

**A Reformed  
Semi-Monthly  
Magazine**

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# THE STANDARD BEARER

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*But God has caused His people to differ. He works in them through His grace and Holy Spirit. He has chosen and formed His people for His own glory and praise. He has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light that we might show forth His praises. He has redeemed us by His grace that we might acknowledge His great mercy and give Him thanks. He has saved us in order that we might forever glorify Him for the wonder of His grace, the greatness of His love, and the faithfulness of His mercies.*

*See: In His Fear, p 491*

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September 15, 1988

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## Meditation

James D. Slopsema

## Inviting The Poor

*Then said he also to them  
that bade him, When thou  
makest a dinner or a supper,  
call not thy friends, nor thy  
brethren, neither thy kinsmen,  
nor thy rich neighbors; lest  
they also bid thee again, and a  
recompense be made thee.*

James D. Slopsema is pastor of Hope  
Protestant Reformed Church, Grandville,  
Michigan.

*But when thou makest a  
feast, call the poor, the  
maimed, the lame, the blind:  
And thou shalt be blessed;  
for they cannot recompense  
thee: for thou shalt be  
recompensed at the resurrec-  
tion of the just.*

Luke 14:12-14

Someone had invited Jesus to  
a feast.

Jesus proceeded to give in-  
structions to the host concerning  
whom he ought to have invited.

Some may question Jesus'  
sense of propriety. Who, after all,  
takes it upon himself to tell the  
host who should be invited to his  
own party?

But if we pay close attention to  
Jesus' instruction, we will learn  
some very important principles  
concerning whom we should in-  
vite into our homes and those  
with whom we ought to  
associate.

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We will also conclude that Jesus' instruction to his host was not unseemly at all, but very appropriate.

\* \* \* \* \*

When thou makest a dinner or supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbors. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind.

Jesus speaks here of a dinner or a supper. He also makes reference to a feast. Dinner was the first meal of the day, eaten either in the forenoon or at noon. Supper was the main meal of the day eaten at sundown, at the end of the workday. A feast was a meal to which guests were invited and at which was to be found music, wine, and merriment. These feasts could be held either at dinner time or supper time. Sometimes they even lasted for several days.

Someone had also invited Jesus to a feast.

Jesus told his host that to such occasions he ought not to invite his friends, his brothers, his relatives, or his rich neighbors. Rather he ought to invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind. Bear in mind that the maimed, lame, and blind were almost always relegated to terrible poverty in Jesus' day. These are they who should be invited to feasts and meals.

Now we must not construe Jesus to mean that we can not invite to our homes our friends, our brothers, our relatives, or rich neighbors. From the rest of Jesus' instruction it becomes apparent that Jesus would have us avoid inviting others to our homes with a view to being repaid by our guests. Rather, we must make it our practice to invite those who have nothing to return to us for our hospitality.

For notice that Jesus instructed His host not to invite friends, his brothers, his relatives, or his rich neighbors, lest they also invite the host and a recompense be made.

It was common in Jesus' day to invite to banquets only those who could pay back the host with a return invitation. The host would invite his friends, his brothers, or his relatives so they would invite him back, and he could have a good time. Or he might invite even his rich neighbor. What prestige this would give him should his rich neighbor give a return invitation.

And this is what Jesus was condemning.

We may not invite others to our homes or to various social events we sponsor with a view to getting something in return. This is exactly what we do if we invite merely our friends, our brothers, our relatives, or rich neighbor.

Rather, when we make a feast, we are to invite the poor, the maimed, lame, and the blind; for they can not recompense us.

Certainly the poor that Jesus described can not advance us socially. In fact, by inviting these kinds to our homes and social events we may well find that others no longer invite us to their homes. Neither are the poor Jesus described able to repay us with a return invitation. They are able only to receive, and have nothing with which to pay back. These are the kinds of people, said Jesus, we are to invite to our homes and banquets.

Perhaps we can take the liberty to extend this principle to other situations in which we come into contact with people.

Children at school should not associate just with those who are fun to be with and that are popular. They should make it a practice to play also with those who for a number of reasons

(usually sinful and selfish) have been cast off.

Their parents should also follow the same practice in their social visiting. They should make it a practice to visit with those who for various reason do not always fit into the mainstream of the church, and tend for that reason to be shunned in the church. Also the widows and singles should be included in our social life.

After church we ought not to socialize only with our friends, but also with strangers and visitors. There are times when visitors ought even to be invited to our homes.

All this requires that we give to those who have little or nothing to pay back.

This is what Jesus requires of us.

\* \* \* \* \*

The reason for this instruction is to be found in God's law.

Jesus pointed in that direction when he said that those who call to their feasts the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind shall be recompensed in the resurrection of the just, or righteous.

The righteous are those who keep the law of God.

Now those who call to their feasts the poor and needy shall be recompensed in the resurrection of the righteous exactly because they have walked in the righteousness of the law.

The heart of God's law is to show mercy to those in need.

God made this very clear through the prophet Hosea. To Judah God said, "I desired mercy and not sacrifice." (Hosea 6:6) By this the Lord meant that even though His law required sacrifices of Judah, without mercy to those in need, all of Judah's sacrifices were nothing.



Jesus Himself quoted Hosea when the Pharisees criticized Him for eating with publicans and sinners. Jesus told the Pharisees that they ought to learn what Hosea meant, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice." (Matt. 9:13)

And now Jesus has shown us one way to demonstrate this mercy of the law.

We are to invite to our banquets and give help to the poor, the maimed, and the needy, who have nothing to pay back.

This is true righteousness and delightful to the Lord.

Let those who neglect the needy learn what Hosea meant: "I will have mercy and not sacrifice."

God will have us show this mercy to those in need exactly because He has shown mercy to us when we were poor, maimed, lame and blind, with nothing to pay back.

How desperate is our situation by nature. We are spiritually bankrupt before God, blinded by sin, unable to walk in the paths of God, headed for certain destruction.

Yet God loved us from all eternity and showed mercy to us. In Christ He has paid up all our spiritual debts, has given us eyes to see and the strength to walk in His ways. We even have an invitation to the marriage feast to be celebrated throughout the endless ages of eternity.

And we have nothing with which we can pay God back! We can only receive His blessings!

God will now have us show this same love and mercy to others in need. "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful." (Luke 6:36)

The power to show this mercy to those in need is God's mercy to us in Christ.

Those who invite to their feasts the poor and needy shall be blessed.

This means they shall be happy.

Those who invite only their friends, their rich neighbors, and those who will pay them back think they will be happy.

But Jesus says those who invite the needy and those who have nothing to repay will be happy.

For they shall be recompensed (paid back) at the resurrection of the just.

When Christ shall return again on the clouds of heaven, there will be a general resurrection, both of the righteous and the wicked. The righteous will be raised to eternal life and glory, whereas the wicked will be raised to the eternal torments of hell.

Those who show mercy to the needy and those who had nothing to repay shall be repaid and rewarded in this glorious resurrection of the righteous.

And what a great reward that will be!

For theirs will be the joy of eternal bliss and glory in Jesus Christ.

Not so those who wickedly and selfishly sought only those who could pay them something back and showed no mercy to the needy. The only reward they have is that which their friends and rich neighbors paid them for their hospitality. Small and of little significance that reward will be when the righteous inherit eternal life and they perish eternally!

Let us then keep our eye single to this reward of the righteous.

It is not a reward of merit, but of grace.

It is set before us, not to earn, but as an incentive for us to show mercy to others, even as God has shown mercy to us. □

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*The Standard Bearer makes a thoughtful gift for members of your family, friends, and neighbors. Give a gift of the Standard Bearer.*

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# The Creation Record Literal (4) Farewell!

## Editorials

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### The Creation Record Literal (4)

We conclude this series on a positive note.

