lies the importance of this



truth of inspiration and infallibility as set forth so clearly in our Netherlands Confession of Faith, Articles 3-7, as they follow the self-authenticating testimony of Scripture throughout, but especially in the classic passages of II Timothy 3:16, 17 ("All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.") and II Peter 1:20, 21 ("Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.")

At the same time we must remember that there are other ways of denying the infallibility of Scripture than that of directly denying infallibility. For one thing, there are devious and erroneous methods of interpretation (for example, the so-called new hermeneutics) which have as their result the denial of the infallible inspiration of Scripture. But there is an even more common method of denial. To refuse to be guided by Scripture in our walk or to deny or twist or contradict the plain teaching of Scripture in our doctrine, and thus to do lip-service to the authority of the infallibly inspired Scriptures but to deny that authority in actual practice — this also is a denial of the infallibly inspired Scriptures.

Let us consider a few aspects of this truth, therefore.

#### *Scripture A Wonder*

We must never forget that Scripture is a wonder, a wonder of grace. The Word of God was produced by a wonderful act of God, whereby He, through His Holy Spirit, breathed forth His Word into and through human instruments.

In the first place, is not this something wonderful when considered all by itself? Think of it! God, Who is really God, matchless in all His infinite perfections, reveals Himself and makes known His own divine Word to us. Consider it! The infinite and eternal Jehovah reveals His Word concerning Himself, His virtues and perfections, His Being and Persons, His counsel and works, His purpose and His salvation, His Son Jesus Christ and His power and coming through the instrumentality of mere, finite, imperfect men. The Almighty reveals His eternal truth in finite, limited, human, earthly language, so that we, His people, may know Him, Whom to know is life eternal. From among all the writings of men we may single out the Bible and say and believe of it, "This is the very Word of God!" What an unspeakable wonder! What a mystery! To know this truth of divine inspiration is possible by faith; but to fathom it is impossible. Ap-

prehend it we can and do by a faith which is His own gift to us; but comprehend it we cannot.

In the second place, wonderful this Word of God is when we consider how it was produced in time. Many prophecies of Scripture there are, but one prophetic Word, speaking centrally always of the same thing, the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Many different human instruments the Holy Spirit employed, some of them altogether unknown. The Scriptures were written over a period of more than 1500 years; yet they constitute the one Word of God. They were written in different countries and in diverse circumstances — in the desert of Sinai, in Canaan, in Babylon, in Persia, in Greece, in Rome, in Asia Minor. They were written by well-educated men and by simple Galileans, written by prophets and priests and kings, by choir leaders, by shepherds, by herdsmen, by fishermen. They were written while guiding flocks, in prisons, in palaces, in courts of great world-rulers. They were often written by men who had no knowledge of one another, and who were unaware of what the other was writing. They were written by men who were apparently unaware at the moment that they were working on one large book. They were written about various subjects. In all the production of the Scriptures there was as little outward and mechanical unity as is imaginable. And yet there is the most beautiful inner harmony in them conceivable; and there is perfect unity. Indeed their perfection can be explained only by the wonder of divine inspiration.

#### *Organically Inspired*

If we would maintain that Scripture is infallibly inspired, are we not shut up to a view of inspiration which is essentially mechanical? Are we not shut up to a view which makes of the human writers nothing more than stocks and blocks? Must we not conclude that the Holy Spirit used the human writers as less than mere stenographers or amanuenses? Did He not use them as machines, as pens, as typewriters, as tape-recorders or dictating machines?

By no means! From this point of view, it is simply a self-evident fact that the Holy Spirit did not evade, or bypass, and did not suppress the personal, individual, rational, moral human natures of the sacred writers. But I would emphasize, too, that we must not be misled into thinking that there is a disjunction between this fact and the truth of divine inspiration. Certainly, in respect to their individuality, their personal characteristics, their style of writing, their time, their characteristics, and also with regard to the precise manner of expression and the words which they employed and the sentences which they penned, the sacred



writers were not suppressed. These elements shine forth from every page of Holy Scripture. They cannot, and they must not, and they need not be ignored. To ignore them is to miss something of the very wonder and beauty of the Scriptures and the marvel of divine inspiration. In addition, it is plain from these phenomena that the sacred writers remained the rational, moral subjects of their writings. To deny this would be to detract from the wonder of inspiration.

But only too often organic inspiration is presented in such a way that it merely means that the Holy Spirit *sought out* and *found* men who were suitable for His purpose, and that then He simply used these men with all their individual characteristics, traits, and circumstances, just as He found them, be it then that He was selective in *how* He used them and in protecting them and preserving them against error. And this, then — along with the entire theory that Scripture is the product of two factors, a divine and a human factor — is presented as the whole theory of organic inspiration. This, however, is not organic, but, after all, very, very mechanical.

We must remember, however, that even as the people of God themselves, so is the Bible the wonder-work of God's grace, designed to be a light for His people in the world. It is designed to be a light upon their path and a lamp unto their feet in the midst of the darkness of this present time. And even as the Lord conceived of the whole of His people as an organism in Christ from before the foundation of the world, so He conceived of the fulness of His Word as an organic whole. Hence, even as Christ is the Head and the fulness of the body, the church, so He is the very heart and center of the revelation we possess in the written Word. This fact, that Scripture is an organism — not a mere compilation of books, not a mere anthology — explains, by the way, why it is true that the people of God had — and could say that they had — the Word of God, even long before the canon of Scripture was complete and closed. Adam and Eve had the Word of God, principally and organically entire, when they had only the protevangel. The children of Israel had the Word of God when they had only the Law of Moses. The Psalmist of Psalm 119 can speak repeatedly of the Word of God which he possessed and knew and loved, so that he could pen an entire Psalm about it — many centuries before the Scriptures were completed. Why? This could never be true if Scripture were a mechanical whole: then one could only have said that he had a *part* of the Word of God. The reason lies in the fact that Scripture is an organic whole, with Christ at the heart of it. Hence, even as the organism of the church has a history and grows organically, so there is an organic

growth of God's revelation to His people; and the Bible comes into existence historically.

Moreover, it comes into existence through the operation of the Spirit of Christ working in special organs of the body, both in the old and new dispensations. Also these organs of inspiration — Moses and the prophets, David, Asaph, Matthew and Luke, Mark and John, Paul and Peter, James and Jude — are ordained for this purpose from before the foundation of the world. And as they are ordained from eternity, so in time they are called and prepared to serve as instruments of inspiration, the writers of Holy Scripture. And let it be stressed: they are ordained and prepared not merely as holy men, not merely as regenerated and sanctified saints, but as *organs of inspiration*. They are ordained and prepared as such organs not merely in general, but in every minute detail of their personalities, their traits of character, their language and style, their circumstances and place in history, their personal experiences — in every detail of all these aspects which must at all enter into their functioning as organs of inspiration and writers of the Word of God. It is every evident that this extends even to the facts of the sins and the deep falls, as well as to all other facets of these organs of inspiration. It is often pointed out that David would never have written Psalm 23, had he not been the shepherd of his father's flock; and he was from eternity ordained to be that shepherd, in order that he might serve as the instrument of revelation and inspiration in Psalm 23. But do not forget that this also pertains to the fact of David's sin with Bathsheba and Uriah. It also pertains to his stubborn walking in sin for a long time, as well as to his conversion from that sin. Otherwise he would never have been able to pen Psalm 32 or Psalm 51.

Hence, we must not conceive of these organs of inspiration as a merely human framework of fabric upon which the Holy Spirit works the texture of His revealed Word. We must not conceive of inspiration thus, that in the marketplace of humanity the Holy Spirit *discovers* men, even children of God, holy men, whom He then finds suitable for His purposes and whom He then uses for the production of Scriptures. On the contrary, they are ordained and prepared, are themselves the wonder-work of God's grace, with their talents and individual characteristics, their circumstances and experiences, their battles and struggles, their sufferings and persecutions, in order that each in his own place and in his own manner might serve to write infallibly the Word of God. And then these organs of inspiration, thus ordained and prepared, are infallibly guided to write the Word of God as it is revealed to them. Only thus can we somewhat understand that amid all the diversity from an ex-



ternal point of view, there is the most complete harmony and organic unity, but also perfection of expression and communication of God's revelation, in Holy Scripture.

