

# *THE* **STANDARD BEARER**

**A Reformed  
Semi-Monthly  
Magazine**

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## **SPECIAL REFORMATION ISSUE**

To make the way smoother for the unlearned —  
for only them do I serve — I shall set down the  
following two propositions concerning the freedom  
and the bondage of the spirit:

A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject  
to none.

A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all,  
subject to all.

— Martin Luther,  
*The Freedom of a Christian* (1520)

## ***The Reformation and Freedom***

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Vol. 69, No. 2  
October 15, 1992

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## Editorially Speaking...

This special issue in commemoration of the Reformation is different from those that preceded. The past two years we concentrated on the conflict of the Reformation with its two main enemies, Rome and Anabaptism (see the Oct. 15, 1990 and Oct. 15, 1991 issues of the *Standard Bearer*). In this issue, we examine the priceless benefit of liberty that has come to the Reformed church from the Reformation.

As the articles will show, the freedom of the church and of the Christian, achieved by the 16th century Reformation, is wide-ranging. It extends from the justified soul of the believer to the government of the congregation by the eldership, and from the enjoyment of the delights of marriage to the hope of everlasting bliss.

Our thanks to the writers who accepted their assignments and produced on time. A special thanks to Rev. Audred Spriensma, who agreed, almost at the deadline, to help out with the article on freedom with regard to the future state.

The Reformed church and Christian today are called to stand fast in their liberty over against an enslaving false gospel of self-salvation on the one hand and an enslaving lawlessness on the other hand.

Our desire is that these articles help the church and the saint to find their way in the light of the liberating Word of God.

— DJE

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## EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

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## EDITORIAL OFFICE

The Standard Bearer  
4949 Ivanhoe Ave.  
Grandville, MI 49418  
BUSINESS OFFICE  
The Standard Bearer  
Don Doezema  
P.O. Box 603  
Grandville, MI  
49468-0603  
PH: (616) 538-1778  
(616) 531-1490  
FAX: (616) 531-3033

## CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger  
6597 40th Ave.  
Hudsonville, MI 49426  
NEW ZEALAND OFFICE  
The Standard Bearer  
c/o Protestant Reformed  
Church  
B. VanHerik  
66 Fraser St.  
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

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# Standing Fast in our Liberty

*Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.*

Galatians 5:1

What slave, liberated from a most cruel bondage by the payment of a great price, would ever consider returning to his slavery? What slave, having tasted freedom, would ever consent to being enslaved once more? Such things are unheard of, unthinkable!

Nevertheless, the apostle Paul saw the necessity of admonishing former slaves to stand fast in their liberty and be not entangled again with their former yoke of bondage. This yoke of bondage was not an earthly yoke but a spiritual one. Paul was addressing those who had at one time been slaves to sin. At a great price Jesus Christ had set them free. Yet they were inclined to return to their former yoke of bondage. Paul therefore exhorted them to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free, and not to be entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

Again and again in the history of the church this same exhortation has had to be sounded. For it seems that the saints of God are forever and again entangling themselves with the yoke of bondage from which Christ has made them free.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Rev. Slopsema is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.*

The yoke of bondage!

To understand what this horrible yoke of bondage is all about, we contrast it to the liberty of which the apostle speaks.

Liberty (freedom) is the ability to live within the confines of God's law.

Many will challenge this definition of freedom. Many consider freedom to be the ability to live without law, to have no restraints or restrictions, to do as they please. To live under law is bondage.

But consider.

In the natural world God has a law for every creature. He has a law for the fish, which is to swim in the water. He has a law for the bird — to fly in the air. For the animal, God's law is to roam the fields. For every creature God has such a law. Now, so long as the creatures of God stay within the confines of God's laws for them, they live. They are free. But just as soon as they violate God's law, they lose their freedom and die.

In the natural world freedom is the ability to live within the confines of God's law.

So is it in the spiritual realm.

In distinction from the animals, mankind has a spiritual side to him that places him in personal contact with God. He discerns God's revelation so that he knows of God and always acts in relationship to God.

To govern this aspect of man's life God has set over mankind the ten commandments, which express God's will for man's life.

When man keeps these spiritual laws, he lives. This is a wonderful life of friendship and fellowship with God, a life in which God provides for

all of man's needs and fills him with joy.

This is man's freedom.

However, should man fail to keep the laws of God, the curse of God comes upon him and he dies. This curse the Bible calls the curse of the law. This transgressing of God's law and its subsequent curse of death are not freedom but bondage.

By nature we are not free but under a terrible yoke of bondage.

A yoke was a beam placed on the shoulders of animals, against which they pushed and struggled as they did the work required of them by their owner, whether plowing or turning the millstone or whatever. Since the yoke was associated with hard, harsh work, it was used to describe the hard work of a slave. The slave was considered to be under the yoke. Sometimes that was true literally, other times only figuratively. The expression "yoke of bondage," therefore, depicts a slave under a heavy, oppressive yoke that ultimately destroys him.

By nature we are all under such a spiritual yoke of bondage. On account of the fall we are all born dead in sin. We are corrupt and depraved, defiled with the original sin of Adam. We have lost all ability to serve God and to keep His commandments. We are prone to every evil and crooked way. In short, we are slaves to sin.

This is a horrible bondage in that it denies us the blessings of God's friendship and brings upon us the curse of God.

We are naturally under the yoke of bondage.

This bondage to sin has shown itself in different ways.



Among the pagan Gentiles, who had only the revelation of God in nature, it has shown itself in crude forms of idolatry. In their bondage to sin they repudiated the God they saw in nature, making idols of stone and wood. Essential to this idol worship was immorality, drunkenness, and abominations of every kind. All of this brought upon them the horrible curse of God.

Among the carnal element of Israel this same spiritual slavery showed itself in works-righteousness. To Israel God had given the Mosaic law. This law was wonderfully designed to regulate God's covenant with Israel. It did that by showing Israel her sin, pointing her to God's Savior (the Lamb of God), and then setting before her the way of loving gratitude and service. However, carnal Israel, being under the bondage of sin, repudiated the law in its true intent. They twisted the law into becoming a means whereby they might work their own salvation. To God's law they also added their own rules and regulations (the traditions of the elders), which in many instances contradicted the law of God by allowing them to rob widows, afflict the poor, etc. All this resulted in a horrible curse upon them, a curse that eventually destroyed Israel as a nation.

\* \* \* \* \*

A glorious liberation!

Christ has made us free from the yoke of bondage!

He has done this, first, by redeeming us from the curse of the law.

A slave was redeemed when the price necessary to set him free was paid.

In like manner Jesus Christ has redeemed us. In order that we might be freed from the horrible yoke of sin's bondage, the price of sin must be paid. This price Jesus has paid for us. The price was extremely high. It cost Him His life. For, to pay for our sins required that Jesus stand before God with the burden of our sin and endure the horrible curse of God in our place. This Jesus did at the cross.

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: as it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree (Gal. 3:13).

This redemption secures our right to eternal freedom.

Our actual freedom or release from the power of sin comes through the saving call of the gospel, as the apostle himself establishes in verse 13 of this same chapter, where he writes, "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty ...."

Jesus Christ calls all who hear the preaching of the gospel to repentance and faith in Him. Generally this call falls upon deaf ears. But when it comes to the ear of the elect, it is accompanied by the inner working of the Holy Spirit, who makes this call effective by the irresistible power of grace. The result is true repentance and faith unto salvation in Jesus Christ.

It is through this saving call that the elect of God are actually made free. For being called to faith they cling to the redemption of the cross, finding in Jesus Christ the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God. By faith they are also transformed to live a new life in Jesus Christ, a life of obedience to the laws of God. In that new obedience they find the sweet joy of God's friendship and fellowship. They also find the security of a heavenly Father's care. In Jesus Christ they are free, wonderfully and gloriously free, free to serve God, free to enjoy Him forever!

\* \* \* \* \*

Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free.

And be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

The necessity of these admonitions arises out of the fact that the works of God's grace and salvation in us are only begun in this life. Although we have been made wonderfully free through a great transformation in our life, we still possess a sinful nature that is inclined to turn back to the former way of sin and slavery. Due to the influence of our sinful nature we do, in fact, turn back again and again to the bondage of sin.

This was happening in the Galatian churches.

Many of the Gentile members had not completely left the wanton, immoral living of the pagan community from which Christ had called them. They were much inclined to turn back to their former yoke of bondage and become ensnared in it.

Others, both Jew and Gentile, were influenced by the Judaizing teachers to embrace the error of works-righteousness. This too was a turning back to the former yoke from which they had been liberated. It certainly was for the Jewish element in the church that had lived under the yoke of the self-righteous Pharisees. But that was also true for the Gentiles, who in their paganism were brought under a horrible yoke of trying to earn the favor of their gods through works.

We see the same tendencies in the church down through history.

Again and again there has arisen in the church an antinomian spirit in which a certain element think they are "free" in Christ to transgress the law of God and indulge themselves in the pleasures of sin. Instead they simply entangle themselves in a miserable yoke of bondage.

The normal reaction to antinomianism in the church is legalism. Legalism is the imposing of man-made rules on the church, rules that require or forbid more than God does in His laws. The legalist thinks that by his strict rules he will purge the church of worldliness. Instead he entangles the church in the yoke of bondage. For eventually obedience to these man-made rules becomes the church's righteousness before God.

Be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage!

Stand fast, rather, in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free! In the power of Jesus Christ conform your life, your thoughts, your words, your actions, to the holy law of God. From this course do not waver, either, to indulge in the pleasures of sin or to bow to the rules of mere men. Persevere in the ways of God and live! □



# The Reformation and Freedom

The goal of the 16th century Reformation was the freedom of the church. This stood in the nature of the case. The Reformation was the work of the Spirit of Christ to restore the gospel to the church and, thus, to form the church anew by the gospel. And the gospel sets men and women free.

Jesus Christ sets men and women free. He is the true "Liberator." He said about Himself, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). Christ makes men and women free by the preaching of the gospel (Luke 4:16ff.). This liberation through the gospel of the forgiveness of sins takes place and is enjoyed in the power of the Spirit of Christ: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (II Cor. 3:17).

The reformers understood full well that the purpose of their great work was liberty. Martin Luther announced that his goal was the freedom of the church in the three, great treatises of 1520 with which the Reformation was irrevocably unleashed: "An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate"; "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church"; and "The Freedom of a Christian." These powerful works may be regarded as a threefold emancipation proclamation for the enslaved church.

In the "Open Letter," Luther pleaded for the liberation of the church in Germany from the slavery in which she found herself on account of three Roman Catholic doctrines (Luther called them "three walls" behind which Rome's tyranny was unassailable): papal power over the

civil authorities; the exclusive right of the pope to interpret Scripture; and the sole authority of the pope to call a council of the church.