Let us remember that the Christian — also the Christian scientist — begins and ends on the basis of the absolute authority of Holy Scripture. This is and must always be his bias, or prepossession. His approach to science is not neutral. Neutrality is, in fact, an impossibility, whether for believer or unbeliever. And with respect to the Genesis record, this bowing before the absolute authority of Scripture implies that he embraces the record of creation as *literal*.

One does not have to maintain that Scripture is a kind of science textbook in order to maintain this position. Everyone knows that this is not true. The Bible does not speak scientific language, and it does not present a scientific analysis of things. When it records the work of creation, it very evidently does not do so from the viewpoint of an astronomer and his telescope, for example, but from the viewpoint of the earth as the habitation of man and as the center and stage of all history. The real question is not whether the Bible

is a science textbook, but whether the Bible records *facts*, and whether the Bible speaks accurately. The latter must certainly be maintained. When Scripture speaks with respect to the origin of things and with respect to the manner of their origin, it speaks inerrantly and perspicuously. Let us never forget this. And the true scientist, the Christian scientist, will bow to that speech of Scripture.

This means that the believing scientist interprets God's book of creation, so-called revelation in nature, by faith in the light of Holy Scripture. He does not reverse this relationship. He does not come with his scientific conclusions/hypotheses to Scripture, and, discovering that the two do not agree, conclude that he will have to adjust his interpretation of Scripture to fit his science and his scientific data. But he is willing to bow before the Scriptures with his science. And where there is conflict, he will re-examine and adjust his science and scientific conclusions so that they are in harmony with Scripture.

The principle of the absolute authority of Scripture must prevail.

In this connection, there are certain Scriptural truths which are of importance and which must be taken into account by the natural scientist. No, these truths are not couched in scientific language. Nevertheless, they are truths with which the scientist must reckon. They are truths, too, which give the lie to many of the notions of unbelieving science. Let me briefly mention them:

1) In the creation narrative Scripture presents the picture of a finished creation. Sometimes this is called a creation "with the appearance of age," an expression of which I am not especially fond. When God created, He created a complete, mature creation. He created a mature man and woman, not a couple of infants, and surely not an evolving creature. He called the sun, moon, and stars into existence; and there they were. He called the dry land and the seas into existence. He called plants and trees into existence. He called the animals, the birds, the fish out of the earth and out of the waters. All of the creation was fashioned and stood there in its completion in six days! Call it an "appearance of age," if you will; but I do not know what age it appeared to have. Nor is that the point. The point is that on the



basis of Scripture we *begin* with what unbelief needs billions of years to arrive at. There is a fundamental difference!

2) We must not forget that science does not and cannot study the universe as it was originally formed. The universe which we study today is a universe radically changed at the time of the fall and through the curse. There are many indications of this in Scripture; and science should pay attention to the changes which Scripture points out. There was a change in the domain of the animals. There was a change in man's dominion over the animals. There was a change in the earth which was cursed. There was a change in the food of man. According to Romans 8:19, the whole creation came under the bondage of corruption through the fall and the curse. This certainly implies, negatively, that science cannot simply proceed on the assumption that there is an uninterrupted *continuum* from the beginning until today. To a large extent we cannot even imagine how things were when that first creation stood in its pristine beauty and perfection. For all that we know and can study is a creation that is under the curse and under the bondage of corruption.

3) There was a radically different world before the Flood. The Bible itself tells us this, II Peter 3:5, 6: "For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished." Notice that the Bible speaks of the pre-diluvian world as *another world*, the world that *then was*. Ours is the world that *now is*. That past world was destroyed by the Flood, by water. Ours will be

destroyed by fire. And the destruction of that former world is comparable to and typical of the final destruction of our world in the holocaust of the final fire.

4) Closely related to the preceding is the fact of the Flood itself. Of course, you can relegate that Flood to "primeval history," or you can deny its universality. But Biblically conceived, the Flood was in every way a tremendous catastrophe, an awful divine intervention, and at the same time a mighty wonder of grace, a miracle. Consider that the windows of heaven were opened and the fountains of the great deep were broken up, Gen. 7:11. The Flood, in the light of Scripture, must not be reduced to an ordinary event with ordinary rainfall which was exceedingly lengthy. It was the *destruction* of the first world. You cannot even begin to imagine the tremendous changes wrought by that Flood in comparison with the devastation that a very small local flood can wreak today.

5) Consider the fact that Scripture presents us in Genesis 5 and Genesis 11 with two very definite chronologies in the generations of Adam and the generations of Shem. Consider, too, that at the time of the Flood and again at the time of the Tower of Babel there were two divine interventions in the life-span of mankind.

All of these truths are of significance for the Christian who is engaged in the study of various natural sciences.

And they should warn us not to capitulate to worldly science and its unbelieving conclusions.

Let us hold fast to the Word of God! □ HCH

## Farewell!

Since this is the last issue of the current volume-year, this is also my final word as Editor and Managing Editor of *The Standard Bearer*, in harmony with the

plans approved by the Staff and announced a year ago. In harmony with those plans, Professor-elect David Engelsma and Prof. R. Decker will take over as Editor-in-Chief and Managing Editor, respectively.

More than one person asked me orally whether I did not feel a certain amount of regret about my pending retirement. I told them this story. After our annual Staff meeting in June, the last over which I presided, I walked across from the seminary to my home, and said to my wife, "Just think! We made a lot of decisions at our meeting about the next volume-year, and I don't have to do anything about them!" I felt as though a heavy burden had been lifted from my shoulders. I suppose that is a bit difficult for anyone to understand, unless he has spent as many years as I have in meeting deadlines of preparing an issue and getting material to the printer for 21 issues per year.

More important than my personal relief and the fact that now I hope to have the time to attend to other writings is my satisfaction that provision has been made for a smooth and orderly transition for our magazine and that two capable men have consented to take over the work.

To my fellow Staff members I say thanks for your help and support over the years.

To my successors I wish the Lord's blessing and pledge my support in continuing the testimony of *The Standard Bearer*.

To my readers I say, "Thank-you for your patient bearing with me through the years."

For the coming volume-year I have asked for a leave of absence from the Staff, though I have promised to write some informative articles from Tasmania, Australia, for which land my wife and I will soon be departing, D.V.

May the Lord continue to bless our *Standard Bearer*. □ HCH



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## Book Review

Herman C. Hanko

# Has The Church Misread The Bible?

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**HAS THE CHURCH MISREAD THE BIBLE?** The history of interpretation in the light of current issues, Moises Silva; Zondervan Publishing House, 1987. 136 pp., no price listed (paper). (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko)

This book is the first in a series under the general title: "Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation." The series is edited by the author of this volume and "seeks to identify and work toward a clarification of the basic problems of interpretation that affect our reading of the Bible today. This unique series covers the field of general hermeneutics in a comprehensive and systematic fashion."

As the sub-title indicates, this introductory volume is intended to introduce the series by a review of the history of Biblical interpretation; yet it is not really a history in the sense in which one usually thinks of history, but is more a review of certain key views in interpretation that have appeared throughout history. The purpose is to introduce the main problems of hermeneutics with which the whole series will deal.

The author claims that he (and authors of the volumes that are to follow) are all committed to the divine inspiration of Scripture in the sense of its complete inerrancy in the original manuscripts. He stresses this in more than one place and seems intent on persuading his readers that this is indeed true.

The book is, however, troubling in more than one respect. It is, I am convinced, must reading for all those who are interested in the current debate concerning the inspiration and authority of Scripture. And this issue is the real issue underlying many other controversies in the modern church world: it is the real issue beneath the debate over evolutionism vs. the doctrine of creation; it is the basic issue in the whole struggle over the right of women to hold ecclesiastical office; it is the fundamental question in the church's stand on such questions as homosexuality, divorce and remarriage, etc.