Summarizing, then, we would distinguish the following elements in the truth of organic inspiration:

1) Just as God conceived sovereignly and from eternity of His people as an organism in Christ, so He conceived in His eternal counsel of the whole of Scripture as an organism, the written revelation of Himself, with Christ as the heart and center of that entire revelation. Moreover, as God conceived of Scripture eternally, so He Himself brought it, sovereignly, into being in time.

2) God from eternity and sovereignly conceived of and determined upon special organs of Christ's body, organs of inspiration, and ordained all the details of their personality, character, talents, education, mode of thinking, style of writing, personal experiences, and historical experiences in such a way that they were from eternity prepared to be fit instruments of divine inspiration, each in his own place in the organism of Scripture, and to the end that Scripture might be brought into being as the perfect, flawless Word of God written. And again, as He ordained them in eternity, so He realized them in time.

3) Thus, the Holy Spirit, and that, too, as the Spirit of Christ, called these divinely ordained organs of inspiration into existence in time, forming

them and preparing them, both naturally and spiritually, for their divinely ordained task.

4) Thus also the same Spirit inspired, moved, illumined, guided, and actually caused these human instruments, thus ordained and prepared and called, to speak and to write infallibly God's own Word.

We may conclude this discussion by pointing out briefly that the *key* to the understanding of organic inspiration is that grand and fundamental principle of the absolute sovereignty of the God of our salvation. God is sovereign and free, both in His counsel and in the execution of that counsel. God is independent. Man is dependent in his very existence, even when that existence is a rational, moral existence. This is true also with respect to inspiration, as is very evident from the above description. Unless we are willing to proceed from the principles of God's sovereignty and of His eternal counsel and His sovereign realization of His own counsel as a *working* principle, we shall never be able to understand properly any of the works of God's grace, including the wonder-work of Holy Scripture. Unless we are willing to understand that all that belongs to the production of Holy Scripture, including the human writers themselves, is subsumed under the embrace of the absolutely sovereign will and activity of the Most High, we shall never be able to maintain the truth that Holy Scripture is the Word of God. HCH

## The New Hermeneutics

*Herman C. Hanko*

The word "Hermeneutics" refers simply to "the principles of interpreting Scripture." Throughout the history of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ, various principles of interpretation have been almost subconsciously used by the church as the people of God turned to God's Word to understand its meaning. The most basic principle that con-

trolled the church was the one very obvious principle: "Scripture is the inspired Word of God." Never in all the history of the church was this principle denied. It controlled all the church's work in Biblical studies. It was actually only after the time of the Reformation that "Hermeneutics" became a separate branch of theology and various principles were set down governing Scripture's interpretation. But even when Hermeneutics was developed as a separate theological science, the controlling truth that Scripture is God's Word determined all the

---

*Herman C. Hanko is professor in the Church History and New Testament departments at the Protestant Reformed Seminary.*



other principles which were now consciously developed.

But in the 18th and 19th centuries, Biblical interpretation took a radically different turn and the so-called New Hermeneutics was introduced into the thinking of the church. It refers to a radically new and different way of interpreting Scripture, a way which the church had never followed before in all her history. This New Hermeneutics took such a hold on the church that it controls almost all Biblical interpretation up to the present and has found its way into almost all Reformed and evangelical circles. But its effects have been uniformly disastrous for Biblical interpretation.

While the methods which proponents of the New Hermeneutics have followed are complicated and devious, difficult to understand and hard to put into practice, nevertheless, God's people should know something about this innovation because it has serious consequences for the life of the church. We need cite only one example of this to demonstrate its truth. We all know that the question of women in office is a question which continues to trouble many conservative and Reformed churches, and many such churches have now begun to introduce into the institutional life of the church women elders and deacons, and even women ministers. Everyone who is involved in this question, whether he is for women officebearers or against women officebearers, admits that the question is one of Hermeneutics; i.e., whether the New Hermeneutics is a valid method of Biblical interpretation or not. The Scriptures themselves are clear on the question of women officebearers, if taken in their literal sense. Even defenders of women officebearers admit that. The question is: does the Bible mean what it says? and, is what the Bible says a controlling principle for the life of the church today?

It would be beyond the scope of this article to trace in detail the New Hermeneutics back to its roots. Nevertheless, it is interesting and important to understand that the New Hermeneutics has its roots in modern rationalism. It was not too long after the Reformation when rationalistic philosophy began to appear in Europe. In a reaction to the synthesizing philosophy of the pre-Reformation Scholastics, who attempted to forge philosophy and theology into one system, rationalistic philosophers made a distinction between philosophy and theology. Theology, so they said, was the domain of faith; philosophy was the domain of reason. These early philosophers tried to remain orthodox in their beliefs and continued, insofar as that was possible, to be loyal to the church; but they insisted that apart from their faith they

could make use of reason to investigate various philosophical problems. When their philosophy came into conflict with their faith, this did not overly trouble them. The two domains were separate and distinct from each other and there was no need to harmonize the two.

But obviously this could not continue. This distinction was a false one and it was not very long before reason was the controlling principle in all a man's thinking. The result was that the principles of reason were more and more applied to theological questions as well as philosophical matters.

Now rationalism, which exalts man's reason, is a terrible sin. It is a terrible sin because it chooses to ignore the fact that man, because of the fall, has become totally depraved and his reason blinded by sin so that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God" (I Cor. 2:14). In defiance of this, rationalism insists that man's reason is capable of discovering truth by its own powers. Rationalism is therefore a great sin because it sets up man's reason as the final arbiter of truth and exalts sinful man as one who can, without the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation, know what is truth.

Rationalism soon was applied to Biblical studies and the Bible was scrutinized from this rationalistic viewpoint. This produced the New Hermeneutics.

It is important to understand this because all the New Hermeneutics has its origin in such sinful rationalism. It is man's effort to impose his powers of reason on Scripture and to make Scripture fit his sinful and proud attempts to discover truth.

When rationalism was applied to Scripture it immediately began to concentrate on the "human" aspect of Scripture. That is, it looked at Scripture from the viewpoint of the men who wrote the Scriptures and not from the viewpoint of God, Who alone is Scripture's Author. It is not surprising that this should happen, because rationalism had no room for the miraculous. Anything miraculous was automatically ruled out of consideration, because a miracle could not be explained rationalistically. So Scripture had to be explained as a human book; and the question was: how did the Scriptures come into existence? What is the explanation for this book called the Bible? How can we understand its origin?

In the 18th and 19th centuries various answers were given to these questions. While we shall have to be brief and shall have to over-simplify the complicated views which were set forth, it is interesting to note some of the more important answers which were given. Some said that the Bible was nothing else but a record of the religious experiences of very ancient peoples, something like the old stories



of pagan gods and goddesses. Ancient people preserved their beliefs and experiences in writing, and the Bible is the result.

Others, following this notion more or less, pointed out that ancient people were often accustomed to expressing their faith and beliefs in mythical form. Hence, the Bible is full of many myths and one has to determine what in the Bible is myth and what is actual historical fact. The story of the creation of the world, of the flood which covered the whole earth, of the miracles of Jesus — these are all efforts on the part of the church to express what she believed by means of myths. And if one is to understand the Bible correctly, one must recognize what is myth and what is not.

Under the influence of Karl Barth, a somewhat new tack was taken. Barth emphasized that God is always speaking, speaking in history and the events of history, confronting man with His Word at every step of man's way and insisting on a response. To this Word of God man always does respond, as he did in the past. The Scriptures are the record of the response of the church in ancient times to God's Word; but still today the church is called upon to respond to that ever present and insistent Word which man confronts.

As these ideas became more developed and more sophisticated, a system of interpreting Scripture was developed which was called "literary-historical" interpretation. Again the emphasis was placed on the fact that the Bible is composed of documents which were written by men and they had to be interpreted as literary and historical documents. The Scriptures had to be explained as literature, written in particular historical times, and thus reflecting the beliefs, world views, presuppositions, mistaken notions, customs and mores of the times in which the authors lived. The type of literature they were (whether poetry, essay, prophecy, argument, teaching models, etc.) had to be determined in order to understand them, and the whole culture of the historical period in which the authors lived had to be thoroughly discovered before Scripture could itself become clear.