"The Babylonian Captivity of the Church" was Luther's assault on Roman Catholic sacramental teaching, especially the Roman doctrine of the Lord's Supper. By this, wrote Luther, "the church has been robbed of all her liberty." What that slavery was from which the Reformation freed the church, Luther made plain when he went on to say about the "papal tyranny," that is, the Roman Catholic Church, that "it has extinguished faith, obscured the sacraments and oppressed the gospel; but its own laws, which are not only impious and sacrilegious, but even barbarous and foolish, it has decreed and multiplied without end."

"The Freedom of a Christian," an open letter to Pope Leo X, described the life of the Christian as a life of freedom. This book, said Luther, "contains the whole of the Christian life in a brief form." Freed by grace from "all sins, laws, and commands" in the matter of justification, the Christian is united with Christ and, in Christ, is "a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none."

John Calvin agreed with Luther that the Reformation aimed at liberty. In his "Reply by Calvin to Cardinal Sadolet's Letter" and his "The Necessity of Reforming the Church," Calvin defended the Reformation as the liberation of the church from the spiritual tyranny of the false gospel of Rome.

The title of the sixth chapter of the original, 1536 edition of the *Institutes*, in which Calvin treated both

the doctrine of the church and the doctrine of the state, is "Christian Freedom." Calvin opened up this vital chapter with these words:

We must now discuss Christian freedom. No summary of gospel teaching ought to omit an explanation of this topic. It is a matter of prime necessity, and without a knowledge of it consciences dare undertake almost nothing without faltering ....

The Reformation gave Christ's church her liberty. It gave her the truth, and the truth made her free.

As a denomination of churches that still enjoy the freedom of the gospel of grace, the Protestant Reformed Churches celebrate the Reformation as their liberation in post-apostolic history from the worst of all slaveries. The members of these Churches might well make something of this celebration by reading some of the documents of the liberation, e.g., Luther's "The Freedom of a Christian" and Calvin's "The Necessity of Reforming the Church."

Celebration does not mean complacency. A vigilant defense of their liberty in Christ is necessary for the PRC at the end of the 20th century. Much of Protestantism has already lost its liberty and perishes in a bondage that is every bit as bad as that in which the church groaned at the time of the Reformation. Powerful pressures and subtle temptations assail and allure the true church with the purpose that she surrender her freedom. These pressures and temptations come not only from the "liberal" left but also from the "conservative" right.

The church as well as the indi-



vidual believer is called to "stand fast ... in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1).

The PRC must insist that the freedom of the church and her members is spiritual. In "The Freedom of a Christian," Luther wrote, "This is that Christian liberty, our faith ...." Writing in the final, 1559 edition of his *Institutes*, Calvin declared: "We must carefully note that Christian freedom is, in all its parts, a spiritual thing. Its whole force consists in quieting frightened consciences before God ..." (3.19.9). Freedom is the state and experience of standing before God as righteous on the basis only of the obedience of Another, Jesus Christ. The liberated life is the life that finds its source in this gracious justification. It is the life of deliverance from guilt, from shame, and from the demand to do anything or be anything upon which acceptance with God depends. It is the life that is empowered to serve God willingly and cheerfully in thankful love.

The freedom of Christ, which the Protestant and Reformed church has inherited from the Reformation, is not earthly and political. It is not deliverance of the materially poor, of the physically oppressed, or of females in the church, as the "liberal" left supposes. Indeed, it is not the unshackling of actual slaves. But neither is it the transformation of the lawless United States into a nation governed in its economic policy and judicial system by the laws of God, or the rule of Northern Ireland from London or Stormont rather than from Dublin, as the "conservative" right would have us believe.

The spiritual liberty of Christ's church is realized by the preaching of the gospel. This, too, the PRC must contend for, if they are to continue in the liberty with which Christ made them free in the Reformation. Freedom depends upon the gospel. It depends only upon the gospel. Luther asserted this clearly in his "The Freedom of a Christian": "One thing, and only one thing, is necessary for Chris-

tian ... freedom. That one thing is the most holy Word of God, the gospel of Christ ...."

Contrary to the notion of the "liberals," Christ does not effect the freedom of His people by synodical pronouncements on the full equality of women in the church or by legislation in Congress that gives political and social rights to homosexuals. But the "conservatives" are similarly in error when they seek Christian freedom, whether in personal life, in the church, or in society, by means of law. It makes no difference whether this "law" is the "touch not, taste not, handle not" of the legalist or the rigorous enforcement of the moral law of the ten commandments by the reconstructionist. The law does not give freedom. The law *cannot* give freedom. It can neither justify nor sanctify. Only the gospel gives, maintains, and enlarges liberty. If the law could have freed us, the Son of God would not have had to become flesh (Rom. 8:3).

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*The truth of grace  
is fundamental  
for the liberating power  
of the gospel.*

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This gospel, which is the only truly liberating power in the world, is the message of salvation from sin by grace alone. The truth of grace is fundamental for the liberating power of the gospel. The announcement of righteousness and salvation out of pure grace for the sake of Christ's redeeming death, grounded in unconditional election, bestowed by the sovereign work of the Spirit, and received by faith (which itself is no work of man but the gift of God), liberates helpless and otherwise hopeless sinners. To corrupt this message of grace in the slightest, so that salvation depends somewhat upon the sinner's own work, will, or worth, is to forfeit liberty.

The need of the hour in Protestant Christianity, not to say *Reformed*

Christianity, is the defense of the gospel as the good news of grace — free, sovereign, particular, unconditional grace. Liberty is at stake. The liberty that comes down from the 16th century Reformation is at stake. The liberty of the gospel is at stake. Where the lie of conditional salvation is preached and believed, there is bondage (Gal. 5:1-4).

Such radical freedom will be abused by unspiritual people in the church. They will seize upon it as a license to sin freely. Luther anticipated this response to the proclamation of liberty that he was making in "The Freedom of a Christian": "If faith ... is alone sufficient unto righteousness, why then are good works commanded? We will take our ease and do no works and be content with faith."

Calvin also warned of this reaction to the Reformation's gospel of liberty:

For, as soon as Christian freedom is mentioned, either passions boil or wild tumults rise, unless these wanton spirits (who otherwise most wickedly corrupt the best things) are opposed in time. Partly, on the pretext of this freedom, men shake off all obedience toward God and break into unbridled license ... (1536 *Institutes*, 6.A.1).

This misuse of the freedom of the gospel results once more in bondage. For the licentious church and individual are the slaves of sin. Sin rules, rather than the Holy Spirit of Christ.

The threat to gospel freedom from the side of lawlessness is as great in the Protestant churches of our day as is the threat from the false gospel of salvation by man's will and works. Antinomism, revolution, and unholy disorder disgrace the churches, all in the name of genuine liberty. The evil is as prevalent among "conservatives" as among "liberals." Both glorify rebellion against unjust civil government, making heroes of revolutionaries against the state. Both show contempt for the ecclesiastical authority that displeases them. Both



approve the gross violation of the seventh commandment by unbiblical divorces and by remarriages.

The PRC are called by the Lord Jesus to defend true freedom by teaching the law of God, the ten commandments, as the inviolable rule of life for believers and their children. As Luther strikingly put it in his "The

Freedom of a Christian," the teaching that "a Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none" must be accompanied by the teaching that "a Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." This teaching must be accompanied by firm discipline upon impenitent transgressors.

Although the law cannot give

freedom, there can be no freedom without the law.

Through the Reformation, Christ has given us liberty, infinitely precious liberty.

Thank the Lord who liberated us.

Value the liberty.

And defend it. □

— DJE

*Rev. Marvin Kamps*

## Freedom in Submission

The Christian man understands well that true freedom is freedom from one's own depraved reasoning. One is free when he is governed by Christ Jesus through the Word of God. God in Christ makes a man free from the prejudices found in the hearts of depraved men and from the deceptions of his own heart. Freedom is itself the gift of God's grace in Christ.

The freedom we are considering is therefore religious freedom. Free to obey God alone. We have but one Master. This is not contradictory. For we do not imagine a freedom for the creature, man, that is absolute. Absolute freedom is God's and His alone. The absolute freedom of God is His as the alone holy, righteous, sovereign over all. But man, who is the Creator's dependent subordinate, is graciously granted a creaturely freedom in Christ Jesus. This freedom in Christ Jesus is the great blessing of salvation. Free not only from the guilt of sin, but also from the tyranny of depravity, from the bondage to Satan; free to will the good; free to obey the Master; free to serve our neighbor for the Lord's sake and for the neighbor's salvation. This

freedom of grace is blessedness itself! "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

Unbelief today is more and more characterized by a demand for absolute freedom in matters of religion and morals. Men claim a freedom to believe and *do* whatever may be their inclination in the pursuit of personal happiness. No divine prerogatives or institutions are recognized. If a woman's pursuit of happiness means the destruction of her unborn child, then nearly the whole of society in all western, so-called Christian countries vehemently defends the right and freedom of such an individual to terminate her pregnancy. Free to divorce at will; free to abandon the responsibility lovingly to care for and rear children; free to despise governments; free to impose upon the hapless employer the will of the laboring force; free to believe and to express said belief no matter how monstrous it may be. This freedom is limited by modern society only by its protection of one's living, air-breathing neighbor. We may not impinge the rights and freedoms of the neighbor by our actions. The unborn, though living, have no such protection. This is not

freedom but hellish bondage. Apostasy from the *Sola Scriptura* principle brings a fearful bondage to the proud individualist whose conscience is forced by sinful inclinations of the depraved heart. Collectively this is true for the whole of society. Man has deified his own conscience. Man is a god unto himself.

Ecclesiastically speaking, prior to the great Reformation of the 16th century, a similar bondage held fast those who desired to be saved. The Romish Church held the whole Christian church enslaved to its popish doctrines. One was called upon by the Romish Church to hold for truth whatever the church taught to be true, upon threat of the loss of salvation should he dare to contradict the instructions of the infallible and holy church. Rome's appeal for this authority was not primarily to the authority of Scripture but to the authority of *tradition*. Her tradition, as expressed by church councils and papal decrees, was to be regarded as divine pronouncements. The doctrinal pronouncements that were found to be offensive by the reformers were *not* those common to the Christian church in all ages, but those that made the Roman Catholic Church uniquely Romish in distinction from the church of the apostles and early church fathers. The biblical doctrines of the

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*Rev. Kamps is pastor of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.*



eternal divinity of Jesus Christ, the Trinity, the infallible inspiration and authority of Scripture, the doctrine of Creation, etc. were not doctrines that made the institution of the church Romish. The Christian church ever held to these. But the popish doctrines made the church Romish, and these had to be believed in order for one to be saved. The authority of tradition demanded, upon threat of excommunication, compliance to and an implicit faith in the teachings of the church. These Romish or popish doctrines are: the mediatorial office of the Pope as the vicar of Christ Jesus, the *ex-cathedra* infallibility of the Pope, all the doctrines that pertain to her ludicrous Mariolatry, the prayers to the saints, indulgences, transubstantiation or the physical presence of Christ Jesus upon the altar, the Mass as a repeated sacrifice necessary to one's salvation, the seven sacraments, purgatory, justification by works and faith, the obscurity or darkness of Scripture, the inability of the so-called laity to interpret Scripture, the Pope's alleged supremacy and authority even in matters civil and governmental, and many other doctrines unique to Rome and which made the church Romish in distinction from Christian.