The difficulty is that there is an increasingly large number of Bible scholars, many of whom are within conservative Reformed and Presbyterian Churches, who teach in some of the conservative colleges and seminaries in this land and abroad, who vehemently claim to hold to the absolute inerrancy of Scripture, and who yet embrace redaction criticism,

literary and historical criticism, or whatever the latest theory of interpretation may be. And there are many (including myself) who reject redaction criticism as well as literary-historical criticism and who insist that these methods of interpretation deny the divine and inerrant inspiration of Scripture.

So what is the problem? Are these men laboring under a false conception of what divine inspiration is? Are they deceiving themselves and others, claiming to believe in a doctrine while in fact denying it? Or perhaps are they correct so that the answer to the title of Dr. Silva's book has to be answered in the affirmative: Yes, the church has misread the Bible all these years.

It is becoming increasingly clear to me that if we are to defend the truth of Scripture's inspiration and inerrancy, we are going to have to come to grips with these problems and answer them. And this book (and the series as a whole) is an excellent place to begin. The book is extremely clear and well-written, without all the jargon that most books of this type use. It can be understood by almost anyone who takes the time to study it a bit — it is not written exclusively for ministers and seminary students. It defines the issues sharply and clearly and without

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equivocation. The issues are all there: what is one going to say about them?

It is, of course, impossible in the course of this review to deal in detail with the whole problem. In fact, that would not even be wise, since it is not always apparent in what direction either Dr. Silva or following writers intend to go on crucial questions. Dr. Silva repeatedly introduces questions and leaves them hanging, all the while assuring his readers that they will be treated in detail in future books of the series.

But there are some preliminary observations which, I think, ought to be made — observations which are of no little importance in connection with this whole question.

Before we get into this matter, however, it might be well to spell out the problems as Dr. Silva sees them. He has a summary of them on p. 37 of the book, which we quote:

*The Bible is divine, yet it has come to us in human form.*

*The commands of God are absolute, yet the historical context of the writings appears to relativize certain elements.*

*The divine message must be clear, yet many passages seem ambiguous.*

*We are dependent only on the Spirit for instruction, yet scholarship is surely necessary.*

*The Scriptures seem to presuppose a literal and historical reading, yet we are also confronted by the figurative and nonhistorical (e.g., the parables).*

*Proper interpretation requires the interpreter's personal freedom, yet some degree of external, corporate authority appears imperative.*

*The objectivity of the biblical message is essential, yet our presuppositions seem to inject a degree of subjectivity into the interpretive process.*

In the course of the book these questions are dealt with in detail, and some related questions are introduced. E.g., in Chapter 3, where the author deals with the problem of the literal vs. the figurative interpretation of Scripture, he points out many difficulties which arise in connection with this problem, also as far as the debate over millennial views is concerned. In connection with the doctrine of Scripture's clarity, he talks of whether or not Scripture has just one, simple, natural, meaning, or whether it has deeper meanings as well in some places. In Chapter V he discusses the question of "cultural contextualization" and says that the only question with which we deal is how far to carry it, for even a translation is a cultural contextualization. How can a passage, understood in its own cultural context and applicable to situations within that context, be understood in our context and culture and be applicable to our times? Is there not, Silva asks, evidence that the New Testament writers contextualized the Old Testament in their use of it?

The key point in all the debate is the question of whether Scripture has a human as well as a divine factor. This is assumed by the author, as it is assumed by almost all those who deal with questions of Biblical interpretation. Silva makes much of this, and even makes a point or two worth repeating. He argues that there is an analogy between the incarnation of Christ and the inscription of God's Word. Just as Christ has a divine and a human nature, so Scripture has a divine and a human element. Just as the human nature of Christ is sinless, so is Scripture, though a human book, without error. And further parts of the analogy can be drawn out. Silva is not the first to use this; it appears in Bavinck's *Gereformeerde*

*Dogmatiek*, and is criticized by G.C. Berkouwer in his book on Scripture. Nevertheless, it has become a rather popular analogy, although I personally have some reservations about it. However that may be, Silva points out rather pointedly, that those who hold to a "low" view of Scripture criticize those who hold to a high view as being "Docetic," i.e., denying the human element just as the "Docetists" denied Christ's human nature. Silva shoots back at them that certainly the charge of Arianism can be levelled against them because they deny the divine element just as Arius denied the divinity of Christ. It is a point well taken.

Nevertheless, one keeps getting the feeling that Silva looks at the whole problem of the difference between the "lows" and the "highs" as being one of degree. Everyone, Silva seems to maintain, agrees with redaction criticism, literal criticism, historical criticism, or whatever. The question is: how far are you going to carry it? The "lows" carry it way too far and lose the divine; the "highs" make use of it only in a very limited way.

I am extremely uncomfortable with that kind of analysis. I for one do not believe for a moment that the difference between those who receive the Bible as the Word of God in all its parts, and those who challenge it in many respects is only a difference of degree. I insist that it is a difference of fundamental viewpoint. The critics are wrong, dead wrong — whether they be redaction critics, historical critics, or any other kind of critic.

The whole problems lies in that question of the human and the divine factor in Scripture. There is, of course, no question about it that God used men as instruments to write His Scriptures. Nor is there any question about it



that the individual characteristics and personality traits, as well as the individual cultural milieus of these men were preserved in the writings of Scripture. No one, so far as I know, has ever denied these truths.

But Scripture is part of God's work of salvation in Jesus Christ. It belongs to the history of salvation and thus belongs to the miraculous work of God which He performs sovereignly, through grace. It would be better, I think, to compare the writing of Scripture with the work of the salvation of the church. Just as salvation is the work of grace alone without human works, so is also the writing of Scripture the work of grace alone without human works. Just as the individual sinner is saved without his character and personality being destroyed or submerged, so also God used men to write the Scriptures without destroying their individuality. Just as the sinner is saved in the whole context of the time and place in which God has placed him, so is Scripture written through men in their own time and place which God has determined for them. Arminianism wishes to preserve a human element in the work of salvation; so a human element is introduced into the writing of Scripture. But Scripture says that salvation is all of grace. So also is Scripture all of grace. And so God is the sole Author of salvation and of Scripture. That needs to be emphasized first of all.

Of course God used men to write Scripture; but this must never be interpreted apart from God's sovereign predestination and providence. God so controlled the whole process of writing Scripture that what emerged was God's Word exclusively.

The method of Biblical interpretation which the church of Christ has almost throughout her entire history adopted is the so-called grammatico-historical method. While during the Middle Ages this method came into disrepute, nevertheless, in times of spiritual strength in the church, this method was followed. This method says two things about Biblical interpretation: 1) That Scripture must be interpreted according to the ordinary rules of grammar and syntax of the language in which Scripture was originally written (Hebrew and Greek). 2) That Scripture must be interpreted in its historical context. E.g., the epistle to the Galatians must be interpreted in the context of the fact that Paul wrote this letter to the churches of Eastern Asia Minor to combat the heresy of Judaism which had so quickly entered the churches there.

This method of Biblical interpretation is said to justify literary and historical criticism. Literary criticism simply takes into account what kind of material one is dealing with in Scripture (whether poetry as in the Psalms or narrative as in the gospels, etc.); but it also attempts to demonstrate how a given book of the Bible came into existence; i.e., whether Matthew or Luke, in writing his gospel narrative, used outside sources, depended upon the eye-witness testimony of others, etc. In this area redaction criticism enters the picture, for redaction criticism deals with the question of how the men whom God used to write the Scriptures put their writings in final form. And historical criticism deals with the question of the historical occasion, the human author, the cultural influences, etc. in a given book of the Bible.

I have no doubt that some of this is indeed legitimate work and that surely some of these

things are implied in the tried and true grammatico-historical method of Biblical interpretation. This is not where I have my quarrel with current "conservative" hermeneutics.

The problem lies in the whole relation between the divine and the "human" elements in Scripture.

A few things ought to be said about this so that the point can be made as clear as possible.

