



***A Reformed  
Semi-Monthly  
Magazine***

# ***The Standard Bearer***



***Rev. Robert C. Harbach***  
1914-1996

See "In Memoriam" p. 178

***Vol. 73, No. 8  
January 15, 1997***



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**In This Issue ...**

Although the purpose of those who write on these pages is faithfulness and clarity, not eloquence, there are some fine phrases in this issue. They draw the reader to intriguing articles, pieces, or discussions.

There is the title of the meditation, "Inexcusable Madness." This is another in the series of sermons by Herman Hoeksema on the book of Romans as the series was taken down by Martin Swart. The subject is the deliberate "clash" of the natural man with God.

"It matters not that we may have to stand alone in all this bleak, and religious, wilderness." So wrote the Rev. Robert C. Harbach, when he was working as home missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Mr. Don Doezeema quotes Rev. Harbach in his remembrance on the occasion of Rev. Harbach's death. See "In Memoriam: Rev. Robert C. Harbach."

Rev. Mitchell Dick exclaims, "Give me *that* truth, and give me *that* liberty ... or give me death!" He is applying the grand word of Jesus Christ, "... and the truth shall make you free." Read the column, "Search the Scriptures."

To what, pray tell, might these lines refer: "Washed with cataclysmic dearth; thy baptism is unequaled upon the earth!"? See the poem by Connie L. Meyer, "To the Earth."

"News From Our Churches" informs us that Edgerton, Minnesota's Christmas Social debated whether Christmas is Christian. Why would one think not? And what was the conclusion? Mr. Benjamin Wigger does not answer these questions. Not in this issue.

—DJE

# Inexcusable Madness

*Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.*

*For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:*

*Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.*

*Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,*

*And changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.*

Romans 1:19-23

The passage speaks of what may be characterized as inexcusable madness. Rather, it speaks of the inexcusable madness of unrighteousness.

Let me illustrate. Imagine that in a dark night a car is approaching a railroad crossing, while a fast train is coming down the tracks, rapidly nearing the road upon which the car is traveling. Some five hundred feet from the crossing, a large sign tells the driver that the railroad crossing is near. The driver sees that sign. A little farther, the driver reads another sign: stop, look, and listen. He reads that sign. The signal lights are flashing, and the bells are ring-

ing. The driver sees and hears it. He hears the shrill whistle of the train. But he drives on with the inevitable result that the car is smashed and the occupants are destroyed. What is this? It is madness. Yes, but it is madness for which there is no excuse.

Or imagine that in the city there is a third rail, highly charged with electricity. A large sign warns of the presence of that rail. It is properly fenced off, to keep anyone from stepping upon that rail. Yet someone, in spite of the warning and in spite of the fence, climbs over that fence and steps upon that rail and is killed. What is this? Madness, you say. But it is inexcusable.

This illustrates what man does with the living God. That train is the almighty God, who holds His course, who does not change His way, who never stops. That living rail is God, who is a consuming fire for all who set themselves against Him. That mad driver is the sinner. The signs and signals are the things that are seen of God. These things are clearly seen. Yet natural man goes on, clashes with God, and is destroyed. This is inexcusable madness.

The text calls our attention to this inexcusable madness from a threefold point of view. It tells us, in the first place, what this madness is, namely, "that when they knew God they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful." In the second place, it tells us that this madness is inexcusable, when it says, "that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them." In the third place, the

text tells us of the first result of the madness. It does not tell us the complete result. But it tells us what is the first result of this madness. This first result is that man "became vain in (his) imaginations, and (his) foolish heart was darkened."

## The Madness

The madness is that man knew God and glorified Him not as God. The apostle is speaking of man, that is, of the world as it lies in darkness, of the world as it lies apart from the gospel, as it does not have the light of the gospel. He is speaking of the world in which he is called to preach. We may say that he is speaking of the heathen world. Of this heathen world the apostle says that it knew God. Their foolishness and idolatry are not to be ascribed to natural darkness. It is often presented this way. It is often presented as if the heathen stand with outstretched hands waiting for the gospel. This is not the heathen world according to Romans. The apostle is speaking of the world apart from the gospel. Of this world he says that it knew God.

When the apostle says that the heathen world knows God, he means, in the first place, that they know that God is. In the second place, they know that God is of everlasting power. The apostle says this in verse 20: "for the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead." By the eternal power of God the apostle simply means the power by which He

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*Herman Hoeksema was the first editor of the Standard Bearer.*

is able to do things. They know it. They know that God is and that He is of eternal power. Of course, the apostle means to say too that they know that that stick which they put in the ground is not god. They know that.

But they know more. They also know the divinity of God. God's divinity is what distinguishes Him from all creatures. God's divinity is that which distinguishes Him from all that we see. As divine, He is not of this world. As divine, He is distinct from everything. As divine, He is wholly other from all that is called creature. The heathen know this. Man knows this. Man knows God's divinity. God's divinity is what is called His holiness in Scripture. God's holiness is that virtue in Him by which He demands that He must always be served, worshiped, glorified, praised, and thanked. Men know this.