All these ideas were taken over by the church in greater or lesser degree. Of course, the trouble was that the church was also committed to the doctrine of inspiration and did not want, as such, to abandon that position lest the Bible become a purely human book. And so attempts were made to marry these views with the doctrine of inspiration. In doing so, it was pointed out that, after all, God used men to write the Scriptures. And He did not use men as mere stenographers, but used them in such a way that their own personalities and beliefs, their own cultural presuppositions and methods of writing,

their own skills and literary abilities were preserved. The trouble was that all the emphasis fell upon the human authors, while the divine Author was all but ignored.

Already in the years preceding the common grace controversy of 1924, which was the year of the origin of our Protestant Reformed Churches, Dr. Jannsen applied these principles to the miracles of Scripture and, strikingly, appealed to common grace in justification of his position. He pointed out that common grace taught that the ungodly were capable of doing good in the sight of God, and that, therefore, the work of these rationalists could be considered the fruit of common grace and could be put to good use by the church in her study of Scripture.

In the October 18, 1985 issue of *Christianity Today* a symposium appeared of conservative evangelical scholars in which these principles, particularly those of redaction criticism, were specifically defended; and it is noteworthy that every one of the participants in this symposium spoke at length of the human authors, and only very rarely, and that in passing, mentioned the divine authorship of the Bible.

What has happened in our century, therefore, is nothing but a refinement of these old rationalistic positions. From the beginning of our century to about the First World War, so-called source criticism held sway. The idea was to determine what sources the human authors used in writing their documents. From World War I to World War II Form Criticism was the fad. This method attempted to determine the form which the authors of Scripture used, i.e., what type of literary form they used to express their beliefs. At present, redaction criticism is in vogue, a method which emphasizes that the books of the Bible were edited documents which various authors produced from other sources, but changed in order to accomplish the purpose for which they were writing.

We cannot go into the details of all these views and lead our readers through the labyrinths of complicated thought which these men walk, but it is important that we understand three things about them: 1) they all have their roots in rationalism; 2) they all emphasize the human element in the Scriptures almost to the exclusion of the divine; 3) they make the Bible a book which can no longer be understood by the child of God who is in no position to know all these complicated processes.

What the New Hermeneutics has done, therefore, is to make, more or less, the Bible a human book and take away from it its divine origin. Just one example of this can be cited from the article referred to above. One of the members of the sym-



posium is quoted as saying: "The undeniable fact is that the canon has multiple gospels. It does not provide a single gospel. So to be faithful to the canon as we have it, one is driven to try to ascertain why Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell the story of Jesus with different emphases." Now to one who holds to the inspiration of Scripture, the answer is very simple. He does not need redaction criticism to determine this; he knows that the explanation for this is simply that the Holy Spirit, Who inspired Matthew, Mark, and Luke to write, caused them to write in the way they did.

Other articles in this issue will deal with the truth of inspiration and set forth what Scripture itself teaches. And so we conclude this article with a few observations.

The love of even conservative men for methods of higher criticism is born out of a desire to be "scholarly." The article in *Christianity Today*, referred to earlier, repeatedly speaks of this. We must be scholars. We must be able to get our materials published in scholarly journals. We must have a voice in scholarly circles. This is nothing but sinful pride. If such is scholarship, God save us from scholarship.

Ultimately all methods of the New Hermeneutics are rooted in pride. Man knows better than God how to interpret the Scriptures. Man knows better than God what the Scriptures mean and how they must be interpreted. Thus the issue is what it has always been: rationalism vs. faith, unbelief vs. a childlike obedience to God.

We do not deny that God used men to write the Scriptures; and in using them He preserved their character and personality, their abilities and gifts. But it remains a fact that "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (II Peter 1:21). This is Scripture's answer to those who say that Scripture is of *private interpretation* (II Peter 1:20); i.e., that Scripture expresses the private interpretation of those who wrote it. Not so, says Scripture, but holy men of God wrote as they were moved (as a ship is carried along by the wind) by the Holy Spirit.

Scripture is a miracle itself, a wonder of grace. And the child of God bows before that Scripture as God's very Word. Every child of God does. He does not need the complicated and involved theories of men to understand the Scriptures. He hears God speak and bows before that Word.

## The Clarity of God's Word and the Believing Reader

Thomas C. Miersma

When we as children of God take up God's Word to read and study it, we do so by faith. God has given us His Word for this one purpose, that we might understand it, that is, that it might be to us, both as believers and as churches, the only rule of faith and life. That Word of God is clear and readily understood by the child of God.

As Reformed people we confess the truth of the clarity or perspicuity of Holy Scripture. This confession has two parts to it. By it we confess first of all that as God spake to us by His servants, the

apostles and prophets, by holy men of God who were moved by His Spirit, so also that Word comes to us in the form of human speech and language. Though it be therefore the very revelation of God Himself, it is nevertheless clear to us. It addresses us in terms which we can understand, was given us and ministered to us by men whose very characters, circumstances, and experiences in life were shaped in the sovereign providence of God for the very purpose of giving us His infallible Word. The Scriptures are therefore, in the objective sense of the Word, clear and understandable. They are not a dark book of obscure utterances.

That which is true objectively is also true of that



Word of God as it is read and studied by the believer, subjectively appropriated by him and made his own. This second element is vital. The Scriptures are clear in themselves so that even the unbeliever is left without excuse when confronted by them. Yet he does not truly understand God's Word, for the truths it contains are spiritual and can only be understood and appropriated spiritually, by faith. God confers this ability to understand spiritual things upon us by His Spirit, when He works in us saving faith. He continues to work this blessing in us by His Spirit in the way of prayer and meditation upon His Word. It is thus that the apostle John speaks in his first epistle, I John 2:20, "But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things". The Scriptures are clear, and they are clear to the believer because he is anointed to the office of believer.

This truth of the clarity of God's Word means for us as children of God that we may take up God's Word to read, study, and understand it because we know that it is God Who teaches us. In His Word, God also teaches us sound principles of interpretation and is in fact His own interpreter. This does not mean that the Scriptures do not require study. We must not confuse the clarity of God's Word with that which can be understood without effort, or with what might be called easy reading. The Scriptures are clear and understandable, and can be read and understood by us as children of God. But they are not on the level of a beginning reader, though even a very young reader can begin to read and understand them according to the measure of his understanding. God requires of us that we not simply read His word, but that we study it and prayerfully meditate upon it. It is also through such study that that which is more difficult to understand in God's Word becomes clearer, and we grow in our understanding. But in all such study we have the assurance of God that His Word is clear and given to be understood. Moreover we have His own promise that He will aid and guide us.

This principle of the clarity of God's Word is one which it is essential that we maintain in the times in which we live. It was one of the principal issues between the Reformers and Rome in the days of the Reformation. Rome maintained that the Bible stood beyond the understanding of the ordinary members of the church and maintained that the anointing of the Spirit, by which God's Word might be understood, was limited to the clergy. Against this false view of Rome the reformers stood upon the testimony of the Word of God itself and maintained its clarity. That clarity is still under attack and the philosophy of Rome under different guise is flourishing in our day, and making inroads into the post-Protestant Christian church.

It is from such a philosophy that much of modern so-called Biblical scholarship proceeds. It is a scholarship which would take the Bible out of the hands of God's people to place it into the hands of an elite core of so-called scholars. It is the denial of the clarity of God's Word which leads to the multiplication of simplified and condensed versions or translations of the Bible, so-called, which are intended to present God's Word to what are regarded as the illiterate and ignorant masses. The denial of the clarity of God's Word also lies hidden behind such attacks upon God's Word as the argument that the Scriptures are culturally conditioned and the other heresies of our age which would reduce the Scriptures to the ancient records of a distant people and their religious experience. These leave us with the impression that if we are not learned in such fields of study as archaeology and cultural history and anthropology, we cannot understand God's Word but are really perpetually misunderstanding what we read, unable without such learned assistance truly to grasp the meaning of what we read in the Scriptures, as if the clarity of Scripture were confined to a select few who can read it. This is nothing but a warmed-over version of the philosophy of Rome.