If we believe that Scripture is infallibly inspired, that it is the Word of God, that it is inerrant in all its parts, that it is divinely-breathed, that holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, then the all-important question which every exegete confronts is this: What is the meaning of the Holy Spirit in this particular text? That is the only question of any importance whatsoever. That is the question which has to be answered. That is the question which confronts the preacher when he prepares his sermons, because he must come to God's people with the words: "Thus saith the Lord." That is the question which the child of God confronts when he takes that Word of God as a lamp unto his feet and a light upon his pathway. He is not interested in what any men say, no matter how holy they may be. He is interested in what God says. That is the only things which counts.

The dangers of redaction criticism or historical-literary criticism are, therefore, these.

1) This type of critical approach to Scripture places all the emphasis on the human element in Scripture and puts the human element as an element along side that of the divine. It fails to reckon with the relation between the men whom God used to write the Scriptures and the work of God Himself. It introduces into the Scriptures a sort of dualism in which both God and man have a



role. It does not see that the human writers were completely controlled by God so that the product is God's work exclusively. It is therefore an introduction into the doctrine of Scripture of Arminianism.

2) It concentrates so completely on the human element that, in practice, the divine element is ignored. This is a practical consequence, but very real for all that. And, in fact, this is exactly what happens to all Arminianism. The human element is so emphasized that it becomes the only important element. And so, from a practical point of view, this type of criticism so concentrates upon the human that the exegete never gets around to asking concerning the meaning of the Holy Spirit. One is so interested in what Paul had to say, or what Isaiah had to say, or what David had to say, that it never occurs to him to ask what the Holy Spirit has to say. He becomes so wrapped up in the cultural context in which the book was written, the cultural influences which determined the nature of the writings of a given man, that the revelation of God in Scripture is forgotten.

3) It runs the grave risk (extremely common even among conservative scholars) of dealing with what is called so often Johannine theology, or Pauline eschatology, or the *corpus* of Petrine literature, to the exclusion of the truth of God in Christ. Paul has his theology, and John his. And perhaps the two do not even always agree with each other. But, after all, the influences which shaped Paul are different from those which shaped John. And the unity of Scripture in the one great revelation of the truth of God in Christ is ignored and denied.

4) From a practical point of view, and most serious of all, it puts the Scriptures outside the reach of the child of God who has no formal training in archeology, rabbinic literature, mid-eastern culture, etc., etc. Really to understand Scripture one must be an expert in all kinds of esoteric subjects. And if one does not have the scholarly credentials that the learned professors in seminary have, too bad about him; he cannot really know what Scripture teaches. Effectively the Scriptures are taken from God's people and are made the exclusive property of learned men.

To avoid this, some have suggested that after all, Scripture has more than one level of meaning. There is the simple, easy, literal level which any person can understand, but there is the deep, underlying meaning which is the real truth and which is available only to those who have Ph.D.'s behind their names. But this is simply a return to the old medieval and Romish doctrine which ultimately fills the child of God with despair, for he cannot really understand what the Bible says, after all. As C.S. Lewis writes:

*An experienced clergyman told me that most liberal priests, faced with this problem, have recalled from its grave the late medieval conception of two truths: a picture-truth which can be preached to the people, and an esoteric truth for use among the clergy. I shouldn't think you will enjoy this conception much when you have to put it into practice. I'm sure if I had to produce picture-truths to a parishioner in great anguish or under fierce temptation, and produce them with that seriousness and fervour which his condition demanded, while knowing all the time that I didn't exactly — only in some Pickwickian sense — believe them myself, I'd find my forehead getting red and damp and my collar getting tight.*

It will be argued by the defenders of redaction and historical-literary criticism that, nevertheless, the tried and true grammatico-historical method of

interpretation which all the church has used implies such emphasis on the human element. The argument here is, of course, that the meaning of God's Word, i.e., the meaning of the Holy Spirit, can really be discovered only by careful attention to all the historical conditions under which a given book was written.

While we do not deny that there is an element of truth to all this, there are, nevertheless, certain points that have to be remembered.

1) In many, many instances in Scripture we simply do not know the historical circumstances of a given book. We do not know, e.g., who wrote I & II Kings or I & II Chronicles. We do not know in every instance who wrote a given Psalm, or under what circumstances it was written. We do now know the author of the epistle to the Hebrews. We do not know with certainty the circumstances under which the gospel narratives were written and what purposes they were intended to serve. We can make guesses about all these things, but the fact remains that the most learned of scholars disagree violently among themselves on many of these questions.

The point is that God did not, in every instance, choose to reveal these things to us. What does that mean? Well, it obviously means that God is saying that a knowledge of these things is not absolutely essential to an understanding of the text because the important question of the text is: What is the Holy Spirit saying? And we need not know all this historical and cultural background to know what the Spirit is saying to the church. It makes not one particle of difference in these cases what the historical circumstances were.



If we had to wait for scholars to decide in every case what the historical circumstances were before we could understand a part of Scripture, we would have to wait until the Lord comes again; and then it will be too late.

2) This does not mean that where the Holy Spirit Himself is pleased to reveal these historical circumstances to us, that such information is helpful in understanding a book or a given passage of Scripture. But let it be remembered then that the Holy Spirit Himself has made the decision on what to reveal to us. And we ought, I think, on the whole, let the Holy Spirit make these decisions in every case.

But even then, if the Holy Spirit is pleased to reveal to us these historical circumstances, His purpose is not to inspire us to write volumes of learned balderdash about these historical cir-

cumstances, but his purpose is to help us in our stupidity from above, so that we may learn the more easily what God Himself has to say to us. We are concerned only about God's Word. And if God, through the Spirit of Christ, in some instances chooses to help us by revealing certain historical circumstances, we can only bow in humility before the wisdom of God. But if God tells us that this information is not really necessary, we are guilty of consummate folly when we spend time, energy, and money writing hundreds of books which are adept at constructing magnificent castles of human speculation but which help us not at all in learning what the Spirit says to the Church.

I am aware of the fact that what I have written does not deal with all the problems that arise in connection with the whole

question of Biblical interpretation. But these things are surely the limits within which all interpretation must be done and all problems must be solved.

I will, I know, be charged with being unscholarly. So be it. If scholarly work requires one to deny in any way or manner what God has done in that remarkable miracle of giving us Scripture, we can only be thankful that God saves us by His grace from scholarliness. And our earnest prayer ought to be: Deliver us, O God, from the hands of scholarship.

A simple, child-like, humble faith in Scripture as the Word of God, understandable to my child sitting on my knee, is more to be preferred than the intricacies and labyrinthian mazes of redaction criticism. □

# The Distinctive Traits Of True Godliness:

## Devotion To The Honor And Glory of God

*In His Fear*  
Arie den Hartog

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God has made all things for His own glory. "For of Him and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen." (Romans 11:36). From the beginning to the end of all history and through all the ages of eternity God will be glorified. At the beginning of history the angels sang of the praises of God. In heaven the song is heard;

"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created," Rev. 4:11. As the sovereign God He will cause all things to glorify Himself. He will not give His glory to any other. He is jealous for His own honor and glory. Even the wicked man, though



contrary to his own will, shall finally glorify God. This is illustrated in the history of Pharaoh, the proud wicked king of Egypt. For God says concerning Pharaoh: "Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth," Romans 9:17.

God seeks His own glory in all of His creatures. The Psalmist sings: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge," Psalm 19:1, 2. The brute creation glorifies God unconsciously without having a knowledge of the creator. God made man in order that he might consciously and personally and willingly glorify God His creator. Man glorifies God when, knowing God, he testifies of the greatness, the virtues, and the goodness of God. Man glorifies God when He worships and serves God as His Lord and creator and gives Him thanks in all things.