Men know that God is not off somewhere in heaven. They know that there is power that surrounds them, a spiritual, living power that surrounds them, and that demands of them that they glorify Him. This is the train of my illustration. Men know this. Yet they do not glorify God, and thank Him.

To glorify God as God is to acknowledge that God is God, that He is good, and that He must be praised and worshiped. To give thanks means practically the same thing, only with the acknowledgment that from this God we receive all things. The food we eat, the water we drink, the air we breathe, all things, we receive from Him. The heathen knew this. They were conscious of the everlasting power and divinity of God.

Sin is not ignorance. Sin is corruption by which man refuses to acknowledge God, because he loves unrighteousness. If a man loves unrighteousness, he cannot, will not, and cannot will to glorify God. He will not give thanks because, as the apostle tells us in

verse 18, he holds the truth under in unrighteousness. Therefore, he refuses to go along with this power. He goes his own way.

This is madness. It is madness because, no more than that train, God will not stop. The truth does not change because we do not want it. God goes on, everlasting power, everlasting divinity. The sinner crosses this everlasting power and divinity. It is madness because the sinner knows that, coming against this power and divinity, he must be crushed.

### The Inexcusable Nature

But, perhaps, there was an excuse. The apostle shows, in verse 20, that no man has an excuse to run against the living God and be crushed. An excuse is something which weakens or even removes the blame for a fault. If a man does not reach a certain place in time, although the sin of being late is there, yet it may be excused. The man may not have known; he may have been misinformed; he may have been detained so that he could not come on time. Therefore, he is excused.

So, perhaps, this man who runs against God has an excuse. After all, God is invisible. The apostle says so in verse 20. Philosophers say that God cannot be seen — He is invisible — and, therefore, cannot be known. The atheist says, "Because we do not see God, there is no God."

But the apostle takes this excuse away. He shows that man is inexcusable. God has done something that makes him inexcusable. What is it? Why is man without excuse? The apostle explains that the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made. Verse 20 is an explanation of what the apostle mentions in verse 19, where he has said, "that which may be known of God, is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them." That which may be

known of God, or, as the original has it, that which is known of God. This means that what is known of God is manifest in them. Notice that the apostle does not say that it is revealed unto them. It is manifest in them. It is manifest in their heart and mind. The apostle does not mean to say that they have a revelation of God in nature as it is frequently explained. It is manifest in them. God made it known to them. There is not a man that does not know that God is. God makes known unto man His eternal power and divinity.

The apostle explains this. "For," he says, "the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made." By the invisible things of God, the apostle means all the virtues of the divine being. You cannot see God. God is hid. He is hid behind the veil of the material things. The essence of God is not seen. But the invisible things of God are seen, the apostle says.

This seems to be a paradox. The invisible things of God are seen. How? By the things that are made. The things that are made are the veil behind which God is hid. But that God is behind the veil is seen. The reason is that all these things are words. They are words of God. When God made these words, what did He speak about? There was not anything to speak about except Himself. But the apostle says that the invisible things of God are seen. They are not merely declared. The apostle says that man sees them. The apostle does not mean to say that man *may* know God, if he only takes notice of these things, but that he may also *not* know God, by not taking notice of them. No, the apostle means that man *must* know God. How does he know God? God brings these things into his heart and mind.

Creation is not a dead book. It is a living testimony. Through

it God brings the invisible things of God into his heart. Just as He brings the living testimony of the gospel into the hearts of His people, so He brings the living testimony of creation into the heart of man.

For this reason the invisible things of God are clearly seen. For this reason it is a good remedy, even for the Christian, to escape from this sophisticated world for a time (for we live in a very sophisticated world) and go to the woods, lie on his back, and say nothing. Do not say anything, do not spoil it by talking, just look up at the sky, listen to the birds, and look at the trees, the flowers, and the grass. This will be the testimony: "God is! God is eternal in power and eternal in Godhead! God must be praised!"

They know God; they know His eternal power and Godhead; they know that he must be glorified and praised.

### The Result

We would say that if man knows God in His power and divinity and that he must be glorified and praised, the expected result would be that man will glorify and praise Him. Just as when the driver of that car sees the signs and signals, and hears the train, the expected result would be that that driver step on the brake and stop the car. But the apostle says that the expected fails. Man knows God and that God must be praised and thanked, but man does not give thanks.

Why not?

In principle, the apostle gives the answer in verse 18: They hold the truth under in unrighteousness. Man wants unrighteousness. Now what does He do? He begins to talk. The apostle says that they became vain in their imaginations. Or, according to the original, they became vain in their own reasoning. Man began to philosophize about God. They set aside God's testimony concerning Him-

self because they wanted a god after their own heart. They did not want to let God tell them who He is. Then they began to philosophize. They said, "We will develop our own system of wisdom." This is philosophy. Philosophy says, "We will determine our own God." This is philosophy. This is also the philosophy for which we take off our cap. All philosophy is foolish because it does not want God.