Rome's doctrine of tradition is that it has equal authority to that of Scripture, and that tradition is also the arbitrator of the right and only acceptable interpretation of Scripture. This tradition is exclusively the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church. And Rome understands her church to have been the Christian church throughout the centuries. The government of the church and the determination of what is to be taught in the church is to be decided exclusively by Rome. The Council of Trent set forth Rome's position in regard to the authority of tradition.

That Council, and the Latin Church as a body, teach on this subject, 1) That Christ and his Apostles taught many things which were not committed to writing, i.e., not recorded in the Sacred Scriptures. 2) That these instructions have been faith-

fully transmitted, and preserved in the Church. 3) That they constitute a part of the rule of faith for all believers .... From this it appears, 1. That these traditions are called unwritten because not contained in the Scriptures. They are, for the most part, now to be found written in the works of the Fathers, decisions of councils, ecclesiastical constitutions, and rescripts of the Popes. 2. The office of tradition is to convey a knowledge of doctrines, precepts, and institutions not contained in Scripture; and also to serve as a guide to the proper understanding of what is therein written. Tradition ... therefore, in the Church of Rome, is both the supplement and interpretation of the written word. 3. The authority due to tradition is the same as that which belongs to the Scriptures" (*Systematic Theology*, Hodge, Vol. I, pp. 109-110).

Rome's doctrine of tradition is of several elements. The doctrine of the personal succession of apostolic authority of Peter to the Bishop of Rome, or the Pope. The church as the divinely guided interpreter of the obscure scriptures. The doctrine of the unwritten Word. "Tradition is always represented by Romanists as not only the interpreter, but the complement of the Scriptures. The Bible, therefore, is, according to the Church of Rome, incomplete. It does not contain all the Church is bound to believe; nor are the doctrines which it does contain, therein fully or clearly made known" (Hodge's *Systematic Theology*, p. 106). Therefore, what the church taught, every Christian must believe. All else were heretics.

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### *Rome hated beyond comprehension the Reformation's doctrine of the sole authority of Scripture.*

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We should understand that this was no mere theoretical matter. To oppose Rome and to appeal to the authority of Scripture alone as one's

rule in all matters of faith and life was to be held worthy of death itself. Rome hated beyond comprehension the Reformation's doctrine of the sole authority of Scripture. Nor must we overlook the fact that this is still Rome's teachings. Scripture is the inspired Word of God, but this Word can only be rightly interpreted by Rome. And the authority of tradition is equal to that of Scripture.

For example, we should consider the dreadful action of the Council of Constance. John Hus was burned at the stake in 1415, having been condemned as a heretic for demanding that Rome give the cup of the Lord's Supper back to the people in the celebration of the Sacrament. His appeal was to Scripture, which records the Lord's institution of the Lord's Supper and the explicit instruction that the communicant drink all of it. But Rome condemned Hus on the basis of the authority of tradition. In addition, Hus had been a strong defender of the theology of Wyclif, the English reformer. Popish doctrines were defended by Rome on the basis of tradition. The authority of tradition provided the church of Rome the grounds for declaring him a heretic, even though he taught nothing that was not founded upon the Scriptures.

Charles Hodge sets forth the terrible consequences when tradition is exalted to equal authority to that of Scripture.

Making tradition a part of the rule of faith subverts the authority of the Scriptures. This follows as a natural and unavoidable consequence. If there be two standards of doctrine of equal authority, the one the explanatory, and infallible interpreter of the other, it is of necessity the interpretation which determines the faith of the people. Instead, therefore, of our faith resting on the testimony of God as recorded in His Word, it rests on what poor, fallible, often fanciful, prejudiced, benighted men tell us what is the meaning of the Word. Man and his authority take the place of God. As this is the logical consequence of making tradition a rule of faith, so it is an historical fact that the Scriptures have been made of no



account wherever the authority of tradition has been admitted. Our Lord said, that the Scribes and Pharisees make the Word of God of no effect by their traditions; that they taught for doctrines the commandments of men. This is no less historically true of the Church of Rome" (p. 128).

Today the doctrine of the exclusive authority of the Bible is perverted and misapplied. Today the Protestant churches openly despise the concept of the authority of the Creeds in the life of the church. This attitude is found even within Reformed and

Presbyterian denominations. Congregations are *weaned away* from a *creedal consciousness* on the ground that the only authority in the church of Jesus Christ is the Bible. No matter how often it is pointed out that the Creeds have a derived and subordinate authority and that the dogmas of the church are always subject to the principle, *sola scriptura*, men still resist the Reformed churches' doctrine of the Creeds. The church institute is denied a systematic, authoritative statement of her beliefs on the ground that these are man-made documents and contrary to the sole authority of

the Bible. Pastors promote a "Christian faith" that has no structure, no definite character, and little specific content. This is done in the name of love, toleration, and freedom. But this perversion of the *Sola Scriptura* principle flies in the face of history. The greatest defenders of the authority of Scripture were also those who encouraged the Reformation churches to express her faith in Creeds, and who appealed to the ancient ecumenical Creeds for a statement of the Christian faith. □

Prof. Herman Hanko

## Ecclesiastical Freedom Vs. Papal Tyranny

The Reformation was the great work of God which delivered the church from the slavery and tyranny of Roman Catholicism. The tyranny of Rome extended to every part of the Christian's life, including the Christian's place in the church of Jesus Christ.

This article purposes to take a look at the freedom which the Reformation gave to God's people as members of the church of Christ in her institutional form.

### Luther's Groundwork

Already in 1520, just a bare three years after he nailed his theses on the chapel door of the church at Wittenberg, Luther wrote three of the most important pamphlets of his en-

tire life. They were: *Address to the German Nobility*, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, and *Concerning Christian Freedom*. In them Luther demolished the pope's tyrannical rule in the church and restored to God's people the "liberty wherewith Christ has made us free."

Luther despised the tyranny of the pope and spoke of it as that government which "agrees with the government of the apostles as well as Lucifer with Christ, hell with heaven, night with day...."<sup>1</sup>

In his *Address to the German Nobility*, Luther speaks of papal tyranny in the church as three walls of Jericho which need to be pulled down. We mention only two.

The first wall is Rome's exclusion of the laity from all matters of the

church. An old Medieval distinction between the "teaching church" (the clergy) and the "hearing church" (the laity) effectively put the lay members under the complete control of the pope and his minions. All that was permitted the laity was passive obedience to the directives and orders of the clergy.

The second wall of Jericho was the claim of the church to have the exclusive right to interpret Scripture. The people of God were tyrannized by the refusal of the church to allow God's people to interpret Scripture themselves—indeed, they might not even possess or read a Bible without the express consent of a member of the clergy. The church assumed all right to explain God's Word.

Luther's address is a massive assault on these walls, by which they were completely thrown down.

These walls were destroyed, first of all, by the great truth of the priesthood of all believers. Not the clergy only have the Spirit; all God's people

Prof. Hanko is professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Philip Schaff, *The History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), Vol. VII, pp. 206, 207.



are anointed with the Holy One. Not only the clergy are prophets, priests, and kings who alone are able to interpret Scripture, intercede with God, and rule in the church. All God's people are able to interpret Scripture and know what it teaches; all God's people are able to come to God without the intermediaries of the church's appointment; all God's people rule in the name of Christ.

Luther writes:

All Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them, save of office alone. As St. Paul says, we are all one body, though each member does its own work, to serve the others. This is because we have one baptism, one gospel, one faith, and are all Christians alike; for baptism, gospel and faith, these alone make spiritual and Christian people.

Or again,

It is faith that makes men priests, faith that unites them to Christ, and gives them the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, whereby they become filled with all holy grace and heavenly power. The inward anointing—this oil, better than any that ever came from the horn of bishop or pope—gives them not the name only, but the nature, the purity, the power of priests; and this anointing have all they received who are believers in Christ.

The second assault against those walls was the truth of the sole authority of Scripture. In Luther's teaching, not the church but God's Word alone stands as the rule and guide of the faith and life of God's people. If only the church possesses the power to interpret Scripture, Luther wrote, then, "Let us burn the Scriptures and be content with the learned boys at Rome."

These mighty cannonades not only demolished the walls, but gave to God's people the freedom of the gospel. The doors of the church were opened to lay participation in the affairs of the church; individual and personal responsibility for his life

before God was laid on the shoulders of the believer; the home and family were elevated to their crucial place in the church.

In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Luther explains how the Roman Church held her members captive by her doctrine of the sacraments. The church controlled the life of Christians from the cradle to the grave and brought every act and event under the power of the priest. It is not difficult to see how this was done. It was as if the grace of God was held by the church in a huge bowl, to be doled out drop by drop to the members of the church by the clergy, through the sacraments, and at the whims of the local parish priest. It was his to decide whether to give or to withhold. The people were in slavery too and tyrannized by the sacraments.

By repudiating such presumptuous ideas, making the sacraments subordinate to the Word, and restoring the sacraments to their original number, Luther smashed this wall too. The power of the sacraments, Luther insisted, was faith worked in the heart by the Holy Spirit.

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*The Christian is lord of all  
and subject to none  
by virtue of faith;  
he is servant of all  
and subject to everyone  
by virtue of love.*

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His third book, *Christian Freedom*, has got to be one of Luther's finest works. Luther understood that the alternative to tyranny and the synonym of freedom is not license—as some wanted it to be.<sup>2</sup> Liberty in the gospel is in Christ, not away from

Him. The beautiful words of Luther ring true today: The Christian is lord of all and subject to none by virtue of faith; he is servant of all and subject to everyone by virtue of love.

### Calvin the Builder

Luther did not and could not complete the work of Reformation in matters of church government. That work awaited the genius of the reformer of Geneva, John Calvin.

All the reformers were in complete agreement on the principle that the Word of God alone had authority in the lives of God's people and in the affairs of the church. Calvin, among all the other work which he performed, restored to the church the biblical rule.

From a negative point of view, Calvin understood full well that the alternative to Rome's tyranny was not liberty in the sense of license—every man doing as seemed good to him. Rome had accused the reformers of bringing license into the church by rejecting the authority of the church; but the reformers repudiated the charge by insisting on the authority of Scripture as that by which we are bound and delivered from license.

Calvin knew firsthand what license meant. Not only had the Anabaptists rejected authority, but the Libertines in Geneva, who refused to be bound by any law and were the early proponents of what today is called "the new morality," were responsible for driving Calvin from Geneva after his first sojourn, and for making life as miserable as they could for Calvin during his second stay—until they were finally driven from the city.