This same implicit denial of the clarity of God's Word is found too in the use or misuse of Scripture by the cults, and some of the bizarre interpretations of prophecy found among so-called fundamentalist circles, which disregard the plain meaning and contexts of passages and the self-evident symbolic character of visions and revelations. These, while professing Scripture's clarity loudly and making the claim that they take it literally, in actual practice and interpretation deny it, in fact make a mockery of it. For they take a cut-and-paste approach to Scripture, wrenching passages out of their proper context and ignoring their plain meaning in their context. They do so that they might piece together a jigsaw puzzle of unrelated and misunderstood texts to propound their strange theories and doctrines. The very nature of these theories and this approach to Scripture makes Scripture obscure and its interpretation dependent upon the leaders of the cult or the latest celebrity's book. So often this approach comes with the appearance of simplicity, or of being Bible-based rather than modernistic, but it is in fact nothing more than trading upon the mere sound of the words or an expression of Scripture without paying any attention to what it means in the place in which it is found. It also is a denial of Scripture's basic clarity.

As children of God confronted by these many voices round about us, we may well become discouraged and begin to wonder if anyone can really understand God's Word. We may well begin to feel



as if we must take the attitude, you have your "opinion" and I have mine, and we may even begin to walk in doubt as to whether we have understood God's Word or whether it is even possible that we can or should understand it. Such an attitude of doubt, if it fixes itself in our minds, will effectively destroy the very foundations of our own study of God's Word. For how shall I know that what I find there is truly what God says to me? What then would be the point of studying God's Word?

The answer to these doubts Scripture also sets before us. God indeed tells us that there shall be those who are ever learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth, and that exactly because they have not faith. The Word of God also warns us of false prophets, false teachers, and of wolves who seek to enter the sheepfold of Christ, both in the guise of sheep and shepherds, who seek to destroy the church. Over against these warnings, God has set His promise to guide us as His people and as the church of Christ into all truth. He has given us His Word for one reason only — that we might understand it; and in order that we might do

so, He anoints us with His Spirit. Possessing His promise, we understand that our doubts about our ability to understand God's Word arise not out of faith, but out of the assault which our old adversary, the devil, makes upon our faith, that by means of doubt and uncertainty he might keep us from God's Word. The cure for such doubt is to take up God's promise and the clear Word of God, and read, study, and prayerfully meditate upon it, making it our own. For we know that God will by His grace and Spirit make His Word plain to us. We must ever in humility and meekness also recognize that in our study of His Word our own sin and imperfection intrudes. We have not yet perfect knowledge or understanding and are therefore utterly dependent upon the Lord to teach us. This He has promised to do, and that which He gives unto us to know and understand is true. By the study of His Word He purposes that we shall grow in all knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. He that calls us therefore to take up His Word will also be faithful to make it plain.

## The Rule for the Christian Life

*Ronald L. Cammenga*

There is one rule for the Christian life. That rule is Holy Scripture. Scripture alone is the standard for the faith and practice of the people of God. The Psalmist expresses this in Psalm 119:105, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Our Belgic Confession of Faith, in Article VII, the title of which article is "The Sufficiency Of The Holy Scriptures To Be The Only Rule Of Faith," states:

We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe, unto salvation, is sufficiently taught therein . . . Neither do we consider of equal value any writing of men, however holy these men may have been, with those divine Scriptures, nor

ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, for the truth is above all; for all men are of themselves liars, and more vain than vanity itself. Therefore, we reject with all our hearts, whatsoever doth not agree with this infallible rule . . .

The sole authority of the Scriptures was a fundamental principle of the Protestant Reformation. Through the Reformation the sole authority of Scripture over the faith and life of the church was asserted.

The authority of Scripture was maintained by the Reformers, first of all, over against the Roman Catholic Church. Rome denied the sole authority of Scripture, and taught instead two sources of



authority in the church: Scripture and tradition. For Rome, not only did the Word of Christ written (Scripture) have authority, but also the Word of Christ unwritten (tradition). These unwritten traditions, Rome teaches, are the teachings of Christ that He gave orally to His apostles, and which the apostles in turn have handed down to the church through the popes and bishops. The Council of Trent anathematized all those who did not receive and venerate church tradition as of equal authority with the Old and New Testament.

What is sometimes overlooked is that the Reformers' position on the sole authority of the Bible was a position that they took not only over against the pope and the Roman Catholic Church. Besides Rome there were also the mystics and the Anabaptists, the movement sometimes referred to as the "Radical Reformation," which also denied the exclusive authority of Holy Scripture.

Like their spiritual descendants today, these recognized the Bible as only one authority and guide for the Christian life. Alongside of and above the Bible they exalted experience and feeling. Their motto was: "Away with the letter that killeth, in favor of the Spirit that giveth life."

To these spiritualists Luther responded (remember now that Scripture portrays the Holy Spirit as a dove): "Unless you cite Scripture, I do not care if you have swallowed the Holy Spirit, feathers and all." For Luther the Word and the Spirit belonged together in an inseparable union. The Anabaptists and mystics wanted the Spirit without the Word. Luther's position was that the Holy Spirit never works independent of or apart from the Word. Christians ought not to hanker after new signs and special revelations and experiences. The Spirit's function is to evoke from the Word of God what is already there.

Over against both Rome and the mystics, the Reformers' position was *Sola Scriptura*, "Only the Scriptures."

The truth of the sole authority of Scripture rests upon the other fundamental truths concerning Holy Scripture. First of all, only if the Bible is the Word of God, can it also be the standard for our faith and life. Only if the Bible is the Word of God does it have the RIGHT to be the authority for our faith and life. The authority of Scripture is the authority of God Himself, the only real authority that there is in the world. The authority of the Bible presupposes very clearly the infallible, Divine inspiration of the Bible. This is the seriousness today of the attack on the inspiration of Scripture, as well as the practical result of this attack, that the authority of Scripture is set aside. It is no longer the standard, then, for the faith and life of the people of

God. And why should it be if it's not the Word of God!

In the second place, the authority of Scripture rests on the truth of the completeness of Scripture. Scripture can be the authority for our faith and life because all that we need to know for our faith and life is contained in Holy Scripture. The Reformers maintained the sufficiency of Scripture. All that is necessary for the believer to know, both as regards doctrine and morals, is contained in Holy Scripture. According to II Timothy 3:17, the Scriptures are all that are necessary "that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." There simply is no need for anything alongside of and in addition to Holy Scripture.

In the third place, the authority of Scripture presupposes the perspicuity or clarity of Scripture. By the perspicuity of Scripture we mean that Scripture is clear and can be understood by the individual believer. Rome maintains that the Scriptures are not easily understood, deep, dark, and mysterious. No individual believer can understand the Bible, but only the priests, bishops, councils, and ultimately an infallible pope. Over against Rome, the Reformers taught the perspicuity of Scripture. Paul reminds Timothy in II Timothy 3:15 that already as a child he had known and understood the Holy Scriptures. The perspicuity of Scripture stands closely connected to its authority, for only if the people of God can understand the Bible can it serve as the rule for their faith and life.

In many ways the authority of the Bible is set aside and challenged today. Certainly Rome's position regarding the Bible's authority has not changed. Rome continues to deny the sole authority of Scripture and proudly to exalt herself, her traditions, and her pope above the authority of the Word of God.

The sin of which Rome is guilty, is characteristic also of the sects and cults. In fact this is one of the outstanding features of the cults, that they exalt some other authority alongside of the authority of Holy Scripture. Whether that's the *Book of Mormon*, *The Koran*, the writings of a Charles Taze Russell or an Ellen G. White, or *The Divine Principle* makes no difference, these sects deny the authority of the Bible.

The whole Pentecostal movement is a fundamental denial of the sole authority of the Word of God. The Pentecostal exaltation of feeling and experience above the revealed Word make these, and not the Word itself, the authority for the Christian life. The inroads that this movement has made in Reformed and Presbyterian churches is an indication of just how far these churches have departed from their Reformation heritage.



More and more in the churches today there is the denial of Scripture's authority by the elevation of the so-called discoveries of science, the teachings of modern humanistic philosophy, and the theories of modern psychology and psychiatry above the clear teaching of the Bible. The results have been devastating: creation has been thrown out the window; sin becomes merely sickness or the remnants of man's animal ancestry; man's mind and man's ingenuity are heralded as being able to overcome every obstacle and solve every problem, if only man will think positively (no real need of the grace of God).