What is the result? The apostle says that man became vain. He became vain, empty, void of the knowledge of God. Man may reason the knowledge of God away. Not in his deepest heart, for there he must know God. But man may reason so long that he reasons the knowledge of God away. Especially over generations man may reason so long that he reasons the knowledge of God away. He becomes vain. This is what the apostle means: Knowing God, he did not glorify and thank Him, and he became vain. He became vain with respect to the knowledge of God. He became vain, empty, with respect to the knowledge of God.

What was the result? The result was that as soon as they so reasoned with regard to God, they clashed with the wrath of God. That wrath of God struck them. Their foolish heart was darkened. God showed them that their wisdom is foolishness. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.

You understand, God showed them the foolishness of their wisdom when He cast them down before the image of corruptible man, and birds, and beasts, and creeping things. God said, "If you will not serve me, then I will make you fools." How does this become evident? By their idolatry. God made man foolish, and man made a picture of a corruptible man, and of an ox, and of creeping things. He said to that image: "Thou art my God. From thee do I expect

help and deliverance and salvation." They changed, in their mind and heart, the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, the apostle says, in the light of this explanation of man. I would be ashamed of it, if the gospel had nothing to say to this man who so holds the truth under in unrighteousness. I would be ashamed of the gospel if it did not have a remedy. But it has. For in it is revealed the righteousness of God which is by faith in Christ Jesus.

I would be ashamed of this gospel if I had to come into this world and offer to this world this righteousness. For then it would be hopeless. Man does not want righteousness. He loves unrighteousness. All history shows that man does not want righteousness. God's invisible things are clearly seen. Although this is not the gospel, it testifies of this one thing: man does not want righteousness. He holds the righteousness of God in nature under in unrighteousness. If I offer to this man the righteousness of Christ, he will also hold this truth under in unrighteousness. If he holds the righteousness of God revealed in nature under in unrighteousness, he will hold the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel under in unrighteousness.

But the gospel is not an offer. It is the power of God unto salvation. Just as God takes the testimony of nature and carries it into the heart of man, so He takes the testimony of the gospel concerning His Son and carries it into the heart of His elect.

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. For it is a power. It is the power which the sinner needs to save him from the death in which he holds the truth under in unrighteousness. □

# A Candid Confession of the Character of a Conditional Covenant (2)

God loves every physical child of believing parents.

In this love, God sincerely desires to save every physical child of believing parents.

This love of God for every child of believing parents is *covenant* love. It is not merely some superficial affection (supposing now that there is such a weak and fleeting emotion in God) that the children share with the entire ungodly world. It is not merely a love that desires their temporal welfare. It is not merely a warm feeling that gives these children earthly gifts.

But it is the rich, deep love of God revealed in the incarnation and death of Christ. It is love that wishes to bestow on them the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. It is love that longs to have them as sons and daughters in the family of the Elder Brother. It is love that sincerely desires their salvation.

Such is the character of the conditional covenant of God with the children of believers that is believed, confessed, and defended by many Reformed and Presbyterian churches today.

This was candidly confessed by a representative of the defenders of the doctrine in the January 1, 1997 issue of the *Standard Bearer*. In answer to my question, "Does the promise that, according to Rev. Tuininga, is made by God to every child of believing parents, express God's covenantal love for

every child?" the Rev. Cecil W. Tuininga wrote, "Yes, God does express His love for every covenant child." In answer to my question, "Does this promise indicate that God sincerely desires to save every child of believing parents?" he wrote, "Yes, God does desire to save every covenant child."

Tuininga's candid confession distinguishes itself from the vagueness and evasiveness at the crucial points of the statements of other defenders of the conditional covenant. Nevertheless, it does nothing more than make explicit what is, in fact, implicit in the main aspects of the doctrine. If God at their baptism makes His covenant with all baptized children and if God on His part promises to all children that He will be their God in Jesus Christ, God loves all baptized children with the love of the covenant and sincerely desires to save them. Scripture teaches that the establishment of the covenant with a person and the promise of salvation are the revelation of the love of God for that person.

The candor of the confession does serve to make clear that the doctrine of a conditional covenant is unbiblical and un-Reformed. For this reason, the candid confession is helpful. The subject is the physical children of believing parents. More specifically, the issue is the attitude and will of the covenant God in Jesus Christ toward

these children. As regards this exact subject and issue, it is the teaching of the apostle of Christ that God did not love both sons of Isaac and Rebekah. Before the sons were born or had done any good or evil, God made known that He loved Jacob and hated Esau (Rom. 9:10-13). Scripture flatly contradicts the teaching of the conditional covenant, that God loves all the children of believing parents.

Nor did God sincerely desire to save Esau as is held by the conditional covenant. God willed to harden Esau unto his eternal damnation (Rom. 9:18). He made Esau a vessel unto dishonor (Rom. 9:21). He fitted Esau, child of believing parents though he was, to destruction and endured that vessel of wrath (Rom. 9:22).

One thing Esau's circumcision (which had the same significance as the baptism of a child under the new covenant) did not mean: God's covenant love for him and, with this love, the desire to save him. One thing did not take place at Esau's circumcision: God's promising to establish His covenant with Esau.