Wicked ungodly man has a controversy with God, his Creator and Lord. He refuses to glorify God. Rather he seeks his own glory. He constantly seeks to deny God and rebel against Him. He refuses to worship God and render Him thanks. He changes the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like unto man and beast. He worships and serves the creature rather than the creator. Wicked man boasts of his own greatness and glory. He can make nothing of himself. He is absolutely dependent on the God of providence, but he does not acknowledge God. He seeks to build a kingdom of man on this earth. Then he boasts with proud Nebuchadnezzar; "Is not this

great Babylon, that I have built for the house of my kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?" (Daniel 4:30). But God will humble the proud wicked man as He did Nebuchadnezzar, who was finally forced to acknowledge: "And I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the king of heaven, all whose works are truth, and His ways judgment: and those that walk in pride He is able to abase," Daniel 4:37. Though the ungodly refuse to acknowledge the glory of God, God will glorify Himself over them. He will glorify Himself in the destruction of the ungodly.

But God has caused His people to differ. He works in them through His grace and Holy Spirit. He has chosen and formed His people for His own glory and praise. He has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light that we might show forth His praises. He has redeemed us by His grace that we might acknowledge His great mercy and give Him thanks. He has saved us in order that we might forever glorify Him for the wonder of His grace, the greatness of His love, and the faithfulness of His mercies.

It follows therefore that one of the great, distinctive marks of the true child of God is that he is devoted in all of his life to the glory of God. The Spirit of God works in his heart a fervent desire for the glory of God. This is the goal and purpose of his life. He says with the Psalmist: "While I live will I praise the Lord: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being," Psalm 146:2. The true child of God delights in the glory of God. All his strength and energy is expended to glorify God. All his zeal and enthusiasm concentrates on this. All his time and efforts and talents are used for this end.

Oh, this is not yet perfectly evident in the child of God. He still has the old sinful nature that often distracts him from this purpose in life and sometimes makes him glory and boast in himself, as the world does. Nevertheless the glory of God is the supreme ideal for which he strives. In striving for this he finds his greatest joys and pleasures. God has redeemed us unto Himself that we might glorify Him. The word of God commands us: "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do it all to the glory of God," I Corinthians 10:31. We know all of this particularly as Reformed Christians. For the absolutely central principle of all things for the Reformed Faith is "To God alone be the glory."

But what does all of this really mean? This must be more than merely a nice thought for us. It must be more than a great doctrine, though it is indeed a great doctrine. It must really be the distinctive mark of all our life that causes us to differ radically from the world. Let us consider some of the areas where our devotion to the honor and glory of God ought to be evident.

First of all we are devoted to the glory of God when we from the heart truly acknowledge Him as our God, the Lord of heaven and earth, and the blessed God of our salvation. God is glorified by His people when they acknowledge Him, confess His name, trust in Him alone and completely. If we live for any other or trust in any other then we have made an idol. Then we are giving the glory that belongs to God to someone or something that does not deserve it. To be devoted to the glory of God is something very exclusive. To be devoted to the glory of God we must be prepared to forsake the world and all of its riches and glory. It is impossible to serve



God and mammon. We are devoted to the glory of God when we seek His kingdom and His truth and His righteousness supremely. Everything else becomes secondary to that.

We are devoted to the honor and glory of God when we delight in the worship of God in His house and among His people. We are devoted to the glory of God when we insist that the Lord's Day was ordained for the special purpose of worshipping God. We do not then make this a day to pursue our own pleasures and prosperity. We come to God's house to bring our vows before Him and to offer our sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. It is a very grievous thing therefore when the Christian considers it a burden to come to God's house or when he is satisfied with coming only once on the Lord's Day. Such an attitude is certainly not consistent with godliness. The true child of God is profoundly conscious of what worship is all about. It is chiefly praising God and giving Him thanks. In God's house the saints of God together lift up their hearts zealously to praise their creator and redeemer. One could easily quote passage after passage from the Psalms to show how this was the supreme desire and delight of the inspired writers. How many Christians lack this zeal for the glory of God, also in our own churches!

A man is devoted to the glory of God when he reveals a love for the truth of God. We discussed the matter of love for the truth of God in our last article. Here, of course, these two marks of godliness are one. God is glorified in His truth. His truth concerns His sovereignty, His righteousness and holiness, His goodness and mercy. False doctrine is one of the ways in which the devil seeks to change the glory of God into a lie. Those

who hold to such false doctrine deny God's glory. Those who are careless about doctrine and truth are careless about God's glory. The chief reason why the true child of God confesses, promotes, and defends the truth of God is his desire to magnify the name of God and to declare His praises. If the Christian is truly devoted to the glory of God, he is prepared to suffer shame and persecution, the dishonor of his own name, in order that the truth of God might be maintained and declared in all of its great glory. He is prepared even to give his own life that the truth of God might be exalted and maintained. This is real devotion to the honor and glory of God. Do we reveal such devotion in our lives?

We show our devotion to the honor and glory of God when we have a great zeal for the preaching of the gospel. God is glorified centrally through the gospel of grace and love in Christ Jesus. The gospel is the power of God whereby He saves His own. Above all, in the gospel is revealed the almighty power and greatness and sovereign mercy of our God. God's people therefore must give their lives for the preaching of the gospel unto the ends of the earth so that God's name might be exalted in all the nations of the earth. It was zeal for the gospel and the glory of the name of God that constrained many thousands of missionaries for all the ages of the present dispensation to go forth to suffer great hardship, to endure terrible persecution, and to make large sacrifices of ease and worldly pleasure for the cause of the gospel. Every Christian must have such zeal for the glory of God. He reveals this zeal when he testifies of the gospel with a heart burning with enthusiasm to his family and to his friends and neighbors. Because of devotion to the glory of God, the Christian

takes a genuine interest in the church's work of the preaching of the gospel. He has a profound sense of the fact that this work is the work of the whole church and her every member. He supports that work with prayers and gifts. He seeks also actively to be involved in some aspect of that work.

We show our devotion to the glory of God when we walk in good works. Our Lord said in that beautiful discourse recorded in John 15, in which he uses the allegory of the vine and the branches; "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." The fruit Jesus speaks of there is the fruit of good works. Again in the sermon on the Mount the Lord exhorts us: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven," Matthew 5:16. God has redeemed us to Himself as a people zealous of good works. Our Heidelberg Catechism defines good works as only those which are done out of true faith and performed in accordance with the law of God and for the glory of God. By that definition many things which men imagine are good works fall short and are not good works at all. The child of God does good works not as the Pharisees did — for their own boasting and glory. Many in the church today do good works out of that motive. The child of God does good works in order that God in heaven might be glorified. When the child of God does good works, then the glory of God's own work in him shines forth.

The true child of God is devoted to the honor and glory of God in all of his daily occupation. This is not something separate, for one particular department of his life. The child of God seeks to glorify God in the common daily course of life.



It matters not whether he or she be a farmer, or a laborer, or a doctor, or a lawyer, or a home maker, or a school teacher, or whatever the case may be. The calling of the child of God is to do all things to the glory of God. The godly wife and mother is devoted to the glory of God when she submits to her husband for the Lord's sake and serves

him in love, when she cares for her children and is a keeper of the house, as God commands her to be. The godly businessman is devoted to the glory of God when he refuses to go along with the corruption that is in the world. He steadfastly maintains the principles of righteousness even if this means great financial loss, because this is more important to him than making money.

The godly farmer is devoted to the glory of God when he plants and harvests his crops, acknowledging the God of providence and giving thanks always to Him. May this beautiful trait of godliness be manifest in all of us in whatever we do. Then we shall finally join the chorus in heaven to sing the glorious praises of God forever. □

## *Guided Into All Truth*

*Thomas C. Miersma*

# Steadfastly Holding To God's Word

We have been considering the underlying trend which lies behind the modern and liberal approach to Scripture. That approach is rooted in the principle that man's reason is the standard of authority by which all things, including also God's Word, are to be judged. The fruit of that philosophical principle has been, as we have seen, a separation between faith and reason. Reason belongs to the realm of human science and philosophical speculation. Faith in modern

thought is no more a certain or assured knowledge, founded upon the objective revelation of God, set down in His written Word, but has been transformed into a merely subjective inward religious experience. It is confidence without knowledge or confidence based upon mere feelings. Moreover, because faith is really the response of our experience, that experience, or the feelings out of which it arises, becomes the new revelation. It is a revelation which cannot be explained. Like climbing a mountaintop and beholding a vista, it cannot be put into words. One must climb the mountaintop himself and experience it. Scripture is thus reduced to a mere record of individual and corporate religious experiences, both of individual men, prophets and apostles, or of the church or the nation of Israel. It is man's attempt to put into words what cannot be put into words. It is an

inherently weak, imperfect attempt. Whether any of it is at all factually true or historically founded is totally beside the point in the modern liberal mind. Matters of fact and history belong to the realm of reason, science, and archaeology.