Society at large puts extreme pressure on the churches today to discard the authority of the Bible. The tragedy is that the churches in many instances have caved in to this pressure. Worldliness is rampant. More and more it comes to it that not the authority of the Word of God, but the will of the majority of the people will dictate the faith and life of the members of the church. And since the majority of the people want dancing, there will now be dancing; since the majority of the people want women in office, there will be women in office; since the majority regard homosexuality as a legitimate alternative life-style, there will be homosexuals in the church.

Although the authority of Holy Scripture is denied in various ways, when it comes down to it there are only two choices as regards this matter of authority. Either the authority of God will be the rule for our faith and life, or the authority and will of man. These are the two alternatives. Every instance of denying the authority of the Word of God is only another instance of promoting the authority of man, whether that be man's writings, man's traditions, man's feelings, man's discoveries, or man's philosophies.

If the Bible is to be the authority for our faith and life, we must know the Bible. Only as we know the Bible will we be able to turn to the Bible as the standard for what we believe and how we live. This is our great struggle! Our great struggle, thank God, is not with papal tradition or the temptation to allow *The Book of Mormon* a place of authority in our lives alongside of the Bible. But the great struggle for all of us is the struggle against our own apathy and indifference toward the Word of God and the study of that Word of God. From one point of view that loss of the Word in the Middle Ages can be traced to the people themselves, their own apathy and indifference. In fact the loss of the Word can rightly be viewed as God's judgment on that apathy. In his *Table Talks*, Luther says this:

Truly, I am less afraid of the pope and his tyrants, than I am of our own ingratitude towards the Word of God; 'tis this will place the pope in his saddle again. But, first, I hope the day of judgment will come.

Do we read the Word of God? Do we study and discuss the Word of God in our families and in the societies of the church? Do we eagerly hear and believingly receive the instruction of the preaching of the Word on the Lord's Day? These things are of the utmost importance if Scripture is to be the authority in our lives.

We echo Luther's sentiments expressed in another place:

No greater mischief can happen to a Christian people, than to have God's Word taken from them, or falsified, so that they no longer have it pure and clear. God grant that we and our descendants be not witnesses of such a calamity.

## Scripture and the Covenant Home

Cornelius Hanko

Upon entering a covenant home one often sees a Bible lying on the living room table. This is certainly to be commended, particularly if the Bible is

used as much as it is in evidence. The Bible should have a central place in our homes. No item should be considered more important than that. No duty should be considered greater than the function of the father in carrying out his prophetic, priestly office in the family.

*Cornelius Hanko is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.*



Moses instructed Israel, saying, "These words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up (Deut. 6:6, 7). If that was the calling of the father in the old dispensation, that is certainly no less true today.

Jesus told the Jews of His day, "Search the Scriptures, . . . they are they that testify of me" (John 5:39).

This is not some good advice that we may accept or reject as we see fit. This is not an admonition that would be very profitable for us to heed, if we had the time and the opportunity. This is God speaking to us! His Word never returns void! It is only when we take heed to His word that we can say, "The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes . . . More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold, sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them is great reward" (Psalm 19:8, 10, 11). Or again, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105). This applies to children and young adults, as well as to mature believers. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word" (Psalm 119:9).

This applies, first of all, to us personally. There is nothing so essential to our daily lives as children of God as our daily devotions. The daily newspaper can better pass unread, our best meal can better be left untouched, than that we neglect our private devotions. We can well appreciate the fact that we have our Sunday worship services to attend, that we have opportunity to study the Scriptures in our societies or groups, that we have our daily devotions with our families, that we help our smaller children with their Bible lessons, but none of these takes the place of our *personal, daily devotions*. Never may we offer the excuse that we are too busy. Rather, as Luther must have said at one time, the busier we are the greater is our need for daily devotions.

Certain principles must always be kept in mind.

First, the Bible is the infallibly inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Word of God. It is even verbally inspired. When man speaks, man may criticize; but when God speaks we must be attentively silent, with the prayer on our lips, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

Scripture is God speaking to us through Jesus

Christ, who is the "Way, the Truth, and the Life." He is the Bread of life. He is the Water of life. He is the Resurrection and the Life. He is the Light that leads us into the eternal day.

Moreover, we must be receptive to the Word. Maintaining that God speaks to us through His Word and by His Spirit in our hearts, we must be prepared to receive His Word. This means that we must have a definite time of day, a quiet surroundings, and take time to do as they did in Ezra and Nehemiah's day, "So they read in the book of the law of God *distinctly, and gave the proper sense, and caused them to understand the reading*" (Neh. 8:8).

Our purpose must be to be enlightened in the truth and doctrines of God's Word, to be strengthened in the faith, and to grow spiritually, to live lives to the glory of our God. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass (the Mirror of the Word) the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord" (II Cor. 3:18). Our lives are so much richer than the lives of the saints of the old dispensation. They had God's promises, but were still waiting for the fulfillment of those promises. They were like children, who were taught by pictures, types and shadows, signs and wonders, accompanied by the voice of the prophets. Their whole life was a picture of the spiritual realities still to come, when the Savior would be born. We have come to the fulfillment of the promises, come, as it were, to maturity, so that God now deals with us as spiritual adults. We must always bear that in mind when we study the Old Testament; the New is the fulfillment of the Old. Only then can we understand that the prophets spoke a language that harmonized with their times, looking forward to the day when the wolf and the lamb will dwell together in heavenly perfection, and a little child shall lead them (Isaiah 11:6).

Finally, God's Word is its own interpreter, so that Scripture must be compared with Scripture. Therefore it is important to have handy a good Concordance, a Bible Atlas, and a good Bible Dictionary.

There are many valuable methods of Bible study. One may study the Bible, as it were, with a telescope, to search out God's glorious revelation of Himself in His dear Son Jesus Christ, as the God of our salvation. Or one may study the Bible, as it were, through a microscope, to draw out golden nuggets from the gold mine of God's Word.

We can study one particular Book of the Bible. This is recommended especially when we study the prophecies, the epistles, or the Book of Revelation. We should read the entire Book repeatedly, in order to grasp the main thought, and then we should study each part in more detail.



We can also study the Scriptures by dealing with concepts. Some Bibles have marginal references which direct us from one passage to another, which deal with the same subject. Reference Bibles often give a list of subjects in alphabetical order and show where in the Scriptures this subject is treated. We may be interested in a concept like affliction, righteousness, or marriage; the subject index can prove to be a big help in our study. Studying words can be both interesting and profitable. For example, the word for "knowing" in Scripture has a far broader meaning, both in the Old and New Testament, than a mere intellectual knowing. Often is included the idea of fellowship, intimacy, choice, approval, or blessing. See Genesis 4:1; 18:19; Psalm 1:6; Romans 8:29, 30; etc.

It is a good practice to copy a certain passage, pin it up on a bulletin board, or carry it with you, to refer to it whenever the opportunity offers, as it unfolds to you new depths of truth, new riches, new comfort. Still better, memorize favorite passages or chapters to have them at your finger tips whenever you need them.

Lists of names, genealogies, and the Mosaic laws can be very interesting and instructive, if we take the time and effort to study them, comparing one passage of Scripture with another. Thus, for example, compare Jesus' cleansing of the leper with the laws of Moses, or compare Deuteronomy 7:2, 3 and 22:10 with II Corinthians 6:14-18.

Besides our personal devotions, we should never neglect our daily family devotions. This is a *must* in every Christian home, beneficial for every member of the family mutually and individually. Since the spiritual bond is stronger than any other, the reading and study of God's Word knits the family together in the strongest manner possible. Ideally family devotions should be held with the family present three times a day. My father always insisted on two times, breakfast and dinner; you know what that meant for getting up in the morning. In many instances our rushing existence hardly makes it possible for our entire family to be together once a day. Yet this should be a requirement for which every single member of the family strives all day. That can very well be the best time of the day for the whole family.

Among us the common practice is to hold devotions at the end of the meal, while the family is still gathered about the table. I have been in homes where the family gathered in the living room once or twice a way, where the father led the devotions by discussing a portion of Scripture, on Sunday in connection with the Catechism sermon or the text of the minister.