The character, or nature, of the conditional covenant is un-Reformed in that it extends the saving love of God in Jesus Christ, the mediator of the covenant, to men and women who are not saved by that love, but perish in spite of it. God's love fails to save some objects of that love. God's

love failed to save Esau. The love of God — the *covenant* love of God — fails, is frustrated, is defeated.

It is the Reformed faith that the love of God in Jesus Christ — God's *covenant* love — is sovereign. It has its way with every sinner who is the object of this love. It saves. No human loved by God in Jesus Christ will perish. This is the creedal doctrine of the Reformed faith in the Canons of Dordt.

The other side of the un-Reformed character of the conditional covenant is its necessarily implied teaching that the reason why God's covenant love does save some children is an act which they perform. The reason cannot be the love of God itself, for the very same love is directed also to children who perish. The faith of Jacob, not the love of God, distinguished Jacob from Esau.

On the contrary, it is the Reformed faith that the salvation of the children of believing parents, which is part of the saving of the elect church, is due only to the discriminating love of God for these children. "This purpose proceeding from everlasting love towards the elect, has from the beginning of the world to this day been powerfully accomplished, and will henceforward still continue to be accomplished ... so that the elect in due time may be gathered together into one ..." (Canons II/9).

As the candid confession makes plain, the conditional covenant is essentially the same as the doctrine that God loves all men, desires to save all, well-meaningly offers salvation to all in the gospel, and depends for the efficacy of His love and the fulfillment of His desire upon the acceptance of His offer by the sinner. This is put beyond any doubt by the texts to which Rev. Tuininga appeals in the questions which he puts to me in return: Matthew 23:37; I Timothy 2:3,4; II Peter 3:9. The only differences between the conditional covenant and the doctrine

of a universal love of God dependent upon the free will of the sinner are that the conditional covenant teaches universal love in the sphere of the covenant, rather than in the sphere of the preaching of the gospel worldwide; speaks of a conditional promise, rather than of a conditional offer of the gospel; and locates the conditional address of God in baptism, rather than in the preaching of the gospel.

In the Canons of the Synod of Dordt, the Reformed churches have officially condemned the doctrine of a universal, ineffectual love of God dependent upon the condition of faith as false doctrine, as a form of the "other gospel" anathematized by Paul in Galatians 1:8,9.

Why the representative of the proponents of a conditional covenant holds back from acknowledging that Jesus died for all the physical children of believers is a mystery. He does so hold back. To my question, "Did Jesus Christ shed His blood for every baptized child of believing parents?" he answers, "No, Jesus shed His blood only for those given Him by the Father." No doubt, there is hesitation to contradict the established Reformed doctrine of "limited atonement." This is commendable.

But it is no worse to deny limited atonement than to deny God's discriminating love and particular will of salvation, that is, divine election. Fact is, the Canons of Dordt ground the atonement in election and determine the extent of the atonement according to the number of those whom God desires to save:

... it was the will of God, that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby he confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation, and given to him by the Father ... (II/8).

On the reckoning of the Canons, if God loves and desires to save all the children of believing parents, Christ also died for all the children.

Can even the most paradoxical of Calvinistic thinkers be satisfied with the theology of the conditional covenant? The covenant God in Jesus Christ loves all the children alike with His covenant love, but designs the atonement to exclude some of them! He desires to save them all, but deliberately refuses to accomplish for some of them the redemption upon which this salvation depends!

This thrusts contradiction and confusion into the mind and will of God. At the very least, it drives a wedge between the electing Father and the redeeming Son, contrary to the testimony of Jesus Himself in John 6:37-40.

And what does this say of the truthfulness of God who, according to the conditional covenant, declares to every child at baptism, Esau as well as Jacob: "I love you with covenant love; I make my covenant with you; I adopt you for my son and heir; I sincerely desire your salvation; and I promise to give you eternal life"? As He is saying these things, it is unalterably true that Christ did not die for that particular child by the determination of the God who is speaking to the child. Christ did not confirm the covenant for the child, did not satisfy divine justice for the child (upon which adoption depends), did not obtain salvation for the child, did not earn faith for the child.

According to the Reformed "Form for the Administration of Baptism," the promise given by God in baptism is not abstracted from the cross, but is based upon the cross and has the cross as its content. If then, as the conditional covenant teaches, God makes the promise to every baptized child, Christ must have died for every child.

So much is universal atone-

ment demanded by a universal love of God in Jesus Christ that wherever the latter is taught the former invariably follows. This has happened in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) as Rev. Tuininga, who only recently left this church, knows well. The covenant doctrine that prevailed in the CRC from its early days was the conditional covenant of Prof. W. Heyns. Like all forms of the conditional covenant, this doctrine taught a grace, or love, of God for all the children of believers. This doctrine paved the way for the adoption of the doctrine of common grace in 1924. The main error of this dogma of the CRC is its teaching that God in Christ loves and desires to save everyone who hears the gospel. In the 1960s, a Christian Reformed theologian publicly advocated universal atonement. The synod of the CRC refused to condemn this doctrine. Today, it is widespread in the CRC to preach that Christ died for all men. It is equally widespread among the people to believe that Christ died for all men.