Concerning them, A. Mitchell Hunter writes:

[Calvin] spoke of the spirit of Libertinism as "the most pernicious and execrable which ever existed in the world, a fire kindled to scathe and destroy everything, a contagion which will infect the whole earth unless some remedy is found." The whole aim of these men, he asserted, was "to destroy all religion whatsoever, to efface all knowledge of the

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<sup>2</sup>The riots in Wittenberg while Luther was hiding in the castle of Wartburg were a case in point.



spiritual nature of man, to deaden his conscience, and obliterate all distinction between men and brutes." Compared to them the Pope was a virtuous character....<sup>3</sup>

It was during the happy years in Strassburg that Calvin did most of his work in the area of church polity. Upon his return to Geneva, he had the opportunity to implement his church polity, and that under the most difficult circumstances.

In 1542 Calvin laid down the principles by which the church ought to be governed as found in the Word of God. This work, Geneva's Church Order, was called "Ecclesiastical Ordinances," the opening words of which are:

In the name of God Almighty, we the Syndics, Small and Great Councils with our people assembled at the sound of the trumpet and the great clock, according to our ancient customs, have considered that the matter above all others worthy of recommendation is to preserve the doctrine of the holy gospel of our Lord in its purity, to protect the Christian Church, to instruct faithfully the youth, and to provide a hospital for the proper support of the poor, — all of which can not be done without a definite order and rule of life, from which every estate may learn the duty of its office. For this reason we have deemed it wise to reduce the spiritual government, such as our Lord has shown us and instituted by His Word, to a good form to be introduced and observed among us. Therefore we have ordered and established to follow and to guard in our city and territory the following ecclesiastical polity, taken from the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup>

The Word of God was the au-

thority in the church. Not papal tyranny, not Libertinism, not Anabaptism; the Scriptures. The Word of God is the rule for the whole church. It is the infallible rule which determines that the church is ruled by officebearers. It defines what offices are to be found in the church and what the work of these officebearers is. It prescribes the role of the "laity" in the church. It settles the relation between officebearers mutually, and between officebearers and the members of the holy congregation.

Calvin was a strong proponent of the need for discipline in the church — meaning, by "discipline," subjection to the rule of the church and the enforcement of the rule of Christ. Nearly the entire 12th chapter of Book iv of his *Institutes* is devoted to this subject, and especially the first paragraph speaks strongly of the need for discipline: "... If no society, nay, no house with even a moderate family, can be kept in a right state without discipline, much more necessary is it in the church, whose state ought to be the best ordered possible."

Calvin found in Scripture the requirement for the offices in the church.<sup>5</sup> Calvin brought into the church the offices of elder, deacon, and minister of the Word, and restored the church according to the pattern of Scripture.<sup>6</sup> His point was that the authority of the Word of God is found in the Scriptures, exercised

<sup>5</sup> Wallace is wrong when he says, "The Scriptural basis which Calvin gives for the office of elder is so flimsy that many Calvin scholars have felt that he was simply trying to find sanction for an institution that had been devised to meet the urgent needs of the church of his day: (Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva, and the Reformation* [Grand Rapids: Baker, Book House, 1988], p. 141).

<sup>6</sup> Actually Calvin had four offices in the church: the office of teacher was a separate office.

by Christ who is exalted on high, but performed here in the visible church through officebearers called and appointed by Christ.

But the question still remains: What was Calvin's view of the relation between the special offices (of elder, deacon, and minister) and the office of all believers? What role did they play in the government of the church?

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*In all the rule of the church,  
believers are called  
to participate.*

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Two answers to this question must be given.

In all the rule of the church, believers are called to participate. The calling of officebearers is by the congregation; the work of the church must be done only with the knowledge and approval of its membership; even the discipline of the church is carried out with the approbation of the congregation.

Secondly, each believer, prophet, priest, and king in his own right, has the freedom of individual conscience, bound only by the Word, in his walk before God. He is answerable to God alone. No individual, no assembly, no papal decree, no mere decree of man can bind his conscience.<sup>7</sup> Luther had said it first: "My conscience is bound by the Word of God. Here I stand. I can do nought else. So help me God."

Those who claim to be heirs of the Reformation want today too to interpret the freedom of the gospel, which the reformers restored to the church, as a kind of liberty from all biblical principle. Let us remain faithful to the Reformation, also in our life in the church of Christ. □

<sup>7</sup> How this is to be applied in the practical life of the individual members of the church is a subject for another paper.

<sup>3</sup> A. Mitchell Hunter, *The Teaching of Calvin*, (Glasgow: Maclehose, Jackson & Co., 1920), p. 219.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted from: Richard Taylor Stevenson, *John Calvin: The Statesman* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1907), p. 129.



# Freedom from Fear of Death and the Future State

What is your attitude toward death? What should be the Christian's attitude toward death? Is your attitude that of fear, or of hope? The way you answer will reflect how much your thinking is affected by the great Reformation. Fear or Hope!

Concerning death the apostle Paul writes in I Thessalonians 4:13ff., "But I would not have you be ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope."

The nature of death and the future state is such that they are unknowable apart from the teaching of Scripture. Death is often a topic which is painstakingly avoided. Yet every person knows that death is inevitable, unless the Lord returns first.

Death: heart attacks, disease, accidents, murder, wars, crib death, old age, and many other causes account for death. The grim reaper may come to anyone, young or old, rich or poor, healthy or sick, saint or sinner. When God calls, none can escape. Scripture tells us: "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

We see then that death is not a natural phenomenon. It is appointed by God. "There is a season," says the writer of Ecclesiastes. Job said, "The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away...."

Death is destruction, a tearing down, a separation. Death marks the end of our earthly existence. A man's name and place is cut off. It is a separation from all earthly things. No longer does the person see, touch,

feel, smell, taste, or move. Earthly relationships are severed. One is torn from family and friends, work and play. Death is separation of body and soul—the body to decay in the grave; the soul to meet its Maker.

It is important to know that death is God's curse upon a sinful world and sinful man. In Genesis 2:17 we read, "In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." The Bible teaches that death is the wages of sin (Rom. 6:23). Death is the avenging, punishing, and damning work of God, the expression of God's holy wrath. Death is the beginning of eternal misery and eternal separation from God. That is the terrible reality of death. Spiritually, death is separation from God—forsaken, left in sin, punished forever.

Well might the unbeliever, the reprobate, fear death! But the child of God need not fear, for the sting of death is removed. Jesus Christ has satisfied the wrath of God that was due us. He took our curse. He died our death. He was forsaken by God that we might forever be accepted by God. Christ did that for every one of those whom the Father gave to the Son to be saved. How beautifully we can repeat the words of David, "In that day thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me" (Isa. 12:11).

Death should hold no terrors for the true Christian. Oh, the last enemy remains. A cruel tyrant, it relentlessly brings grief and misery to all those touched by it. The apostle Paul describes it as a terrible foe with an awful sting like an adder. Christ Himself, as He stood by the sorrow-

ing relatives at the grave of His friend Lazarus, wept as He saw the grief of His friends and felt in Himself the awfulness of this enemy. But we sorrow not as those without hope!

While death remains a dreadful experience (dissolution of our earthly house—the apostle Paul likens the loss of the body by the soul to the state of nakedness, in II Corinthians 5:1-4), death is no longer to be feared by the child of God. Rather it is the boundary line between this world and the next, the portal through which our Lord entered to prepare the way for His own. Our salvation is sure. When in the Lord's appointed time He comes for us, it is for the purpose of leading us into our inheritance. The day of our death is the day of our coronation. We leave a world of sin and sorrow, affliction and pain, temptation and struggle, to enter a far better world, a world of perfection and holiness, blessedness and glory, freedom and fellowship with God. That is why the apostle Paul could write, "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain."

From the above it should be apparent that death is not the end of our existence. Many believe that there is nothing more after death. So eat, drink, and be merry. Today you live; who knows about tomorrow. "You only go around once. Make the most of it." How the wicked like to delude themselves that there is nothing more, for they do not want to confront the almighty, righteous God who punishes the wicked in time and eternity. Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists, as well as some leading evangelicals today, assert that the wicked will be annihilated. They do



this to soften or do away with the doctrine of eternal punishment. They defend the character of God as a "God of love who certainly could not eternally punish and damn sinners."

Death, rather than being an end to our existence, is a transition. The soul enters eternal life for the believer and eternal death for the unbeliever. What happens to these souls? It is not my intention now to trace the misery of the wicked reprobate. I want to look at the blessedness and hope of believers. What happens to believers at death?

The Roman Catholic Church has built up a doctrine in which it is held that all who die at peace with the church, but who are not perfect, must undergo penal and purifying suffering in an intermediate realm known as purgatory. Only those believers who have attained a state of Christian perfection go immediately to heaven. All unbaptized adults and those who after baptism have committed mortal sin go immediately to hell. The great mass of partially sanctified Christians, who die in fellowship with the church but who nevertheless are encumbered with some degree of sin, go to purgatory, where for a period of time they suffer until all sin is purged away.

The Roman Catholic Church holds that baptism removes all previous guilt, both original and actual, so that if a person were to die immediately after baptism he would go directly to heaven. All other believers, except the Christian martyrs, must go to purgatory to pay the penalty for sins committed after baptism.

As regards the intensity of the suffering, Bellarmine, a noted Roman Catholic theologian, says, "The pains of purgatory are very severe, surpassing anything endured in this life." In another place we read, "according to the Holy Fathers of the church, the fire of purgatory does not differ from the fire of hell, except in point of duration. 'It is the same fire,' says St. Thomas Aquinas, 'that torments the reprobates in hell and the just in purgatory.' The least pain in purgatory surpasses the greatest sufferings in this life. Nothing but the eternal du-

ration makes the fire of hell more terrible than that of purgatory." Again, Bellarmine is quoted as saying, "There is absolutely no doubt that the pains of purgatory in some cases endure for entire centuries."

The Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory was defined by the Council of Trent as follows: "There is a purgatory, and the souls there detained are helped by the prayers of the faithful, and especially by the acceptable sacrifice of the Altar" (Session XXV).

This holy council commands all bishops "diligently to endeavor that the wholesome doctrine concerning purgatory... be believed, held, taught, and everywhere preached by Christ's faithful" (Session XXV). With respect to the person who rejects this doctrine, the same council declared, "Let him be anathema" (Session VI).

The Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory rests on the assumption that while God forgives sin, His justice nevertheless demands that the sinner must suffer the full punishment due to him for his sin before he will be allowed to enter heaven. The period of suffering can be shortened by gifts of money, the prayers of the priests, and Masses held. These gifts, prayers, and Masses can be provided for by the person before his death or by relatives and friends after death. Purgatory is believed to be under the special jurisdiction of the Pope, and it is his prerogative as the representative of Christ, and the priests' as representatives of the Pope, to grant indulgences (i.e., relief from suffering) as he sees fit. So the priesthood has the power to alleviate, shorten, or terminate the sufferings. The priest is authorized to accept gifts and to offer the prayer for the alleviation of suffering or the deliverance of the soul. In effect, therefore, the church sells salvation. The rich can pay for the removal of their suffering. The people are enslaved to the greedy priesthood. Look in the third world countries how the people live in shacks and huts while large expensive cathedrals are built in their midst. The doctrine of purgatory has sometimes

been referred to as "the goldmine of the priesthood," since it accounts for such a large part of their wealth.

The Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory gives to the death and funeral of the Roman Catholic a dreadful and terrible aspect. Under the shadow of such a doctrine, death is not, as in Protestantism, the coming of Christ for His loved ones, but the ushering of the shrinking soul into a place of "unspeakable torture."

It is no wonder that millions born and raised in Roman Catholicism, not knowing the Scriptures, live and die in the fear of death, the fear of spending unknown years in the pain and anguish of a place called purgatory. These people live in fear and servitude to the priests, who, they are taught, hold in their hands the ability to alleviate, shorten, or terminate suffering for the right price. These blinded people live in fear whether friends and relatives will remember them, pray for them, and pay for them that their sufferings may be shortened.

Roman Catholicism has often been described as a religion of fear. All their lives the followers of the Church of Rome are kept in servitude by the fear of death. No wonder! Lilt Lehmann says this concerning his boyhood in Ireland:

A sense of constant fear overshadowed everything. Ingrained fear is in fact the predominant note running through the life of all children born and raised in Catholic Ireland. Few ever get rid of it completely in after life, even in America. That fear concerns everything in this life, and still more terrible is the fear of the terrors in the life beyond the grave" (*The Soul of a Priest*, p. 34).

We must be thankful that God delivered His church, by the great Reformation, from the shackles of such a servitude to fear. Freed by the Scriptures.

We were freed from the fear of an imaginary purgatory with its burning hell fire. We have the blessed hope that when we die we are taken immediately up to heaven!



Jesus said to the thief on the cross, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Not someday, not after you have paid for all your heinous crimes, but, Jesus said, Today! Paradise! Jesus said (John 5:24), "He that heareth my word and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but is passed from death unto life." Paul wrote that to depart was to "be with Christ," and that it would be "far better" (Phil. 1:23).

We were freed from the grip of greedy, accursed priests trying to sell salvation. "The blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin .... If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:7, 9). All our sins — yes, *all* of them — are forgiven by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, once for all, not to be purged away by priests saying Mass or prayers, or by hell fires raging for centuries. To the question, "What must I do to be saved?" the answer is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). There is no reference to confession to a priest, penance, purgatory, or anything else the Roman priests demand.

We were freed from an accursed works-righteousness. Man cannot save himself. Salvation is God's work. We do not pay for our sins. We do not

cleanse ourselves. Jesus paid it all. Jesus said, "It is finished" (John 19:30). It was He who sustained for His people eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12) by the sacrifice of Himself (Heb. 9:26). It was by means of His *one* offering that He perfected those who are sanctified (Heb. 10:14). "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin" (I John 1:7). We are sanctified by the Holy Spirit (II Thess. 2:13), not by the terrible fires of a supposed purgatory.

We were freed from the fear that our enjoying the bliss of heaven depends upon relatives and friends praying and paying for us. For some elderly people the knowledge is only too keen that it is difficult for children and relatives to remember and visit us while still alive. Perish the thought that our final deliverance from the hell fires would depend upon those relatives to remember us when we are gone!

How wonderful is this freedom the Reformation brought to the church. Because of Jesus' work, His sacrifice on Calvary was sufficient to purge all of our sins, without the need of any "purg"-atory. Christ says, "And their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 10:17).

Over against the fears of Rome, as Christians of the Reformed persuasion we have the glorious hope that at death we go straight to heaven! HOPE!

Romans 8:1 — There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.

John 14:2, 3 — In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

Revelation 14:13 — Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.

For the believer, there is hope in death and in the future state. We will be with Jesus, with the angels and saints in heaven, continuously praising God. But, of course, we keep one eye on that great day when Jesus will come again on the clouds of heaven, to usher in the new heavens and earth, when our bodies will be raised and be gloriously transformed. Then, with body and soul, we will see Him, worship Him, and enjoy Him forever. A great hope!

Always, as Protestant Reformed Churches, we must beware of false teachings creeping into the church, sucking away her hope and her life, shackling again the church in the shackles of fear. "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (II Tim. 1:7).

HOPE — freed from fear! □

## The Dream City

There's a city that hath no need of light

Of the moon, or the stars or sun;  
There is no noon, neither is there night,

For the day and night are one.  
There is no sin there, neither pain nor care,

Toil or sorrow, death or decay;  
Everlasting beauty abideth there,  
That shall never pass away.

I have dreamed of that city I shall see  
When the mists roll in splendor away

And morning dawns, as it will for me  
At the close of life's brief day.

Of its jasper walls and its pearly gates,  
Of its streets of bright shining gold,

And the home therein which for me  
awaits

When the portals bright unfold.

I have thought I could hear the angels sing

As, unnumbered, they stood  
'round the throne

On which One sat whom they  
crowned their King,

And I knew Him — Christ, my  
own!

As He looked at me I beheld Him smile,

And His tender voice I could hear  
Saying: "Tarry yet but a little while,  
For the morning draweth near."

*Standard Bearer*

January 1, 1933



# Not Commanded, Not Forbidden

## "Freedom In the Adiaphora"

"Should I do it? Or should I not?" For a good portion of the Christian life, the Bible does not give direct answer to us whether we should or should not. These things, about which the Bible does not give direct instruction, are called *adiaphora*. *Adiaphora* means, literally, "the things indifferent." The concept is important — as important as your salvation. The word ought to be known by us. Thus, I included it in the title of the article. Please learn it: *adiaphora*. The things indifferent.

In contrast to the Roman Catholic Church (and other modern, legalistic churches or sects), the Protestant Reformed Churches must guard jealously the freedom of her members in the things indifferent. The members of these churches, under the careful protection of their officebearers, have the right freely to use and enjoy all the good gifts of God, receiving them with thanksgiving and sanctifying them with the Word of God and prayer.

They believe that things which God neither commands nor forbids may be performed or omitted by them as a matter of indifference. None decides for them. They are free to do or not do, use or not use, as they themselves determine.

According to the reformer John Calvin, this aspect of our freedom in Christ is the third main part of Christian liberty. First, the Christian is free

in his conscience from the terrors of the law. Second, he has freedom of conscience to obey the law from the heart. Third, he is given freedom of conscience regarding the use of the indifferent things.

The restoration of this teaching rescued the poor people of God in the Roman church. Holding the miserable view that *every* area of the Christian's life must be circumscribed by the church, the Roman church made law upon law, precept upon precept for the sheep under their "care." The twin error of the Roman church, and thus the double oppression for the people of God, was that these regulations, although not found in the Word of God, were binding on their conscience for salvation. Extra-biblical, yet necessary for salvation!

The laws regulated almost every nook and cranny of life, public and private, for the clergy as well as laity. A former Roman Catholic priest recounts that, in addition to the regulation for priests, "Thou shalt not marry," the institution where he was trained required, "Thou shalt not look out the window; thou shalt not touch flowers; thou shalt not have close friendships." "Brother Ass" (the body), they claimed, must be ruled strictly. (see H. J. Hegger, *I Saw the Light*, 1961, Presbyterian and Reformed, pages 27,31).

For the laity the laws included, "No wine at the Mass, No meat on Fridays, worship and love Mary or you will be damned." Still today the Roman Catholic Church makes these extra-biblical yet binding pronouncements for her members.

What is amazing about these pronouncements is that they come from the pope. Having really pulled them from his sleeve, or having sucked them from his thumb, he audaciously claims that they come directly from God.

But this is no different from the lordly Pharisee who said, "You go to hell if you eat with unwashed hands," or the proud legalist today who says, "If you drink a glass of wine or a bottle of beer you are damned." Both bind the believer's conscience with a law not found in Scripture. We must resist this with all our might, lest we make "void the grace of Christ" (Calvin on Colossians 2:16ff.).

The men whom God raised up to give deliverance to His oppressed people found these abusive regulations to be insufferable. Carefully they pointed the people of God to their freedom to live as they themselves judged to be pious Christian behavior in all areas where the Bible is silent.

Luther has a marvelous explanation of the broad picture of Christian liberty, "A Treatise on Christian Liberty," in which he spells out the whole message of the gospel in a clear, heartwarming manner (see the *Works of Martin Luther*, Philadelphia Edition, 6 volumes, 1982, Baker, Volume 2). Every Reformed Christian would do well to read this short treatise. But in a sermon to the people at Wittenberg, Luther puts briefly that aspect of Christian liberty we refer to here. He says, "Take note of these two things, 'must' and 'free.' The 'must' is that which necessity requires, and

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Rev. Gritters is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Byron Center, Michigan.



which must ever be unyielding; as, for instance, the faith, which I shall never permit any one to take away from me, but which I must always keep in my heart and freely confess before every one. But 'free' is that in which I have choice, and may use or not.... Now do not make a 'must' out of what is 'free,' as you have done..." (*Works*, volume II, page 395).

Commenting on Colossians 2:16ff., and referring to those church members or rulers who would condemn us in these indifferent matters, Calvin warns, "How bright a mirror there is as to this in popery!... human traditions are a labyrinth, in which consciences are more and more entangled; nay more, are snares, which from the beginning bind in such a way that in course of time they strangle in the end." "In short, when persons have once taken it upon them to tyrannize over men's souls, there is no end of new laws being daily added to old ones, and new enactments starting up from time to time." In his *Institutes*, he warns against consciences which are "tormented about the use of things indifferent" (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.19.9, translated by Ford Lewis Battles).

Taking his starting point at Romans 14, one of the important passages on the adiaphora, Calvin hears Paul subject "all outward things to our freedom, provided that our minds are assured that the basis for such freedom stands before God" (*Institutes*, 3.19.9). What Paul says is, "I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself" (Romans 14:14a).

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In I Corinthians, the apostle repeats the doctrine in this way: "All things are lawful unto (for) me" (6:12, 10:23). In I Corinthians 8:8, speaking of food, he says, "But meat

commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse." Eating meat is a thing indifferent.

Warning against those who would spy out and pilfer their liberty, Paul says, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days..." (Colossians 2:16). Puzzled that those who are dead with Christ from the ordinances of the world would return to bondage, Paul asks the Colossian Christians, "Why are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which are all to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?" (2:20-22). He exposes the vanity of these laws in the next verse, pointing out that these regulations are no more than hypocrisy, "a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body..." (verse 23).

Both as regards the Old Testament civil and ceremonial laws (theonomists to the contrary notwithstanding) and as regards man-made regulations, "brethren, ye have been called unto liberty" (Galatians 5:13a).