Various methods can be utilized in carrying out

these devotions. The suggestions made for personal devotions apply also here. Some families follow the practice of reading through the entire Bible, and then starting over again. Some alternate between the Old and the New Testament, particularly when devotions are held more than once a day. I have often questioned the wisdom of reading genealogies or all the Mosaic laws, especially with children present, unless we make an attempt to explain and understand them. It is also more profitable to read a short passage and discuss it, rather than force the small children to sit quietly through the reading of a long passage.

Historical passages are always of special interest to children. Even when reading those passages children should be given opportunity to ask and to answer questions. Words and events that seem perfectly clear to us often leave a wrong impression on children. In many instances a Bible Atlas and Bible Dictionary can prove very helpful. When reading about the kings of Israel and Judah we do well to make a list of the various kings, comparing the time of their reign, including the prophets who lived at any given time. Still better, make a chart that includes the kings of Israel and Judah, the time of their reign, and the contemporary prophets.

In some homes a Bible Story Book is read to help the very small children to understand the historical parts of the Bible. This is a very good practice, especially when mother is home with the little ones; but this must never be done at the expense of reading the Bible. At an early age children should become acquainted with the unique style of the Authorized or King James version of the Bible. They absorb much more than they understand, which proves beneficial to them for the rest of their lives. Children should be encouraged to memorize various passages of the Scriptures. Teenagers and young people should have their private devotions at a set time every day. We should live as if the time may soon come that the Bible is taken from us, and we will have to depend on our memories for our spiritual food.

Much more can and should be said about this all important subject. Let each seek out various methods of making the reading of God's Word an interesting and integral part of our lives, drinking from the living waters of the Fountain of life. Let us always bear in mind that, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Tim. 3:16, 17).

Soli Deo Gloria!



# The Survey Method of Bible Study

Kenneth Hanko

Rev. Tom Miersma in his regular column in *The Standard Bearer* has been treating carefully the subject assigned to me for this special issue. In order to avoid repetition I am going to 1) recommend that you read carefully his articles on this subject (there is much valuable material in them), and 2) take a different viewpoint. He has set forth the principles which must apply in the study of a particular passage. I will try to set forth a broader application of these principles to particular books.

Before I begin I want to bring to your attention two books which I have found helpful in this sort of study: *Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament* and *Jensen's Survey of the New Testament*. They were written by Irving Jensen and published by Moody Press. The author is a premillennialist so you will want to use the books with discretion especially in the area of prophecy, but you will find in them also much that is helpful.

The purpose of these books, and also the purpose of this article, is to help you understand the structure, purpose, and main thought of a particular book of the Bible. The purpose is not to lead you, first of all, into a detailed study of all the passages found in the book. Rather it is to prepare you for a detailed study by giving to you a broad understanding of the whole book, a perspective which will keep you on the right track as you do a more detailed study of individual passages. This is the sort of study which Rev. Kortering has been doing in his column, "Bible Study Guide." You will find it helpful in more detailed examination of almost any portion of Scripture.

After you have chosen the particular book you want to study, the first thing to do is to gather together as much information as the Bible itself gives you about the author, date, and historical circumstances of the people for whom the book was first written. To illustrate this and the points which follow let me refer you to the prophecy of Zephaniah. The first verse of the book tells you that Zephaniah was the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah. You should look up all these names in your concordance. You ought to discover at least that the name Hizkiah is, in the Hebrew, exactly the same as the

name Hezekiah. It is possible, though not certain, that Zephaniah was a great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah. Is this significant? The first verse also tells you that Zephaniah prophesied in the days of Josiah king of Judah. For a proper understanding of this book you ought therefore to have a good grasp of the history of Josiah as recorded in II Kings and II Chronicles. In fact you ought to take these two accounts of Josiah's history and put all the different events together in as near a chronological order as possible. Try to get an understanding of the people and of the peculiar circumstances in which and to which Zephaniah spoke. Note also that Jeremiah prophesied during the reign of Josiah. Were there any other prophets at this time?

Now this will not always be as easy as it is in Zephaniah. Look up, for example, Nahum, Malachi, Hebrews, or (for that matter) II Chronicles itself. What period of history II Chronicles covers is abundantly clear, but it is not so clear who wrote it and for whom. In situations of this sort it is probably best to get some help from other reliable sources. There are frequently clues to date and setting in the book which it would be difficult for you to pick up on your own.

The next step is to turn to the book itself. Remember that your purpose is not, first of all, a detailed understanding of every passage. You are aiming, at this early stage of your study, for a knowledge of the structure, purpose, and theme of the book. In fact your goal in this part of the study will be to arrive at a detailed outline of the contents, a brief statement (one sentence or phrase!) of the theme, and a brief summary of the purpose or purposes for which the book was written.

It is extremely important in this sort of study that you read the book, not just once but several times, and in whatever different translations you have at hand. You ought to read it through in one sitting if possible, and you ought, each time you read it, to have a different and very specific goal in mind. For example you could read it the first time simply with a view to a general acquaintance with its contents. The second time through you might want to look for words and phrases which are repeated relatively frequently (these will give you clues to the main subject of the book). The third time through you could pay close attention to paragraph markings

*Kenneth Hanko, a missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches, is currently laboring in Bluebell, Pennsylvania.*



and chapter breaks (though these may be inaccurate since they were put in by the translators). During this reading, or another, you might want to start marking what you perceive to be major and minor breaks in the thought. The number of times you read the book will probably vary with the difficulty and length of the book which you have chosen. What specific purpose you have in mind with each reading will probably vary according to your personality and the study habits you have already acquired. There are no cut-and-dried rules for method of Bible study. You must develop your own, and vary them according to circumstances and material. But remember that in your preliminary survey study your goal is always to know the structure, theme, and purpose of the book.

Secondly you ought also to have paper and pen handy so that you can record your observations, thoughts, and questions. Use a looseleaf notebook and try to keep your notes fairly orderly. Have one page with the heading "Author" and all the information you can find about him. Have another headed "Date and Historical Setting," another listing key words and phrases, and striking features, perhaps several for the gradual development of your detailed outline, more for notes on each chapter and on particular verses in them, and so on. Also make some notes and markings in your Bible to guide you in further readings.

In a first reading of Zephaniah you would probably notice that the dominant subject is judgment. A more careful reading would show you that the book falls into three basic parts. Chapter one emphasizes judgment on Judah, Chapter 2 (vv. 4-15) pronounces judgment on various heathen nations, and Chapter 3, after another pronouncement of judgment, contains promises of salvation. Now you have a basic outline to record in your notes. Use Roman numerals and give to each of these three sections a heading.

We ought not to stop there, because within these major divisions there are some minor ones which are not difficult to discern. More careful study will lead you to add subdivisions and divisions of subdivisions to your outline, so that you may end up with several outlines, each of which is more detailed than the one preceding it. Continue to work on this outline until you are satisfied that it covers adequately the contents of the book.

There may be some difficult points which you are not able to resolve. It may be, for example, that in a section of several verses you discern a transition in the thought, but are not able to say exactly where the transition takes place. Leave such points for your later more detailed study.

Having done this detailed outline you ought to be able to discern some of the main subjects of the book. Write them down, and ask yourself why these subjects have come up. For example ask why Zephaniah speaks of judgment against Judah. From what you read in the first chapter and from your knowledge of the history the answer is plain. Now ask yourself why Zephaniah pronounces judgment on the heathen nations. This is not so easy, but careful examination of the four judgments pronounced will show you that these four nations were enemies of Judah, and that God pronounced judgment against them in order to assure His people that He would save them from their enemies. Then if you examine the connection between verses 1-7 and 8ff. of chapter 3 you will see that Jehovah intends to accomplish the salvation of His people through judgment.

When you have a carefully worked out outline of the book, when you understand what are the main subjects dealt with, and when you understand to some degree the flow of the thought, you ought to be able to make at least a tentative statement of the theme. Make this as concise and simple as possible. From what was said above we could state the theme of Zephaniah this way: Jehovah will save His people through judgments which destroy the wicked both among and around them.

You will not find every book as easy as Zephaniah. In fact it may be that several readings of a book will bring you no closer to understanding its structure than you were at the beginning. Don't give up in frustration. Persevere and, if perseverance fails, go to your other books for help, but remember always that the Lord will give you understanding if you seek it diligently from Him.

One more thing. Before you begin a more detailed study of the book following the rules outlined by Rev. Miersma you ought to ask yourself how the major subjects and theme of the book apply to your life. Begin even now to hear the Word of God to you in this particular part of the Scriptures.