I would be surprised if, especially in the Netherlands where the conditional covenant has been strongly promoted, Reformed ministers do not teach that Christ died for all the children of believers and Reformed people do not have this as their deep conviction.

To my question, whether faith is included among the benefits promised to the children at baptism, the Rev. Tuininga answered, "No, faith is a condition that a covenant child must fulfill but can only fulfill by God's grace (Eph. 2:8). If they do not fulfill this condition they are cut off the covenant tree (Rom. 11:22)."

This has to be his answer as one who teaches that God addresses the covenant promise to every baptized child. If faith is one of the benefits included in the promise to every child, faith cannot be the condition upon which reception of the promise depends,

as is the teaching of the conditional covenant. Also, if faith is one of the benefits included in the promise, God must give faith to every child, which the conditional covenant denies.

But in denying that faith is itself a benefit included in the covenant promise, the conditional covenant goes grievously wrong. First, this is, in reality, a denial that faith is the gift of God to sinners as the Canons teach in III, IV/14. All of the gifts that belong to salvation were earned by the death of Christ and come to the heirs of salvation by promise. The Canons expressly state that Christ earned faith for all the elect by His death (II/8). Acts 2:38, 39 teaches that those who are called receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, which includes every spiritual grace, *as promise and by promise*.

Second, the denial that faith is part of the promise contradicts the confessions. The Presbyterian Westminster Confession of Faith teaches that in the covenant of grace God "promis(es) to give unto all those that are ordained unto life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe (7.3)." The point to notice is not that Westminster strictly limits the promise to the elect (which it does), but that it makes faith a benefit included in the promise itself.

The Reformed Heidelberg Catechism does the same in Question 74: To the infants of believers, "the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is promised." In the promise of the author of faith to the children is promised the faith of which He is author. How can Rev. Tuininga, bound as he is by the Heidelberg Catechism, deny that faith is included among the benefits in the promise that God makes to the children of believers? But if it is included, how can it be the condition upon which depends the fulfillment of a universal promise? And if it is included in the promise that God supposedly makes to every child, why does God not ful-

fill His promise to every child?

To affirm at the end that the child fulfills the condition of faith "by God's grace" is not sufficient to rescue the doctrine of a conditional covenant from heresy. For one thing, even the outright Arminian, who attributes faith to man's free will, does not refuse to say, especially when he is being pressed by a champion of God's free grace, that sinners believe with the help of God's grace. In addition, the mere statement that the child believes "by God's grace" is overpowered by the teaching itself that faith is the condition of the fulfillment of the promise and that faith is not included among the benefits that God promises to the children.

Besides, in the popular presentation of the doctrine of a conditional covenant, the defenders of this doctrine usually say nothing at all about the child's believing "by God's grace." The latest issue of the magazine, *Lux Mundi*, is an example of this. Explaining the meaning of baptism, the editor, a theologian who holds the conditional covenant, writes:

The triune God himself acts in baptism.... He assures the person baptized that *the promises* of his covenant are for him. In the sign and seal of baptism he *promises* such a person regeneration by the Holy Spirit and forgiveness of sins and eternal life. And to *all* who accept his promises in faith God also gives what he promises! (Dec. 15, 1996, p. 1)

There is not so much as a hint that the baptized sinner believes "by God's grace." On the contrary, the reader is given to understand that the salvation of the child depends on his own act of "accepting" the promises of God. Indeed, this popular presentation of the conditional covenant teaches gross false doctrine: the baptized infant's regeneration depends upon his faith. God, we are told, promises to regenerate all who ac-

cept His promise in faith. James Arminius was not so bold.

The candid confession of the character of the conditional covenant by Rev. Tuininga throws into bold relief the fundamental departure from the Reformed faith of this doctrine of the covenant. The root of the errors regarding the love of God, God's will of salvation, the cross, the promise, and faith is the conception of the covenant as established conditionally with every child at baptism. This is the conception that Rev. Tuininga affirms when he answers my questions about the work of the triune God described by our Reformed "Form" as the second principal part of the doctrine of holy baptism. To my questions

whether God the Father makes an eternal covenant of grace with every child; whether God the Son seals to every child that He washes him in His blood; and whether God the Holy Ghost assures every child that He will dwell in him, *on the condition that the child will believe*, Rev. Tuininga answers, "Yes; yes; yes."

It is this conception of the covenant with the children of believers, which refuses to view the covenant in the light of predestination (as Paul does in Romans 9), that necessarily results in the teaching of universal covenant love and a universal will of salvation within the sphere of the covenant.

I have earlier set forth on these

pages, and defended, a doctrine of an unconditional covenant of grace with believers and their true, spiritual children according to election (a series on "The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers" in vol. 66; a related series on "The Approach to Covenant Children" in vol. 67; and a series on "An 'Election Theology' of Covenant" in vol. 67). These articles are readily available. I need not repeat what I wrote in them.

What I must do, however, is answer the questions that Rev. Tuininga has put to me as a defender of the unconditional covenant.