The result of this separation of faith and reason is far-reaching, as it has unfolded in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. On the side of reason it has been open season on the Bible. Men have spent their lives laboring in speculation, without any facts, about that which is factual in the gospels and in the Old Testament. They have spent their lives seeking to discern the various sources, traditions, and influences which they assume must underlie the Bible. They have taken Israel and reduced it to a scattered group of Semitic tribes, with different religious traditions, coming together into some form of national union. The Old Testament

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is regarded as the result of these differing religious traditions being blended together and being continually revised and edited. The proof for any of this is nonexistent. The prophets are reduced to spokesmen for various religious and political factions in Israel. The Old Testament church is treated as the world's greatest religious borrower and adapter of other nation's thoughts, myths, and sagas. Virtually every thought or historical record in Scripture is found to have some pagan Canaanite source, origin, or influence. The Scriptures have become the intellectual playground of virtually every philosophical system. Paul and Peter are set over against one another as leaders of two differing factions in the New Testament church. And the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ is reduced to a form of mass hysteria among Jesus' followers and the apostles, beginning with the women on Easter morning.

Having no standard of truth, everything in the life of the church, its doctrine, practical morality, and order and discipline becomes a matter of opinion. Truth in the Bible is no more a matter of "what saith the Lord" but "what do I feel?" It becomes a matter of whether a given text reveals itself to me, speaks to me so that it is God's word to me, or whether it does not. Truth becomes nothing more than tradition, the collective feeling of the church in history, (which is the basis of Rome) or the will of the majority, which is to be regarded as the dynamic leading of the Spirit in the church today. This is the position of the Pentecostal applied to the life of the church.

It is in the midst of the multitude of these opinions, theories, and their constantly shifting form and variety, that we stand as Reformed people. Against them we must do battle and against them we must stand steadfast, holding to God's Word. That Word of God is itself the only weapon we have with which to fight the battle. It is the foundation upon which we stand. It is our fundamental spiritual weapon and only defense against the assaults of those, who like Pilate ask, "What is truth?" and do so even in the presence of Him Who was the truth come in the flesh. Jesus Himself said of the Scriptures, "Thy word is truth," John 17:17. The Scriptures are their own defense. If men will not hear them, they will not hear or believe, though one rise from the dead.

In harmony with that Word of God, we must maintain the principle that faith is both knowledge and confidence. We must hold fast to the truth that faith is not merely a responsive feeling to experience, but that it is what our Heidelberg Catechism in the light of God's Word calls it in Lord's Day VII. Faith is a certain or assured knowledge ". . . whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in his word." Out of that conviction and certain knowledge arises confidence and trust, the assurance of faith that the promises of the gospel are for me as a child of God. That assured confidence the Holy Ghost Himself works in our hearts by the gospel. Separate faith from knowledge and there can remain no more confidence of faith. This is exactly the reason that the Christian church and many Reformed churches in particular are so weak in doctrinal understanding, are straying into ways of sin and sinful practice, and seem no more to know their right hand from their left.

Without the standard of the Scriptures, man has no standard but that which he finds in himself. That standard of Scripture must be maintained as truth in its entirety. Where the Bible is no more regarded as God's Word of truth and of binding authority in all its parts, faith has no foundation and no anchor. It is adrift in a sea of pseudo-theological opinion. Where opinion reigns, one man's is as trustworthy as another's, and my ideas about what the Bible is saying to me are as valid as yours. The result, of course, is that everyone does what is right in his own eyes. Then everything is controlled in the church either by those who have power and the ability to enforce their opinions, or by the opinion and will of the majority. That this is the situation in the world, among the non-Christian, or the unbelieving governments under which we live, is understandable. When it enters the government of the church which professes Christ and His Word it is intolerable. It was upon the basis of the certainty and truth of God's Word that the reformers would not bow before Rome and the opinions of men. To do so they would have been compelled to compromise the truth. The same issue confronts us as Reformed people today. This may well mean that we are compelled to stand alone as churches, as believers and Christians in the world, in our life and walk, and suffer also for righteousness' sake and for the truth's sake.

To hold steadfastly to God's Word, however, means also not only that we do not compromise the truth, but that we hold it anti-thetically. In the light of the truth we must expose the lie. Where unbelief is found we do not gloss it over, treat it as merely a difference of opinion, but we call it for what it is: unbelief. Do so today and you will be accused of



being narrow-minded, old-fashioned, or unloving. Today such terms are compliments. Broad, after all, is the way that leads to destruction. And it was the devil who was the first modernist when in the Garden of Eden he said, "Yea, hath God said?" And as for unloving, if you truly love someone, will you allow him to walk in unbelief to his own destruction? If the world hated Christ as He exposed the lie, they will also hate you.

Holding steadfastly to God's Word, however, means that we do so not as a mere intellectual exercise. The certain knowledge of faith holds God's Word for truth for *me*: for my life, my walk, my activity. Scripture is the only rule, not only of faith, says our Belgic Confession of Faith, but also of life. Steadfastly holding to God's Word means that we are both hearers and doers, that we strive to walk not after our own will and our own

imagination, but in obedience and submission, also as we apply that Word to our life and walk. You cannot hold God's Word as truth in your head and live according to the lie, for faith without works is dead. It is exactly therein that the relative, "What is truth?", "You have your opinion, I have mine" philosophy so easily enters the church. It is a philosophy which is rooted in the flesh which we are daily called to put off in conversion of life. □

## All Around Us

Gise J. Van Baren

# C.R.C. Synod of 1988

The Synods of many of the Reformed churches have been concluded. Of interest to us especially are the decisions of the Synod of our "mother" church, the Christian Reformed Church. That Synod met from June 14 to June 23 at Calvin College. Several important issues were treated there: the question whether children might partake of the Lord's Supper; decisions concerning joining with the National Association of Evangelicals

and also with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC); treatment of a protest against a church which has women elders (in direct violation of earlier decisions of Synod); and, of course, protests concerning the action of the Board of Trustees of Calvin College in regard to the Van Till book: *The Fourth Day*.

The Synod did not adopt the position of opening the communion table to all baptized children as some advocate. It did indicate, however, that children could partake by way of making a kind of profession of faith which would not admit them to full adult responsibilities in the church. One member of the committee stated, according to the *Banner*, June 27, 1988:

*After four years of study, commented Rev. Carl Zylstra of Classis Orange City, a member of the study committee, all of the committee members have come to see that baptism brings one into a covenant community and that profession of faith is*

*not becoming a full member (an unfortunate phrase) of the institutional church but rather is being accepted into full communion with God's people. "That," he said, "we must underscore."*

Here follows a summary of the decision as presented in the *Banner*:

1. The church is warranted in admitting to the Lord's Supper covenant children who give evidence of faith and who are able to discern the body and remember and proclaim the death of Jesus in celebrating the Lord's Supper.
2. The church is to assure itself of such faith through a public profession of faith on the part of covenant children.
3. Covenant children should be encouraged to make public profession of faith as soon as they exhibit faith and are able to discern the body and remember and proclaim the death of Jesus in celebrating the Lord's Supper.
4. The profession of faith of covenant children, required for admission to the Lord's Supper, is not necessarily an acceptance of adult responsibilities within a congregation; therefore,
  - a. the church continue to instruct these children in the Word and in the Reformed confessions;

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b. adult responsibilities of membership are to be granted by the church council and assumed by professing individuals at age eighteen or as granted by the articles of incorporation of the congregation.