*Take the time to read and study  
the Standard Bearer.*



## P.A.P.A. and A.P.E.

Gise J. Van Baren

The title catch your attention? It has to do with attendance at societies within the church where the Word of God is studied. Many Reformed churches have discarded the societies within their churches because of lack of interest. Some have substituted mid-week meetings for the whole family — but these are not always well attended either. Within our own churches there is evidence of problems as well. Many do not attend societies — some for legitimate reasons, but others for no good reason at all. Often, those who belong to societies, do not regularly attend. Have societies “seen their day”? Are they, perhaps, a relic of the horse-and-buggy time, inappropriate for our modern, fast-moving society? Will the time soon come that we will also have to state: “Cancelled due to lack of interest”?

The title of this article was borrowed from an old *Beacon Lights* article which appeared years ago when I was still a teen-ager — and that is LONG ago, as my children would tell me. I don't recall the issue in which it appeared, nor the author. The title of that article was given then to impress upon the readers the problem of poor attendance at society meetings. The writer took the letters he observed being placed in the secretary's attendance record. As each name was read, she would place a P (present) or A (absent); or there was an A, a P, and an E (excused). So it was: PAPA or APE. A little math shows that this represents either 50% attendance or 33% attendance — in either case, a very poor record. So there were problems many years ago already.

Society membership and attendance has not improved since that time. One might identify reasons for this. We do live in a very busy, secular, society. Sports occupy the attention of many. Basketball and football are avidly followed. Many, many hours are spent in practicing and playing games in grade schools and high schools. Fans eagerly follow the fortunes of their team. There is little time left for study for society, or for attending a society that meets during the week.

But there are so many other things to do in this age. There are many activities offered to the public: entertainment parks, restaurants for many meals eaten out of the homes, or there are the programs

presented on TV. There seems to be no time for society, then.

And, we must face it, there is not a great desire to sit down with the Word of God in order to search out its meaning. Few today spend the hours our forefathers did in studying the Word of God. One can become easily satisfied with the barest knowledge of Scripture. The old warning of Scripture applies also today, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6).

There is, too, a desire to restrict spiritual activities to Sunday. Not only do we need some societies on Sunday, but choral societies and other special church activities often are scheduled for that one day. Nor is this always wrong. It does appear, however, that the rest of the week is reserved for other than such activities — there is no time for society, and hardly time for catechism classes, during the week.

But are there not legitimate complaints raised against society attendance? There is, first, the objection that one spends many hours at hard work through the day. At night, one is simply too tired to go out again to meet in society to study the Word of God. It is a question of physical limitations.

But other complaints are lodged, some partly valid. It is claimed that hardly anyone comes prepared to discuss the Scripture passage in society. Without proper study, the discussion lags; interest wanes. Does the complainer himself adequately study? Likely not, but that is because few others do either.

There comes too the problem of speed in covering a passage of Scripture. Some would study an entire book, as Revelation perhaps, in a single season. Others would drag this out over a period of five or ten years. So some will not attend because the society appears to plod along in its study while others refuse to attend because there is not a slow, careful analysis of the text.

Then there is the problem of those few who do speak in society. A limited number appear to do all the speaking. Some object to this, while others might object that so many people in society never say a word. There are problems too with the leaders of societies. Some give too great and detailed an explanation of their own; others seem to give hardly



any explanation at all.

There are complaints about the book of the Bible to be studied. It is too hard — or too easy; too doctrinal or too practical.

Others attend discussion groups on Sunday evening. These groups, however, fine though they may be, do not study books of the Bible. They are not, and were never meant to be, substitutes for society.

Did I include your excuse for not attending society? If I have missed it, would you please add it to the list?

Though some complaints may be legitimate, that question each must ask is: "What have I done to promote good discussion within the society? Have I put into it all that I could? Have I done my share? Did I prepare myself as I ought?" Those who put into the society all that they can, are also the ones who find society enjoyable and profitable.

Are societies outdated, or can they still serve a useful purpose? I am convinced that societies serve two useful functions in the church. First: these encourage a careful study of the Word of God. There ought to be time for such study of the Word for each of us. If we are too busy for that, we are indeed TOO busy. Society provides the opportunity to study a passage of Scripture in greater detail. We have our family devotions but these do not usually involve detailed study of a passage of Scripture. One needs the opportunity to compare Scripture with Scripture. One ought to reflect on the thoughts of others concerning a passage of Scripture. There must be the opportunity to consider how a passage of Scripture applies to one's own life and walk. Societies can function as means to accomplish those ends. No doubt one can find fault with societies; they are not perfect. But if we demand perfection, then let each begin with himself. The means are there within the society to assist each in a better understanding of the Word of God.

Secondly, societies can promote the communion of the saints. We are, after all, one not because we all support the Detroit Tigers, or because we are all farmers, but because we together confess the truths of the Word of God. It is this oneness which we express each Sunday under the preaching of the Word. It is this oneness which we can express as we gather together to discuss the truths of Scripture. Within the society there can be seen the unity of saints. There is revealed the spiritual life of the saints as they reflect together on that which is most precious to them. There they seek with unity the kingdom of heaven and its oneness. When we have these opportunities to promote such fellowship, we ought to take full advantage of this. This ought to be a bit of a foretaste of the fellowship in heaven.

What can a person do in preparation for society? First, begin each personal preparation with prayer to God. Christ promised that the Spirit of truth would lead into all truth. Let us ask His guidance as we begin each study. Secondly, read the passage carefully a number of times. Allow the words of Scripture to sink into our consciousness. Too often we superficially read Scripture. Let this preparation be something deeper.

Thirdly, consider how the passage fits in with the whole of the book. An outline of that Bible book would prove helpful (and outlines are often provided by study-Bibles). Note the context. How does the passage follow out of the context? Next, study the important words and concepts of the passage. Are there other passages in Scripture which use the same words? (A concordance will help to find them.) What do the words mean in the other passages? Does this help to understand the word or concept in the passage studied? Finally, one or more commentaries might provide useful guidance. Commentaries are not the "final word" concerning the meaning of a passage. They can, however, provide useful guidance and give valuable thoughts on the passage.

Together with the above, one ought to take notes. These notes would include various points which need emphasis in the passage. Notes would include our own thoughts and ideas concerning the meaning of this Word. Jot down questions which come to mind. Note what one point you would like to speak on.

Is all this too much preparation? You do not have the time required to prepare thus? Then I would ask: how much time do you put into reading the newspaper? Your favorite magazine? In watching programs on TV? Would it be unfair to put in just *half* that time each week into the study of Scripture?

Then, there is the participation in society discussions. Many profess their inability to do this. Perhaps a few can not participate for good reason. Speaking up in society ought to be no different than conversing on other important (or unimportant) subjects. So, you are afraid that what you might say would prove to be wrong? The preacher himself is not always right. Noted commentaries do not all present the same explanations of a passage. Some are contradictory. What makes you think that you ought to speak only if you are right? Are you expected to attain perfection before you can speak?

Let each practice in order to participate properly. Ask at least one question at each meeting. It does not have to be profound. It does not have to be the expression of great wisdom. Just ask the question. Resolve, further, to make one comment at least at each meeting. Again, it need not be profound nor



even right. Add your contribution to the discussion. It will liven the discussion and you yourself will find it more interesting.

Finally, return home from society and allow some time for reflection and thought. Use the discussion in society as occasion for further discussion at home. A good society discussion, like a good

meal, needs to be digested and assimilated.

Often it has been said: One gets out of society what he puts into it. As the new society season soon begins, let each consider his own responsibility to participate for the profit of the membership of the church — and for his own benefit.

## Book Review

**CHRISTIAN ENGLAND** from the 18th Century to the First World War, by David L. Edwards (Vol. III); Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985; 378 pp., \$8.95 (paper). (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko)

It is probably best to quote from the blurb to give our readers some idea of the contents of this book.

Recognizing the impact of Christianity on the lives and imaginations of the English, Edwards focuses more on people, literature, architecture, art, and prayer than on ecclesiastical administration or theological controversy. The result is a lively and readable account accessible (sic) to general readers and students.