With the same candor with which he answered mine. □

— DJE

## Letters

### ■ Appropriate

After having read the letter "Not Appropriate" (*Standard Bearer*, Dec. 1, 1996) by Mr. Marc Carpenter, and having reread the article entitled "The Reformed Family: Teachers" (*SB*, Sept. 15, 1996) by Mrs. Lubbers, I am somewhat confused as to the nature of Mr. Carpenter's objection.

His letter reads, "my wife and I were offended at the lack of personal purity that some parts of the article endorsed." I am left wondering, to whose lack of purity does he refer? Mrs. Lubbers' or Miss Reitsma's? Indeed, in the record of Mrs. Lubbers' memory, a portion is given to the physical appearance of Miss Reitsma. Her recollection is that of an eighth grade girl, with the accompanying sights and understandings. She recalls this particular teacher as being attractive and describes it in that manner. Nowhere does she suggest that Miss Reitsma acted inappropriately with the beauty God bestowed upon her. There is no lack of purity in *being* beautiful; there is no lack of purity in *seeing* it.

Complaint is given that "no

mention is made that any heads that turned were turned in wickedness." It is not necessary nor judicious to state the *intent of the heart* with respect to heads turned some years ago. I was struck with the description of a memory that indicated a particular teacher to have a spiritual, youthful, vivacious, and attractive approach to the calling God gave her. While some may have turned in wickedness, it is equally possible that they turned in awe of the godly attitude with which she apparently carried herself.

Mr. Carpenter also asks, with respect to the showing of a movie and Miss Reitsma's covering of the lens at a bedroom scene (of husband and wife), "Were these protests sinful? Why were her eyes dancing with mischief?" I can only assume that since she covered the lens, she was fully aware of the sinful nature of eighth graders to interpret such a scene wrongly and improperly. "Mischief in her eyes" is the subjective analysis of an eighth grader, remembered over the passage of many years. To judge the purpose or intent of such a thing at this point in time would

be pointless and far beyond the nature of an article which merely reports that memory.

Finally, Mr. Carpenter points out the lack of emphasis on personal holiness in Reformed circles. While this is always to be a matter of great concern, I do not see this as a fault of articles like Mrs. Lubbers'. *Seeing* physical beauty and *reporting* its existence are never sinful, but placing an importance on it above or before spiritual beauty is at fault, for the physical is but a picture (poor and sin-filled) of the spiritual. I understood Mrs. Lubbers' descriptions in that light, as seeing and reporting that physical beauty in Miss Reitsma: not more important, not necessary to and not above that spiritual beauty which God wrought in her, which resulted in a portion of the godly training of Mrs. Lubbers and many others.

According to the memory of Mrs. Lubbers, Miss Reitsma considered the following worthy of her daily labors for God's covenant children: memorizing poetry and Psalters; singing spirituals; encouraging skills of logic and rhetoric; preparing students to live without

a teacher; enthusiasm for her calling regardless of personal struggle; respect for and necessity of godly ministers in the school; regular chapels; school programs in the way of music and Scripture; motivating kids to think; and several more.

If I had thought there were any possibility that Mrs. Lubbers considered the physical beauty of Miss Reitsma to be essential or necessary to the making of a godly teacher, my doubts would have been dispelled when reading the following: "this vibrant, energetic teacher lay weak and wasted, her pallor at one with the white, crisp sheets. Even those wonderful green eyes were robbed of vitality." Having seen her beloved teacher in the ugliness of death, Mrs. Lubbers goes on to recount the permanent written record of Miss Reitsma's last letters to her students. Her words (Miss Reitsma's) are a lasting, beautiful, and very spiritual confession. For

Mrs. Lubbers, her teacher's physical beauty is wasted and gone, but the spiritual beauty of that confession, which Miss Reitsma was used of God to impart, has remained. When I read that beautiful confession, I wept for the covenant children who do not have the benefit of such teachers, with or without physical beauty.

Thank you, Mrs. Lubbers, for reminding us of the importance of godly, Reformed teachers. If God is merciful to provide them, it is of no consequence whether they remain in our children's memories as physically beautiful, ugly, or otherwise, so long as they recall and live that godly and Reformed way of thinking that Miss Reitsma apparently taught and lived.

(Mrs.) Deborah Benson  
Elgin, IL

#### ■ Appreciation

I wish to express my appreciation for two reasons.

First, I am thoroughly pleased by your frequent inclusion of

meditations by Rev. Herman Hoeksema. His piercing insight into God's Word, and His simple, straightforward style of exposition always strengthens my faith and sends new rays of God's light streaming into my heart.

Secondly, Rev. Moore's enthusiasm for the mission work in Ghana should be an encouragement for us all to join together in promoting this work "with prayers, gifts, letters, visits, etc.," as he suggests. Our churches have made the decision (guided, we trust, by the Holy Spirit), to pursue this mission endeavor. May our Lord raise up the right man for missionary, with a willing team of helpers; and may He work powerfully to gather His own in that place.

"Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands: Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious" (Ps. 66:1, 2).