The reason for this liberty is that the church has come of age. By the indwelling Spirit of Jesus Christ, the church is sufficiently mature to be freed from the minute regulations that control every second. Paul likens the maturity of the church of the new dispensation to the maturity of a child who reaches adulthood (Galatians 4:1-7). For anyone to believe he may (or must) regulate the life of the believers with even one law that the Scripture does not bind us with is, among other things, to deny the maturity of New Testament believers, to do despite unto the Spirit of grace. Calvin calls it "pernicious" (Commentary on Colossians 2:16ff.). To allow others to bind our conscience is to lose the light that is in us, and to offer insult to Christ, the author of our freedom (Calvin's Commentary on Galatians 5:1; *Institutes*, 3.19.14).

The Protestant Reformed Churches do not make (and may not

make) any rules for their members that are extra-biblical, which bind the conscience, for which the member may be excommunicated. Tempted sorely, seeing the great evil of the abuse of the television, to make a law against television (as one Reformed congregation is reported to have done), we resist, believing that the danger of legalism is a soul-destroying evil. Observing the grievous destruction that alcohol wreaks on the lives of some of the members, the pastors and elders may be tempted to say, "Drinking alcohol brings your membership in this church into jeopardy." They will not make that regulation, knowing that the Word of God does not prohibit the use of alcohol.

Observing the abuse of television or liquor or tobacco or birth control or any other "indifferent" thing, the pastors and elders warn with all their heart from Galatians 5:13, "Your liberty is not meant for the satisfying of your flesh." Doing this, God's servants believe (as do Christian parents who face the same problems) that the warnings of Scripture are used by the Holy Spirit of Christ to sanctify wholly the children of God.

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When they warn in this way (no rules, but passionate, stern cautions against abuse), officebearers are faithful to Scripture and follow in the path restored by the reformers. Repeatedly, when Calvin raises the subject of the things indifferent, he acknowledges that many will be tempted to give reign to unbridled lusts. This, unbridled lusts, is one result of and reaction to the attempt to bind the child of God with unnecessary laws! Some will live licentiously without provocation. Others are driven to it by the spying out of their liberty (see R.C. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*, Eerdmans, 1969, pages 310, 311).



At almost every point where Scripture teaches our liberty in Jesus regarding indifferent things, it sounds a clear warning not to prostitute that liberty. This is a different warning than the other writers refer to elsewhere in this issue, different from the apostle's caution, "Think not that your liberty gives you permission to violate the law of God" (see, probably, the editorial and the meditation). Here, the warnings call us to live out our maturity by asking ourselves some important questions as regards *why* we will use or avoid the use of the indifferent thing.

First, where Paul proclaims, "All things are lawful unto me," he quickly adds for the sake of our maturity, "but not all things are expedient" (I Cor. 6:12, 10:23). Out of love for God and the neighbor, the mature child of God is able to answer this question, "Is my use of the thing *profitable* for me and for others?"

Second, Paul says, "All things are lawful for me, but I will not come under the power of any." Both Luther and Calvin warn that, because we are lord of the good gifts of God, we must not let them become lord over us.

Liquor, tobacco, food, sports, all have that dangerous power. Christians are free. Do not become slave to these.

Third, Paul warns, "But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours becomes a stumblingblock to them that are weak." We care for the neighbor; we love him. So it matters who is looking when we do what we do, or refrain from something. Because we love the neighbor, we do not want him to stumble.

Fourth, required by the Word of God is that anything we do be done "unto the Lord" (Rom. 14:6). Is a thing pure and lawful for me? Then,

when I am finished, I am able before God to say to Him, "Thanks, Lord, for that good gift" (I Cor. 10:30, I Tim. 4:4,5). Do it "unto the Lord." "Do all to the glory of God" (I Cor. 10:31).

Free, with the glorious liberty of Jesus Christ, we will let no one rob us of it. We take the advice of Calvin in his commentary on I Corinthians 10:29: "The soul of a pious man looks exclusively to the tribunal of God, has no regard for man, is satisfied with the blessing of liberty secured for it by Christ, and is bound to no individuals, and to no circumstances of time and place." □

Closely related, but too large a subject to treat in this article, is the subject of the adiaphora in public worship. Although the second commandment binds us to include in our worship services only those things which the Scriptures require, there are minor things related to the *worship* that are a matter of indifference. The PRC have recognized this, as their Acts of Synod show, 1990, page 145. Nevertheless, consistories have the right to make extra-biblical regulations for good order and decency in regard to the worship services. But the consistory makes rules for the sake of edification, not strangulation. Nor do any of these rules bind the *conscience* of the believer. When a member physically cannot comply, the consistory does not bind him with the rule, or does not make it in the first place. The warnings of the *Belgic Confession*, article 32, must be carefully heeded. On this subject, read Luther's interesting treatise, "On the Councils and the Churches" in his *Works*, referred to above, vol. V, especially pages 187, 250, 251.

Rev. Kenneth Koole

## Freedom Re the Things of This Life

In days of self-indulgence, in days when hedonism and worldliness saturate the life of the church like fat does bacon, one becomes apprehensive about extolling freedom in the use of the things of this world (with the fullness thereof). The need of the hour, it is everywhere apparent, is moderation, self-discipline,

restraint, and perhaps even a good dose of self-imposed austerity — sometimes known as fasting (which is not to be confused with dieting).

The reformers, Calvin in particular, promoted such. In fact, humanly speaking, if the thousands of Rome's monks under their vows of asceticism had practiced self-control and moderation to half the extent that Calvin did in his life of Christian liberty and freedom, the Reformation might well not have happened, at least not in the century that it did. It

was the well-known licentiousness of the clerics of Rome that made Rome so odious to the multitudes, and that proved that there was something desperately wrong with her doctrines, both of dogma and of life.

Words such as "moderation," "frugality," "temperance," and the call to the avoidance of all excess are scattered throughout Calvin's writings. (Cf. for instance, his sermons on Job 1 and his commentaries on I Cor. 6 & 7). And what he preached he practiced. (But he was not stingy; his

Rev. Koole is pastor of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan.



hospitality and liberality were well known.)

Still, the reformers did not promote monkish asceticism. They were well aware of its inherent dangers. They knew it arose out of a misreading of what the Christian life and what true piety was all about. Luther, of course, knew by personal experience, himself having been a monk and having labored mightily to make his peace with God through the rigor, poverty, self-inflicted suffering, and vows of the cloister. The reformers were vigorous opponents of the monastic 'mentality' and its abuses.

This is not to say that they scoffed at the sincerity of all who broke with life's pleasures and comforts in order to devote themselves to finding peace with God in the monastic life. The great Augustine himself founded a monastic order devoted to celibacy and regular spiritual devotions. As well, he demanded physical labor by all members, to sustain their own cloister on the sound scriptural principle that "...if any would not work, neither should he eat" (I Thess. 3:10). And, as is well known, Luther felt compelled to become a monk to certify his own salvation and to cease sinning against his Maker and Judge. For such, one can feel only pity. Some drove themselves to death through austerity in order to have some hope for heaven. Luther speaks of a Prince

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William of Anhalt who forsook the royal courts to become a begging friar. Luther reports that as a lad he saw with his own eyes this renowned William carrying a sack like a donkey. Luther writes, "He had so worn himself down by fasting and vigil that he looked like a death's-head, mere bone and skin. No one could look upon him without feeling ashamed of his own life."

What is interesting is that last comment of Luther with regards to

this Prince William, "without feeling ashamed of his own life." Shame for what? One's carnal excesses and lack of single-minded interest in the hereafter, in gaining heaven. The evident sincerity of this once "rich, young ruler," Prince William of Anhalt, and the cost he was willing to count to assure himself of eternal life and God's approval, were remarkable. But it was also horribly misguided. And it was against this that the reformers thundered — not against the piously well-intentioned but misled souls like Prince William, but against the system and theology that produced such pitiful specimens of spiritual desperation as they sought eternal life. It was, and is, a bondage.

The Reformation was a committed return to freedom, freedom in Christ; freedom from guilt before God as Judge and Father; freedom from enslavement to darkness, the Devil, and to sin; freedom from the fear of death and its horrors; freedom to find joy in God in this life as well as in the life to come; freedom to serve Him as Lord and to find his approval in that way, freedom to use the things of this life. In other words it was committed to *knowing* the freedom a child has in his own home where love is, which freedom is "dread-free," but not "boundary-free."

Calvin condemns a philosophy of life "which, in allowing no use of the creatures but for necessity, not only maliciously deprives us of the lawful fruit of the divine beneficence, but cannot be realized without depriving man of all his senses, and reducing him to a block" (3. 10. 3).

The "necessity" to which Calvin refers was a word used by the radical ascetics. They meant by this only those things absolutely necessary for life, which would be bread and water, and then perhaps precious little of that. One was to live without shelter or heat as well, if possible. It was those who imposed the greatest physical suffering on themselves who were judged the most holy and God-favored. This Calvin dismissed as a hateful doctrine.

The error which Calvin con-

demned has been of long standing in the New Testament church. Paul warns against it in Colossians, where he rebukes those who promoted a "taste not, touch not, handle not" perspective for the truly spiritual life.

It was, as we stated, a bondage, a bondage which gave rise to many errors.

It was a bondage of guilt, first of all. The sincere felt they had to feel guilty and without assurance in order to have hope for divine approval, because, if they were not troubled by guilt and uncertainty, that could only mean they felt they had done enough to please God. But they knew that such an assessment of self amounted to pride, which was the most serious sin of all. So they had to retreat back to the cell of guilt in order to be humble enough.

There was therefore this psychological bondage. Either one was feeling guilty for having confidence over feeling guilty enough to please God, or he was trying to cleanse his mind of all confidence so that he would not be tempted to boast in his confidence in having felt guilty enough. Psychologically, spiritually, it was devastating, a bondage like a maze to which there was no exit door.

For others it fostered pride in subtle ways. Because one had rigorously abstained from certain food for a time, one felt good about himself. And that led to the next step of pride, namely judging others as inferior. "Surely we are better than many of the brothers who have not denied themselves the things we have." So, as one knelt like a publican in the corner, he was thinking, "How thankful I am that I am not as these others. Note, Lord, my greater humility and abstinence." It fostered the twin evils of self-righteousness and the despising of others.

Having warned of the futility of vigils, long fasts, lying on the cold ground, and doing without many of the good things of this life, Calvin makes a significant statement concerning Paul's words to Timothy that "bodily exercise profiteth little." States Calvin,



This is a needed warning, for the world always has a strong tendency towards worshipping God by external observances (imposed bodily discomforts — KK), which can be fatal. Even leaving out the perverse notion that there is merit in it, our nature always disposed us strongly to think that the ascetic life is of great value, as though it were a notable part of Christian sanctification.... If the ancient monks had not believed that there was some divine or angelic perfection in their austere rule of life, they would never have practiced it with such ardour. In the same way if pastors had not unduly overvalued the practices then observed as a means of mortifying the flesh, they would never have been so strict in requiring them. And yet Paul says the opposite, that even if a man has worn himself out much and long in these exercises, the profit will be small and meager, for they are nothing but the rudiments of a childish discipline (Comm., I Tim. 4:7).