In this third and final volume of the series, Edwards takes up the story in the 18th century and tells of the Evangelical and Catholic revivals which helped to make the Victorian Age as religious as it was. His portrait of the Victorian Age shows that "for all its faults it was an age full of courage and creativity, one of the peaks of Christian civilization." The book concludes with a discussion of the controversies between English Christians in the early years of the 20th century and the decline of conventional Christianity which the sudden outbreak of the First World War partly caused and partly revealed.

The analysis of the book in the first paragraph of the quote is accurate; but this is both its strength and weakness. It is the strength of the book because we have here a history which has in it a great deal of material and detail which cannot easily be found in other histories of the Church of England. But this is also the weakness of the book

because the book becomes so preoccupied with the trees that it loses sight of the forest; i.e., it concentrates so on details of the history that it misses the broad scope of events and the sweeping currents of the times. I presume this is one of the problems which any historian faces, and a happy balance can never really be achieved. So we highly recommend the book as a valuable supplement to other books on the history of Christian England.

I say that it is a valuable supplement for another reason. The book is really written for those who already know quite a bit about this history, for many things are assumed as general knowledge — something which may be true in England itself (although I doubt it), but which is certainly not true in this land. I hope any Christian Schools where Church History is taught will purchase the book. And it is a good addition to any home library, especially if reading in the home includes books on the history of the church of Christ.

The book is marred by typographical mistakes, on the order of the misspelling in the quote above.

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



# News From Our Churches

David Harbach

July 14, 1986

Rev. K. Hanko comments that the annual lectures they held were edifying, and that it was good also to visit with Rev. Engelsma and Rev. and Mrs. Miersma. They had several visitors again. Rev. Hanko is presently working on beginning a class for instruction about the office of elder. He writes, "This will have a two-fold purpose: it will be used by God, we hope, to discover and make use of the spiritual gifts which He has given to our people, and it will help all of us in our understanding of the doctrine of the church and our relation to it . . . . The work progresses and our hope for organization in the relatively near future grows. We ask that you will continue to support us as you have in the past."

Rev. R. Van Overloop comments that back in May he administered the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, under the supervision of South Holland's Consistory to fourteen confessing adults of the fellowship in the Northwest mission. This was a rare thing for the mission field and was possible because most of the people in the fellowship were members of South Holland Church before it was declared a mission field.

Rev. W. Bruinsma remarks that in April, Waterworks Church held a Sunday School program. Many people attended and many were amazed that the children knew just what to do and say. "This, I believe, is a fruit because we witnessed by this program that our church is interested in covenant children. I have yet to see any other denomination in Jamaica who pays any attention at all to children. This is the outgrowth of the believers baptism error so prevalent on the island. We in a concrete way demonstrated to the Waterworks community that the Reformed faith views children differently than what they are used to." Rev. Bruinsma has revised the twenty-five lessons of Old Testament Stories for Beginners to make it more simple for use on the field. He has also prepared a series of worksheets on the minister, elders, and deacons to assist in his teaching the officebearers of Lacovia.

Mr. and Mrs. Mahtani and their two sons are gradually heading west to California where they will leave for Singapore in August. Although they

are ready to return to their homeland, they did state in a letter to Grandville Church, Michigan, "We will miss you. Do write to us at this address: 12-10, River Valley Close, Singapore 0923. Better still, visit us there someday. Till we meet again, farewell." We already miss them and pray that God will continue to send his covenant blessings to them in Singapore.

South Holland's Evangelism News has many letters from people who receive their literature. From Oakdale, California: "We are informed we can order tape recordings of the messages of the Conference on Marriage . . . There is much need for help along this line." From Grants Pass, Oregon: "A friend showed me a copy of (your) booklet, 'A Defense of Calvinism as the Gospel.' If you can spare some copies, I have a number of preachers and laymen I could share them with."

Byron Center Church, Michigan, will hold their Camp Day August 7 and 8. Rev. Van Overloop and another minister will speak on the importance of personal evangelism and corporate evangelism.

Now for the latest in church building. Loveland Church, Colorado, is especially grateful for the opportunity to have gathered for worship in their new church building during the summer. In the summer they hold their evening service at 7:00 P.M. Covenant Church, Wyckoff, New Jersey, needs approximately \$30,000.00 to complete their church. The city regulations are such that they can not use their building until it is completely finished. First Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan, has finished the lower level and expects to have their new organ installed and working by mid-September. Pieces of their chancel furniture, the pulpit, communion table, baptismal font, and chairs were made by Mr. Bill Hofman. Kalamazoo Church, Michigan, plans to or has already put up a new steeple for an approximate cost of \$2,000.00.

*Take the time to  
read and study the  
Standard Bearer!*



### NOTICE!!!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Houston, Texas on Wednesday, September 3, 1986, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. Delegates in need of lodging or of transportation from the airport should inform the Clerk of the Houston Consistory.

Rev. David Engelsma, Stated Clerk  
Classis West

### NOTICE!!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, September 10, at the Kalamazoo Protestant Reformed Church. Material to be treated in this session must be in the hands of the Stated Clerk at least three weeks prior to the convening of this session.

Jon Huisken  
Stated Clerk

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On August 18, 1986, the Lord willing, our parents, PROF. AND MRS. ROBERT DECKER, will celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary. We, their children, give thanks to our heavenly Father for the Christian love and guidance they have given us. May our covenant God continue to bless and keep them in the coming years.

"The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel." (Psalm 128:5, 6)

Deborah Daniel Timothy Jonathan

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On August 20, 1986, our parents and grandparents, REV. AND MRS. JOHN A. HEYS, will celebrate their 45 years of marriage. We rejoice with them and also thank our Heavenly Father for the years they have shared and for the constant love and covenant instruction and guidance they have given us. Our prayer for them is that they may continue to experience the blessings of our faithful God in the years that He may give them.

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

their grateful children and grandchildren,

Burton and Ardess Van Prooyen	Sidney and Joyce Niemeyer
Duane, Debra	Laura, Heather, Eric
John and Sandra Heys	
John, Lorinda, Sonja, Trisha	

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

We rejoice in the Lord with our parents, MR. AND MRS. JOHN FEENSTRA, as they celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary on August 24, 1986.

We thank our God for the years they have shared and for the example and covenant home they have provided. Our prayer is that the Lord will continue to bless and keep them in His care.

"Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of thy vanity." (Ecclesiastes 9:9a)

Kenneth and Glenyce Feenstra	Cynthia Feenstra
Tena and Stacy	Lori Feenstra
Linda Feenstra	Redlands, Cal.

### ANNIVERSARY IN MINISTRY

August 1986, the Lord willing, will mark 45 years that the Lord has sustained our father, REV. JOHN A. HEYS, in the service of the Protestant Reformed Churches. We Thank God that His covenant blessings have been with our father and our prayer is that God will use him (and our mother as his "help") for years to come.

"I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations." (Psalm 89:1)

Burton and Ardess Van Prooyen  
John and Sandra Heys  
Sidney and Joyce Niemeyer

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Consistory of the Loveland Protestant Reformed Church, on behalf of the congregation, expresses sympathy to the family of MRS. CLARA SERR, whom the Lord took to Himself on July 7, 1986. May your assurance be that "... all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28)

Rev. Ron Cammenga, Pres.  
Frank Van Baren, Clerk

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church expresses sympathy to Mr. Robert Hoving and family in the death of his mother, MRS. L. HOVING.

"For this God is our God forever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death." (Psalm 48:14)

Phillip Lotterman, Pres.  
Bill De Kraker, Vice Sec'y.

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Priscilla Society of the First Protestant Reformed Church (Grand Rapids) expresses its sincere sympathy to our fellow member, Miss Dorothy Baar and her family, in the death of her father, MR. HENRY BAAR. May our Lord comfort the family through His Word.

"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." (I Thess. 4:14)

Mrs. Charles Kregel, Pres.  
Mrs. William Corson, Sec'y.

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies Aid Society of First Church, Grand Rapids, Mich., expresses its Christian sympathy to Mrs. Lena Baar and family, in the loss of their husband, father and grandfather, MR. HENRY BAAR.

"The Lord redeemeth the soul of His servants: and none of them that trust in Him shall be desolate." (Psalm 34:22)

Mrs. G. Bylsma, Pres.  
Mrs. S. De Young, Vice Sec'y.