John Hilton  
Edgerton, MN

### In Memoriam

## Rev. Robert C. Harbach

*On Saturday evening, December 14, 1996, the earthly pilgrimage of our beloved Rev. Harbach ended, when the Lord took him from a nursing home to his eternal home and eternal reward.*



Soft-spoken, unassuming, never one to seek, or even to want, a place of prominence among men.

But, in the kingdom, a "giant warrior of the faith." In referring to him thus in his funeral message, Rev. Spriensma was speaking for all those who were privileged to sit under Rev. Harbach's preaching, either in an established church or on a mission field. One needed

not to listen long to Rev. Harbach, or to read much of his writing, to be persuaded that this minister of the gospel of grace not only talked the truth but loved it and valiantly defended it.

A "warrior." "It matters not," he once wrote from a mission field, "that we may have to stand alone in all this bleak, and religious, wilderness. It is our calling to let our

light shine before men, and to 'set up the standard toward Zion' (Jer. 4:6)." "These are days," Rev. Harbach continued, "when preaching is largely ignored, especially Reformed preaching. It is pushed aside for dashes of religious entertainment. Men who occupy the pulpit (I hate calling them ministers) do not preach the Word, do not preach sermons. The people

do not hear the Word. Many of them do not ask for bread, being satisfied with stones, which is what they get."

"But," he added, "the preaching of the Word is still to be heard. By it we learn to know the truth, embrace it, live in it, and gain heaven by it.... For by such means the sovereign God purposes to save those who believe, and to gather together in one the children of God scattered abroad."

Rev. Harbach considered preaching "a very serious stewardship, a weighty trust committed to Christ's ministers." His own preaching reflected untold hours in the study. So did his writing. It sparkled with illustrations not only from church fathers but also from English poets and Greek philosophers.

Hardly was it the case however that all of his source material was on the shelves of his library. He was a careful and appreciative student of another "book," one which he "read" with the aid of field binoculars, or, sometimes, an underwater face mask and a snorkel. For the July 1979 issue of this magazine Rev. Harbach submitted a "Contribution" entitled "Come Ye Apart." In that single article are woven effectively references to some 45 different kinds of birds.

"There are times," he wrote, "when in our busy round of toil and care we must take time to come apart and rest awhile or we may come apart. The needed rest, one, a grey-beard, finds in twenty minutes of running three times a week. But since life today is so characterized by hurry, why, it may be asked, take up running to gain that needed refreshing? Why not, rather, take the time to notice the flora and fauna, to smell the flowers? Even though creation's glorious characters are large enough so that he that runneth may read, much is missed in the flurry and scurry of life. The world is a beautiful place; as Moses wrote in Genesis One, very

beautiful. But in the mad pace of our Western life-style we are all too often heedless of the beauty fashioned by the divine artisan."

Rev. Harbach then puts it all in perspective when he concludes,

Not nature itself, not anything of the world, but the spiritual gift and ability to read parables divine revealed in the creation do comfort the soul. So field or Kleinstückwald in snow-laden winter becomes a haven from the strife of tongues and the crashing din of sin in the world. The woods ring with the crow of the cock pheasant; Black-capped Chickadees twitter high aloft; the noisy Titmouse proclaims its presence; the Redpolls and Purple Finches make it a red letter day; a Towhee scratches on the leafy forest floor; Pine Siskins appear, then vanish; a small flock of Cedarbirds eats its way through the winter berries lading the bushes, while ubiquitous Juncos lead the way on our path! The death of winter teems with life! Ask the birds of the air and they shall tell thee. But He maketh us wiser than the birds of heaven. The stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed time, and the turtle-dove and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but My people know not the judgment of the Lord. The birds observe the approach of winter: do we the winter of judgment? O how manifold are Thy works! In wisdom hast Thou made them all. The earth is full of Thy riches!

Of all the many references made in the Bible to nature, the singing of birds is mentioned only three times. Yet in the loud and lovely song emitted from their tiny throats, we think miracles have not ceased. It must be most glorious music that is reserved for the saints in heaven, since the Lord allows wicked men such music on earth!

So much he enjoyed the music of little songbirds! Now he knows also that more glorious music, for he has joined the multitude of redeemed in glory, standing on the sea of crystal, singing the song of

Moses and the song of the Lamb, "Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty" (Rev. 15:2, 3).

◆ ◆ ◆

After his retirement from the ministry, and before Parkinson's disease left him unable to work at all, Rev. Harbach remained active in his study. From his pen came a number of pamphlets and regular contributions to the *SB*. We are glad for that; but we are thankful especially, that in the good providence of God, Rev. Harbach was able to finish his greatest work, *Studies in the Book of Genesis*. A lasting legacy! Any reflection on the gifts of God to His church through the dedicated labors of Rev. Harbach would be incomplete without mention of that book. Its "Foreword," written also by the undersigned, includes the kind of biographical information which, we think, will be a fitting conclusion for this article in memory of its author.