The Synod decided to join the National Association of Evangelicals, an association of fundamentalists. At the same time, the Synod rejected the recommendation to join the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. This latter body consists of Presbyterian and Reformed bodies, many of which are very liberal in outlook.

Classis Minnesota South had an appeal at Synod against the practice of Eastern Ave. C.R.C. of having unordained women serving as "adjunct elders". The problem, of course, was not that they were "unordained", but that they were "adjunct elders". The *Banner* reported some of the comments made:

*"Recognize that the real issue is not women in office," (said) Rev. James De Vries of Classis Thornapple Valley, chairman of the advisory committee on this appeal. "Recognize that this is an issue of church order and our compliance with it. Honor that process, or the church order becomes a dead practice."*

*Rev. Peter Brouwer of Classis Minnesota South . . . said that his classis was concerned only that the church order and the decisions of synod be followed. "We deplore the congregationalism that is found among us," he said . . .*

*A number of delegates who opposed the appeal argued that Classis Grand Rapids East is in the process of responsibly dealing with the matter . . .*

*"Why stop Classis Grand Rapids East from doing its work?" asked Rev. Simon Wolfert of Classis Toronto.*

*"How can synod go over the head of classis and directly address a congregation?" wondered Rev. Tim Limburg of Classis Hackensack, whose own Washington, D.C., congregation allows women to serve as elders.*

Synod sustained the appeal of Classis Minnesota South. It deplored "congregationalism" in the churches but emphasized in one of its grounds that congregationalism seen in the denomination is

not limited to this one instance. It pointed to the "withholding of denominational quota payments" as an example of "congregational individualism" which the churches ought to avoid.

What will be the outcome?

Rev. Leonard Vander Zee, minister at Eastern Ave. C.R.C. responded in an interview.

*What will be Eastern Avenue's next move? "That's up to our council and Classis Grand Rapids East," said Vander Zee in an interview after the decision. "I only regret that Eastern has been unfairly branded as congregational when we've followed the church order and classical procedures."*

That is a remarkable statement by Vander Zee. A few years ago the Synod decided that Eastern Ave. C.R.C. could not have women as "assistant" elders. Eastern Ave. "submitted" to that decision. They no longer had women serving as *assistant* elders. The same women, functioning in the same manner, now became *adjunct* elders. One could suppose that again Eastern Ave. can abide by Synod's decision and submit to the church order by changing the name once more of these women "elders". Perhaps these could be called *auxiliary* elders, or *affiliate* elders, or even *associate* elders, or possibly *subordinate* elders. On second thought, that last suggestion would not be appropriate since it would imply a lesser position for these women.

In all seriousness, however, one recognizes the real trend toward congregationalism when a congregation can do what is right in its own eyes, while ignoring or mocking synodical decisions.

The question arousing greatest interest was, perhaps, the report of the Board of Trustees which in effect vindicated three Calvin College professors who teach a

"theistic evolution". There were many protests against this finding of the Board of Trustees. Mr. Leo Peters created a stir in the Grand Rapids area when he purchased full page advertisements a number of times in the *Grand Rapids Press* to refute the conclusions of the Board. Dr. Lester DeKoster, former Calvin professor and former editor of the *Banner*, together with Mr. Leo Peters, dramatically placed their own protest on the table at Synod after its sessions began. Synod, after a six-hour debate, "turned down a proposal that Calvin physics professor Howard Van Till and geology professors Clarence Menninga and Davis Young be prohibited from teaching in a way that might lead to questions about 'the event character of the history in the early chapters of Genesis.'"

What did Synod do?

*Synod . . . decided to appoint a study committee . . . made up of scientists, philosophers, and theologians to address the relationship between special and general revelation. The study, which is due in 1991, will focus particularly on the relationship between the creation story in Genesis and evolutionary theory.*

It is strange indeed that after all that has been taught for hundreds of years in the Reformed churches, and in the C.R.C., and considering what our confessions have to say (not even to mention Scripture itself), that a study must once more be made on the relationship between special and general revelation. Have past teachings been so indefinite and unclear that further study need be made? And, in a Reformed denomination, is study still required to find out the relationship between the "creation story in Genesis and evolutionary theory"? One can only conclude that (1) a three-year delay was chosen to allow this whole question to simmer down; and (2) perhaps a study will only make



official what has been taught by Van Till and others for many years already.

The Synod also appointed Dr. Henry De Moor as associate professor of church polity in the seminary. This proposed appointment had aroused objections by

some, since De Moor has publicly stated that he favors the ordination of women to all church offices. Those objecting stated "that because De Moor disagrees with the Christian Reformed Church's stand on women in church office, he cannot teach church order

with integrity." The Synod, however, was not moved by these arguments.

Many other decisions were taken. The above will, however, likely generate continuing debate within those churches for some time to come. □

# The Two Natures of Christ: The Union of the Human and Divine Natures

## *Taking Heed To The Doctrine*

Ronald H. Hanko

### 3. The analogy of body and soul.

Various analogies have been used to help explain the union of Christ's two natures and to show that faith in this union is not unreasonable. Regarding the use of these analogies to show the plausibility of belief in Christ's two natures, we should remember that this is a matter of faith and not of demonstration. It is part of the great "mystery of godliness" (I Tim. 3:16), and is something, therefore, that the natural man cannot receive by any amount of proof. It must be spiritually discerned. They can be used, however, with greater or lesser success, to help us understand this mystery in so far as we are able.

One analogy which has been used to teach that Christ *assumed* our human nature is the analogy of a man putting on a coat. This analogy is weak in many ways, especially in that it leaves the impression that the union of Christ's two natures is not permanent, that is, that Christ can shed His human nature at will as a man sheds his coat. We believe, of course, that the union of the two natures of Christ is permanent. To all eternity, from the time of His incarnation, He is God and man in one Person. Nor is a coat ever part of a man, but Christ's two natures are so inseparably joined in Him that without one or the other He is not even the Christ. Yet in so far as this analogy reminds us that Christ did not just dwell in a man and that He was not turned from God into a man, but that He took on or "assumed" our humanity, it is acceptable.

More valuable and more common is the analogy of the rela-

tionship of soul and body in a man. The union of soul and body is, in other words, similar in some respects to the union of divinity and humanity in Christ. If the statement of the Belgic Confession concerning the Athanasian Creed is true, that "we do willingly receive the three creeds, namely, that of the Apostles, of Nice, and of Athanasius" (Art. IX), then the use of this analogy is indeed legitimate and valuable, for the Athanasian Creed makes use of it when it says: "For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ" (37).

This analogy is by no means perfect. No analogy is. But as Hodge says, "There is in this case enough of a resemblance to sustain faith and rebuke unbelief. There is nothing in the one more mysterious or inscrutable than in the other" (III, iii, 1). Along the same lines, Calvin says, in making use of this analogy, "If in

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human affairs, anything analogous to this great mystery can be found, the most apposite similitude seems to be that of man" (*Institutes*, II, xiv, 1).

The points of similarity are as follows. In the first place, like man who is made up of two different "substances," soul (or spirit) and body, the one material and the other immaterial, so Christ has two natures, the one finite and creaturely, the other infinite and all-glorious. The analogy is imperfect already at this point in that soul and body are really only *parts* of man, while the two natures of Christ are whole and complete in themselves. The analogy does point out, however, that it is no more unthinkable to believe in the two natures of Christ, than in man himself.

The second point of analogy is that the union of soul and body in man is personal. Together they constitute one individual man, or human person (cf. Hodge, III, iii, 1). In both the activities of soul and body there is but one man acting, willing, and thinking. Christ also is but one Person acting in and through two different natures. One is no more justified in concluding that because Christ has two natures, He is actually two different individuals, than one would be justified in ascribing to man two separate existences because he is soul and body.