Note that Calvin states that, even apart from the erroneous notion of merit by means of self-imposed physical deprivation and suffering, the simple fact is that the notion of salvation through "monkery" was unbiblical and valueless.

The reformers (and Calvin in particular, with his followers) have been caricatured as equating sourness in life with piety, and looking upon all joy in the midst of material abundance as the death of spirituality. This simply is not true. For all their castigating Rome for the gluttony, avarice, wine-bibbing, and promiscuity loose amongst her clergy, the reformers did not fall into the error of gnostic "dualism" as a remedy. Gnostic "dualism," is the erroneous teaching that there is something inherently "unspiritual" (and, hence, "tending to evil") in the material, physical side of this life. The reformers would have none of this.

Luther, the reformer most outspoken about the Christian's newfound liberty in Christ, is a clear case in point. His enjoyment of life from music, to food, to marriage, once he broke with Rome, is well docu-

mented. The impression left by his "table-talks" (though admittedly sometimes a bit exaggerated) is that the marriage-bed, some frothy German beer, and good companionship and laughter, is not only permissible for the believer, but necessary if one is to enjoy his freedom to its fullest.

The more austere Calvin was no less a promoter of freedom with respect to the use of the things of this life and a foe of gnostic dualism. Writes Calvin, "Now then, if we consider for what end [God] created food, we shall find that he consulted not only for our necessity, but also for our enjoyment and delight.... Were it not so, the Prophet would not enumerate among the mercies of God 'wine that maketh glad the heart of men, and oil to make his face to shine' Ps.104:15" (*Institutes* III, §, 2).

And Calvin ties this in with our newfound freedom in Christ. "God ... by ingrafting us into His Son, constitutes us anew to be lords of the world, that we may lawfully use as our own all the wealth with which He supplies us" (Comm., I Tim. 4:5).

If we were to summarize in one word the governing principle of the reformers for their own life, we could do worse than use the word "service."

This is how the reformers faced life as redeemed and forgiven sinners. How shall I serve my Lord? How shall I show my thanks for His great mercy shown me? What does the Lord consider proper response to the privileges and goodness shown me? It had to do with a life of service. It is encapsulated well in John Calvin's well-known motto, "Promptly and sincerely I offer my heart, O Lord, to thee." He was saying, use me Lord in thy service. It was the recognition that the believer has been set free in order to serve.

It is this very consideration that underscored the inappropriateness of and error behind the monastic movement and withdrawal from life. Of what service to Christ can one be if he is physically separated from life and preoccupied only with his own eternal security? Service means minister-

ing to one's fellow saints (as Christ's body), and it involves bearing witness in society to Christ's name. "Ye are the light of the world." One does not do this by becoming a recluse.

The call to service means one must make wise, spiritually mature decisions on how best he will use the things of this life for his own service of the Lord. I may decide it is best for me to forgo all alcoholic drink, not to marry, to abstain from coffee with its caffeine, to enjoy no pipe or cigar, and to become basically vegetarian. Wonderful! One has the freedom to make such choices for the sake of more profitable service. Against such choices there is no law.

But against *something*, due to the saint's freedom in Christ, there is a law. And that is this, that I begin to make my decisions in these matters the standard by which I judge my brother. As though because I have chosen to refrain from some of these things, he ought to also, and if he does not, his spirituality is suspect. This is legalism, namely, imposing on one's brother more than does God's own Word with respect to the things of this life.

The perfect balance is struck I Timothy 6:6ff., where the apostle Paul does not condemn being rich, but does warn the wealthy believer about the snares riches have, and then calls them to put their trust "...in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute..." (vss. 16,17).

We are free to enjoy the things of this life ... but not to consume them upon our own lusts. Rather we are free to keep our sobriety, to give God thanks, and to show it through kingdom service.

And please remember, that enjoying this life's goods and corrupting the mind are two different things. For the latter there is no freedom.

This is as thoroughly Reformed as it is biblical. □



# The Reformation's Restoration of Communion with God

In the modern age in which we live it is perhaps difficult to understand the wonder of that direct access we have to God through Jesus Christ, which was brought again to light by the Reformation. We live in an age where the opposite tendency, to humanize God, to bring Him down to our level, so pervades the church that the remoteness of God and of Christ which dominated the church at the time of the Reformation is almost wholly foreign to our thinking. The church at the time of the Reformation had utterly forsaken the riches of the New Testament in the cross of Christ. It had returned under the yoke of bondage to Mt. Sinai which trembled and quaked with the holy presence of God. But Israel stood at Mt. Sinai as a redeemed people, borne on eagle's wings by grace. It was by grace that the law was added to the promise. Not so in the medieval Romish church. God was a God of holy, righteous wrath against sin, whose grace was afar off.

In our age the Lord Jesus Christ has been falsely reduced to a mere man, neither righteous man nor di-

vine. In the medieval church His humanity was almost lost, and His divinity was stressed at the expense of His manhood. Still the Mediator, He was remote, the One who in awesome majesty would judge the quick and the dead, the One before whom all sinners trembled in fear of His coming judgment. Christ could be approached only by co-mediators, by prayers to Mary, "our lady," the saints, and angels, who were nearer to man than was Christ in His exalted glory. It is not without reason that our Confession of Faith says in Article 26, "But this mediator, whom the Father has appointed between him and us, ought in no wise to affright us by his majesty, or cause us to seek another according to our fancy." The church walked in fear. The people stood afar off.

God could be approached only by way of the sacraments, a system of sacraments centering in the sacrifices of the Mass, by penances imposed by the priest in the confessional and by the mediation of an earthly priesthood. One entered the church by the sacrament of baptism as a washing away of original sin by the water. The sacrament of baptism was not administered for the edification of the church, but as a superstitious ritual in a separated rite, children being presented by godparents, baptized with water, and anointed with the sign of the cross by chrism, a holy anointing oil like that of the Old Testament, mixed

with the spit of the priest. At age twelve they were confirmed (the sacrament of confession of faith), usually with a minimal knowledge of the Christian faith.

Spiritual life centered in the Mass, a dramatic reenactment of the cross, culminating in the sacrifice of Christ afresh in an unbloody manner at the altar, by which bread was magically changed into the literal body of Christ. The altar, as in the Old Testament, was the one place where God had fellowship with man in Christ. It was the one place that Jesus' human nature was manifested as the mediator, but now in a piece of bread to be worshiped. The medieval church was not a place for the gathering of the people of God, the body of Christ, for fellowship with God by His Word in Christ. It was a temple whose sweeping arches and pillars reaching to the high vault above spoke of the majesty of God. Its windows of multi-colored glass surrounded the people with saints, floating as it were in the vault of heaven. Myriads of carved and painted statutes of saints were clustered in the vaults, adding to the holy presence. Carved angels in a canopy hovered over the altar. Candles flickered in the holy sanctuary, and incense smoldered as the people stood as far off as Israel in the outer court.

The choir of priests and monks, like the levitical choirs, stood between the people and the altar, chanting the psalms and hymns of the church in a

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*Rev. Miersma is pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.*



language the people understood not. The priests and bishops were clothed in holy vestments like the priests of the Old Testament, put on with prayers for each piece, with the kissing of garments and many genuflections. They wore garments which dated from the clothes worn in the Roman emperors' courts centuries before.

The priests entered the church and ascended to the altar with all the pageantry of a parade, a solemn assembly, there to perform incomprehensible rites, bowing and bending. The people, observers, responded to the liturgy by crossing themselves, uttering stock refrains, bowing themselves. The people held their sacramentals, little sacraments, counting the beads of the rosary, reciting in vain repetition as the heathen the Lord's Prayer and their "Hail Marys." They would depart perhaps with a

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little statue of a saint for their comfort, like the Ephesians before them with their silver images of the goddess Diana, or a medallion or a bottle of holy water. The people watched until the mystery took place. Bells were rung in the hands of the priests to drive out the ever-present demons. Then the priest elevated the bread of communion, the host, and said the magic words, "In hoc corpus meum est," "This is my body" — or "hocus pocus," as it sounded to the people. There Jesus was beheld, the sacrifice for sin made anew. The people worshiped the piece of bread.

On special days, in their superstition, they roamed from church to church in the big cities in hurrying multitudes, hoping to see the magic

again and again. To eat of the sacrament was for one moment to have communion with Christ and receive grace by the bread.

Again and again that sacrifice of the Mass had to be offered for the living and for the dead, for without it there was no forgiveness of sins. The Roman sacramental system held the people in spiritual bondage all their life. Even at the hour of death there was the sacrament of extreme unction, the anointing again with holy oil. The church was held in a yoke of bondage and superstition in life and death.

From that bondage the Reformation of the church and return to the truth of God's Word wrought a true liberation. Christ was restored as the true mediator between God (who ought not to "affright us by His majesty") and men. The truth that we are reconciled to the holy God by the one sacrifice of Christ once offered upon the cross was restored. The Reformation gave us again the truth that we have access to God through Jesus Christ, our high priest, and no longer have need for an earthly priesthood. The truth that we are to come boldly to the throne of grace through Christ our Savior in prayer, was restored. The truth was again brought to light that we have a merciful and faithful high priest who can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities, who understands our needs and will not turn us away. True spiritual fellowship with God was restored, while outward rites and ceremonies, the inventions of men, as barriers between Christ and His people, fell away. The Mass was seen for what it was, a denial of Christ's atoning death, an accursed idolatry and superstition (Heidelberg Catechism Q/A 80). The sacraments were reduced to their proper number of two, baptism and the Lord's Supper, and to their spiritual function as visible signs and seals for the confirmation and strengthening of our faith. The sacraments were stripped of man-made additions and restored to their purity as signs and seals of the covenant. The worship of the church in fellowship with God

likewise was restored to its pure form, centering in the Word of God and the preaching of His Word.

The Reformation restored to the life and worship of the church true spiritual fellowship and communion with God. The Romish sacramental system and its accompanying worship had taken from us that communion. The worship of God had become an outward religion of form, separating God and His people. The Romish sacramental system of worship is a multimedia artistic event of sight, sound, and color, or pageantry and drama. Grace itself is outwardly administered in the bread to be eaten with the mouth, and worshiped as God.

The Romish system is a corrupt unity. We must see it as a whole if we are to understand the writings and language of the reformers when they speak of "books for the laity" and of the Mass as "an accursed idolatry," lest we take their writings out of their proper historical context or treat the issues involved piecemeal. Their concern for purity of worship was not a concern over church decoration but with a whole ceremonial system of corrupt worship, corruption of the sacraments and the whole life of the church, all of which robbed the child of God of forgiveness and fellowship with God through Jesus Christ by substituting external form and superstition. Their concern was to restore true communion with God through Jesus Christ.

It points us too to the present folly of much of Protestantism which can no longer see any difference with Rome, for Rome has not changed. A folly too as the sacraments are again corrupted by human invention, attended by the corruption of worship. The worship of Protestantism is again turning to ritual, to pageantry, in liturgical drama, dance, and ceremony. Inventing its own books for the laity to replace the preaching of the Word with films, plays, pseudo-Christian rock concerts. So that again the people of God sit afar off as observers to be entertained and not as worshipers. □



# Freedom From the Bondage of Works-Righteousness

To be righteous is to be right with God. It means that God judges one to be guiltless and worthy of everlasting life and glory. God forgives one's sins, adopts that person as His own child and makes that person an heir of eternal life. This, in brief, is the plain teaching of Scripture in Galatians 4:4-7. This passage presents the good news that God in the fullness of time sent forth His son, made of a woman and made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, "that we might receive the adoption of sons." And as sons we are "heirs of God through Christ."

The crucial question is: how can I be righteous before God? Only the righteous inherit eternal life. Only they are saved from their sins and brought into God's blessed fellowship. The unrighteous will be damned. For the unrighteous there is only "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation .... It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:27-31).

There is a day of judgment, a day of reckoning. Jesus told us this when He said; "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works" (Matt. 16:27). Romans 2:5-11 teaches that God, the righteous Judge, will render to every man according to his deeds. To the righteous, God will

give eternal life, glory, honor, and peace. To those who are contentious and who obey not the truth, but who obey unrighteousness, God will give indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish. Scripture says, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Cor. 5:10).

How then can I be righteous before God? Crucial question indeed! If I can be assured in my heart that I am righteous before God, I have no fear of the day of judgment. I am at peace. If not, I am held in the terrible bondage of the terror of death and judgment.

Rome answers the crucial question by telling me I have to perform good works in order to merit or earn righteousness. If I do works of penance, of mercy; if I obey the commandments of God; if I faithfully participate in the Mass, God will on the basis of those good works infuse me with the righteousness of Christ. If I fail to perform these good works, according to Rome, I will be punished

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*If Rome's doctrine  
of works-righteousness  
be true,  
I am indeed in bondage.*

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eternally in hell. If I do not perform enough good works, or if I do not perform them well enough, accord-

ing to Rome, I will need to spend some time suffering in purgatory before God will allow me to go to heaven.

If Rome's doctrine of works-righteousness be true (thank God it isn't!), I am indeed in bondage. What if my works are not good enough? What if God in the end is not pleased with what I have done? If Rome's doctrine be true, I am held in the icy grip of the terror of death. That indeed is bondage of the worst sort! Martin Luther experienced this terrible bondage until God touched his heart with the words, "The just shall live by faith" (Hab. 2:4, Rom. 1:17).

Only slightly different is the answer Arminianism gives to this crucial question, "How can I be righteous before God?" The Arminian tells me Jesus died for all men. The way to be righteous before God is to exercise my free will and accept Jesus as my personal Savior. The Arminian says that salvation is by grace through faith, but I must really perform the work of faith in order to be righteous. What is more, according to the Arminian I must persevere in faith, because if I do not I will perish in hell. In other words, the possibility exists that I may accept Jesus one day and reject Him the next, in which case I would lose my salvation.

If the Arminian answer to the crucial question be true (thank God it isn't!), I am held in the same terrible bondage of Rome's works-righteousness. The Bible answers the crucial question, "How can I be righteous before God?" quite differently. The Bible tells me I am by nature dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1-3).

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*Prof. Decker is professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.*



Because I am dead in trespasses and sins I am unable to be subject to God's law, and according to my flesh I cannot please God (Rom. 8:7-8). The Bible tells me I am totally depraved, and for that reason I am unable to do any good at all. By nature I don't even have the desire to do good works or to strive to please God.

The Bible tells me that I have been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, that I have been predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ according to the good pleasure of God's will and to God's praise (Eph. 1:3-6). The Bible tells me I have been made alive in Christ because of God's rich mercy and great love for me. The Bible assures me that I am saved not by works, but by grace through faith, God's gift (Eph. 2:4-8).

The Bible's answer to the crucial question, "How can I be righteous before God?" is *by faith!* And faith is God's gift to me. Faith is not another work, as the Arminian would have it. Faith is the bond which unites me to Christ, and through that bond I receive all the blessings which Christ merited for me at the cross. I am righteous by faith. It is all the work of the sovereign God of my salvation.

This is the gospel. Only this gospel frees me from the terrible bondage of works-righteousness. Because I am justified (made righteous) by faith I have peace with God through my Lord Jesus Christ.

Rome objects to this precious truth by saying this doctrine makes men careless and profane. If it is all by grace through faith, God's gift, Rome says (and so says the Arminian as well) I deny man's responsibility. Still more, Rome and the Arminian say I may as well sin that grace may abound.

The apostle Paul faced this ridiculous objection long ago. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he answered, "God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Rom. 6:2). The Bible says we have been buried with Christ into his death and raised with him to newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4).

No, this doctrine does not make me careless or profane. Far from it! In fact, that's an impossibility! The Heidelberg Catechism sums the biblical teaching well when it says, "... it is impossible that those, who are implanted into Christ by a true faith, should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness" (Q. 64). Ultimately that is

impossible because I and all of God's elect in Christ are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God has before ordained that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10).

This is the answer to the crucial question, "How can I be righteous before God?" This assurance frees me from the terrible bondage of Rome's works-righteousness and Arminianism's free-will error. In this blessed assurance I am free from the terrors of death and judgment. I am free to love and serve my God in the way of His good commandments. It's not without a struggle! Every day I have to put off the old man and put on the new (Eph. 4:22-24). And I need the whole armor of God in order to be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might (Eph. 6:10-20).

In that struggle, that battle, I am confident of this very thing, "... he which began a good work in me will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

By grace through faith, God's gift — that's how I am righteous before God? To God be the glory! Thank God for the Reformation, by which He which brought the church back to this precious truth. □

## Report of Classis East

Classis East met in regular session on Wednesday, September 9, 1992 at the Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church. All the churches, with the exception of Norristown which had one delegate, were represented by two delegates. This session was chaired by Rev. Kenneth Koole.

The main item of business for this session was the appeal brought by a brother regarding censure. Given the nature of the case, classis dealt with this case in closed session. Two consistories brought requests for increasing censure. These requests were also considered in closed session.

Classis approved the request of the South Holland PRC for help in the

support of Rev. Audred Spriensma. This cause was commended to the churches with the request for a quick response to this need.

Classical appointments were requested by Grandville and by Hudsonville for Northern Ireland. The following schedule was adopted: **GRANDVILLE (p.m. service only):** October 4 — D. Kuiper, October 11 — M. Joostens, October 25 — B. Woudenberg, November 1 — W. Bruinsma, November 8 — J. Slopsema, November 22 — D. Kuiper, November 29 — M. Joostens, December 6 — B. Woudenberg, December 20 — W. Bruinsma, December 27 — J. Slopsema, January 3 — D. Kuiper,

January 10 — R. Flikkema; **NORTHERN IRELAND:** September 27, October 4, October 11 — M. Kamps, November 1-15 — G. VanBaren, December 6-20 — K. Koole, January 17-31 — B. Gritters.

Expenses of this classis amounted to \$1,447.25. Classis will meet next in the Faith PRC on January 13, 1993.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jon J. Huisken  
Stated Clerk



*News From Our Churches*

*Mr. Benjamin Wigger*

**Ministerial Calls**

The Council of the Grandville, MI PRC presented a trio consisting of the Revs. B. Gritters, J. Slopsema, and A. Spriensma to their congregation for consideration and on Sunday evening, September 20, they extended a call to Pastor A. Spriensma to become their next undershepherd.

Rev. C. Haak, pastor of the Lynden, WA PRC, declined the call he had been considering to serve our churches as missionary to the Covenant Reformed Fellowship of Larne, Northern Ireland.

**Congregational Activities**

With regard to the above item dealing with the CRF of Larne, it was also reported to the congregation of the Hudsonville, MI PRC immediately after Rev. Haak's decline that their council had agreed to grant their pastor, Rev. G. VanBaren, a leave of up to a year in length so that he and his wife could go to Larne and work for an extended time with the saints there. Rev. and Mrs. VanBaren are scheduled to leave for Northern Ireland on October 19.

**Evangelism Activities**

At a recent meeting of the Council of South Holland a decision was made to ask the Mission Committee of our churches to assume responsibility for work with the Sovereign Redeemer Fellowship in Boise, Idaho. This decision was based on the fact

that the group in Boise is desirous to begin working with the Mission Committee with a view to becoming a home mission field, and that the Mission Committee expressed a desire to help in this labor. This will also give the group a wider exposure in our churches and enable them to get to know our ministers in Classis East.

The Evangelism Committee of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA is working on the possibility of airing the Reformed Witness Hour on Sunday afternoons on K-Life Radio Station. They are also working on having a book table at the Redlands market-night.

The Evangelism Society of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI sponsored a lecture September 17 at Calvin College Fine Arts Center with Rev. R. VanOverloop speaking on "Sex and Dating in the Christian Life." Rev. VanOverloop spoke to a good-sized group, with a lot of young people and families present. (The Young People's Society of the First PRC of Holland, MI attended as a group.) Rev. VanOverloop set this lecture squarely on the Word of God as its standard. What does the Bible say about sex and dating? One statement that he made really struck me, "Ask not, who am I (as if to say I am God's gift to women or men), but *whose* am I." We belong, after all, to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and our dating should reflect that. You can order a tape of this very worthwhile lecture by contacting Southeast Evangelism Committee at 1543 Cambridge Ave., Grand Rapids, MI 49506.

**Denominational Activities**

Rev. B. Woudenberg, along with

his brother Herm and Rev. Joseph Posta, traveled to Hungary and Romania for two weeks in September. Rev. Woudenberg was scheduled to meet with the head of the Reformed Church Publishing Department in Hungary. One of the things he would like to look into is the possibility of translating and publishing *The Triple Knowledge* into Hungarian. These men are also to meet with the bishops of the churches in Romania in an effort to assist in their return to normal church life after the demise of communism. Toward the end of the trip they were to travel into the mountain villages to examine church life there.

Rev. Joostens and Elder Clare Prince returned to Jamaica September 11 to evaluate and work with the churches there. □

**ANNOUNCEMENT**

**NOTICE!!!**

On October 1, 1992, our pastor, **REV. DALE H. KUIPER**, completed 25 years in the ministry in the Protestant Reformed Churches. For this we praise and thank our covenant God.

"For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (II Corinthians 4:5, 6).

Council of  
Southeast Protestant Reformed  
Church

*Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.*