In the third place, in man both soul and body, though joined, remain distinct. The union is not like that of copper and zinc, which when combined produce a third substance, brass. Body and soul do not lose their character by virtue of being joined in man. No more are the two natures of Christ united in such a way that He is neither really human and divine anymore but some kind of hybrid between the two.

At the same time, the union of the two natures of Christ is not by mere indwelling, so that the union is only accidental and temporary. This is true also of body and soul. The union between them is not such that the soul merely dwells in or is caged in the body, as a man dwells in a house. As with body and soul, so with Christ: there is a real union between the two natures, so that they work together in perfect harmony in our salvation.

Finally, the result of the union of body and soul in man is that the attributes of both soul and body are ascribed to the one person. We may say of the *man* what is true of his body or what is true of his soul. Describing especially the body of a man we may say that he, the man, is tall or short, handsome or not, or even that he is healthy or sick. Likewise, speaking of his soul especially, we may say that he, the man, is wise or foolish, kind or cruel, calm or high-strung. The distinction between soul and body is such that what is true of one is not necessarily true of the other. For example, when a man suffers physical injury, this may have an effect on the soul, but it is his body, not his soul, that is injured. Yet we say, and truly, that the man himself has been hurt. This distinction can even mean that what appear to be inconsistent or contradictory statements may be made about a man, as for example, that he is dust and that he is spirit.

All this reminds us that what is true of each of Christ's natures is true of Christ Himself. The two natures are forever distinct, but what is true of each of them is true of Christ. As one Person, He is God and He is man, finite and infinite, omniscient and limited in knowledge, omnipotent and weak, eternal and time-bound. The Athanasian Creed expresses

this very thing when it says that He is:

*God of the substance of the Father, begotten before all worlds; man of the substance of His mother, born in the world . . . . Equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His manhood. Who, although He is God and man, yet He is not two but one Christ (31, 33, 34).*

This is the mystery of the incarnation, the mystery that is Christ.

We see, then, that though the analogy does help us to understand Who and what Christ is, in the end, because it is itself a mystery, it serves also to deepen our reverence and awe for Him Who is like us in all things, and yet is the God of our salvation Whom we worship and adore.

#### 4. The definition of Chalcedon.

We have already mentioned the Creed of Chalcedon and the fact that it was written to define the relationship between the two natures of Christ over against various heresies that arose in the early church.

After the doctrine of Christ's divinity had been established as the doctrine of the church in the Nicene Creed, the question of how Christ could be God and man together began to trouble the church, and various answers were given. Many of these answers were wrong and were rejected by the Council and Creed of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. These errors were especially those of Appollinaris, Nestorius, Eutychus, and the Monophysites.

In the Creed of Chalcedon and over against these errors there are four words used to define the union of Christ's two natures as exactly as possible, they are the words "inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, and inseparably." These words stand still today as a bulwark against error and as the fullest possible statement that can be made concerning this great mystery.

We intend to look at each of these words separately and see



what they say and why they are used, but first there are several things that we should note about all of them together.

First, though these words are not from Scripture, they nevertheless do express the teaching of Scripture and express it so exactly and completely that the church has really not been able to add anything to this statement since the time it was written. Also, these words as such are not part of our own confessions. We receive officially the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds by way of the statement from Article IX of the Belgic Confession quoted above, but not this creed. I, personally, consider this a lack, but the

reason is to be found in the controversial statement of the creed that Mary is "the Mother of God." Nevertheless, though we do not officially receive the creed, its definition of the union of Christ's two natures is comprehended in our other creeds, particularly in Article XIX of the Belgic Confession. There only one of the four words used by Chalcedon is to be found, but the essential teaching of the other three is there, as we shall see.

Finally, it should be noted that all four terms used by the Council of Chalcedon are negative. They say what the union is not, but do not even attempt to define what it is. This is, of course, to

be explained first of all from the fact that the council was dealing with various heresies, but it must also be due to the fact that this is a mystery. Those who wrote this creed knew, as we do, what they believed, and what they did not believe, but to explain such a mystery as this was not only beyond their power, but beyond ours also. This does not make the definition of the Council of Chalcedon any less valuable, for as a guard against error it is irreplaceable. It only reminds us of the important thing: that this is a matter of faith and salvation, not of logical analysis and intellectual comprehension. □

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## News From Our Churches

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*Ben Wigger*

September 15, 1988

First for some "late" news. Since Rev. B. Gritters declined the call to become our churches' second missionary to Jamaica, First P.R.C. in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the calling church,

found it necessary to form a new trio to fill this need. From the trio of Pastors W. Bekkering, C. Haak, and K. Koole, a call was extended to Pastor W. Bekkering.

Rev. S. Houck has declined the call he received from the Hope P.R.C. in Isabel, South Dakota.

Rev. D. Engelsma has accepted the call to serve as a professor in our churches' seminary.

We also want to extend our congratulations, even if a little late, to Rev. and Mrs. Dykstra and family in the birth of a daughter, Emily Jo, born on June 30.

At a meeting on June 30, the Reformed Witness Committee voted to stop holding worship services in Sioux Falls, Iowa starting on July 10. Evidently the

work there produced little positive fruit. Yet we are assured that God's Word never returns void; He always accomplishes His sovereign good pleasure.

Way back in June, plans were finalized on a new garage for the parsonage of the Redlands P.R.C. in Redlands, California. The old structure was torn down and by now Rev. Koole should be enjoying that new garage.

Also back in late June the congregation of the First P.R.C. in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada was to decide on a proposal from their Building Committee to buy the St. Barnabas Anglican Church building and parsonage. The congregation was given an opportunity to view the property at an open house. We can happily

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report to you that this proposal was unanimously adopted. And we can also relay to you that Edmonton's offer was accepted, but only for the land and buildings and not for the furnishings. The Building Committee is now in the process of putting their current parsonage up for sale and negotiating with an Anglican Church committee concerning the pews and other furnishings in an attempt to reach an agreement on their cost.

Plans are also going forward with the congregation of the Lynden P.R.C. in Lynden, Washington, on their new church building. At a congregational meeting in July, a concept of the building plan they wanted was adopted, along with a plan to finance the entire project.

The Evangelism Committee of the Trinity P.R.C. in Houston, Texas is sponsoring a prayer breakfast for the men of the congregation. The committee was planning to have these every other month.

Sunday, August 7 was the date for the annual Pre-Convention

Singspiration, held this year in air-conditioned comfort at the First Jenison Chr. Ref. Church in Jenison, Michigan. The church was full to overflowing, which always makes for an hour of fine singing. In addition to the fine singing under the direction of Mr. Jerry Kuiper, those there that night were treated to a couple of numbers from the Hope Heralds and a trumpet solo from Miss Sarah Ondersma.

The 1988 P.R. Young People's Convention was held August 8-11 on the campus of Hope College in Holland, Michigan. This year's convention was sponsored by the young people of the Southwest P.R.C. in Grandville, Michigan. Looking at the schedule of events it makes me almost wish that I were younger once again. One notable change was this year's banquet. It was listed as a formal event. That must have been a rather elegant-looking affair. For more coverage of this year's convention please refer to the October issue of the "Beacon Lights."

The consistory of the Grandville P.R.C. in Grandville, Michigan appointed an activities committee to arrange for various social functions in their congregation. Their first project was scheduled in late August for a soft-ball game and a steak fry.

Twenty-four families and nine individuals from the South Holland congregation in South Holland, Illinois will petition Classis West in September to start a daughter congregation.

The Prot. Ref. School Federation held their 1988 mini-course on August 18 at First Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. This year's topic was, "The Special Student in the Regular Classroom." Dr. Myra Kraker, of Calvin College Education Department, was the main speaker.

The consistory of the Immanuel P.R.C. in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada has been informed that another small church building in Lacombe is soon coming up for sale. There is not yet much information on this building, but you will be kept up-to-date as it becomes available. □

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