### Foreword

The author, the Rev. Robert C. Harbach, was born on July 27, 1914, in Riverdale, Maryland. As a boy, he went through the Philadelphia Public School system, and, on graduation from high school in 1933, thought first of going into art and journalism. He had a change of heart, however, and enrolled instead in the Philadelphia School of the Bible, founded by C.I. Scofield, the noted dispensationalist. By the spring of 1939 he had graduated from that institution and went on to study at the Theological School of the Reformed Episcopal Church. Not one to miss an opportunity both to gain valuable experience and to be of service, he spent one of the summers of his three years at the R.E. Seminary working with a missionary in Kentucky.

His wife Roberta, meanwhile, was attending night school at the Philadelphia School of the Bible

and she herself graduated from there in 1944. That was one year after her husband had received his diploma from the Reformed Episcopal Seminary. After graduation, Rev. Harbach became involved with Child Evangelism Fellowship. From an office in Boston he served as director of the Eastern Massachusetts' branch of the Fellowship. After holding that position for a couple of years, he received a call in 1946 from Emmanuel Reformed Episcopal Church of Somerville, New Jersey. He was pastor there until, through the influence particularly of the late Rev. Marinus Schipper, he decided in 1950 to move to Grand Rapids, in order to study further in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

It was in Grand Rapids that his children were born — Philip in 1951, during Rev. Harbach's first year in the Protestant Reformed Seminary, and Janice in 1955, two years after his graduation. It was in 1955 also that Rev. Harbach received a call from the Protestant Reformed Church in Lynden, Washington. He served as pastor there for seven and a half years till, in 1963, he accepted a call from the Kalamazoo (Michigan) Protestant Reformed Church.

Eleven years later he took another call, this one to serve as home missionary in Houston, Texas. During his three years of labor there the Trinity Protestant Reformed Church was organized, on February 15, 1977. Soon after, Rev. Harbach took the call to be missionary in Victoria, British Columbia. It was there that he closed out his active ministerial career. His retirement in 1979, after only two years of service in Victoria, was precipitated by very serious sight problems. Cataracts had brought blindness to one of his eyes and much impaired vision to the other. So, in 1979, Rev. Harbach officially retired from the ministry and returned to Grand Rapids.

In Grand Rapids he submitted to successful eye surgery. Intraocular lens inserts brought, in the good counsel of God, restoration of vision to both eyes. Rev. Harbach was of course deeply grateful to the Lord for that recovery. It meant, for one thing, that the beauties of God's handiwork in creation would still be available to his sight. He had always been one to take great pleasure in that. It happens that birds were a special fascination of his. In Kalamazoo he would carry his books from his study to the living room so that, while he was preparing sermons, he could keep an eye on the bird feeder which stood outside the picture window. During his stay in Houston he loved to go to the marshlands or to the coastal area, loaded down with telescope, binoculars, camera, and field guides. He kept a written record of sightings of different species of birds. Letters to his children, from the mission field, often included detailed accounts of the location, time, and circumstances of his observation of unusual birds.

His appreciation for natural beauty went far beyond birds however. He used his three-inch telescope not only for studying birds, but also for looking into the heavens at night. And his camera has been used for taking pictures of everything from majestic mountain scenery to tiny flowers — all of which reveal the greatness of their Creator, to those to whom God has given *spiritual* eyes to see. In one of those letters to his son Phil, Rev. Harbach wrote, "How good it is to know the Lord! How good that He speaks to us in His Word. What a glorious word He speaks to us in the Book of Creation! I see there His infinite MAJESTY. I see *miracles* before my very eyes. Just a little plover is a source of delight, as though it were something supernatural! How glorious heaven must be!"

Yes, Rev. Harbach was indeed

thankful for the restoration of his sight. That "Book of Creation" remained as it were open to his view. But he was concerned about other books too. The manuscript for a possible commentary on the book of Genesis, for example, lay unfinished in his study. That was a project which he very much wanted to complete. And it seemed for awhile as if it might have been placed just beyond his reach. But, as this volume proves, the Lord willed otherwise.

Apart from that unfinished "book," Rev. Harbach had in his study shelves of books which for years had been special friends. When he moved to Victoria, it happened that he was not able, or did not choose, to take with him *all* of his books. As a result, he often felt "like a workman without his tools." His "workshop" now was in British Columbia and some of his "tools" were 2,600 miles away. So close had he always been to those tools that, when on occasion he would call or write Phil, asking that a particular volume be sent to him, he would be able to describe its exact location in the study (not only on which shelf it was, but what particular place it occupied on that shelf — "third shelf on the right, fourth book from the left side").

Rev. Harbach is an avid reader. His knowledge of astronomy (to say nothing of physics) becomes evident in his treatment of God's work of creation on the fourth day. The same can be said for what he writes concerning the fifth day of creation week. He can, for example, give an interesting description of the coot — a kind of "half duck and half chicken" — from *his own observation* of the bird in a lake near the southern tip of Cape May Point in New Jersey. All of those visits to the swamps and the sea coast have paid handsome dividends in the writing of his commentary on Genesis. When the writer is able to describe the beauty of the sea

floor, having himself donned a face mask to observe it in the Caribbean at Jamaica, it becomes obvious that he is not one who has contented himself with poring over theological tomes in ivory towers. Rev. Harbach has read *widely*, and has a *broad* range of experiences and interests. In fact, when in his continued reading he would come upon pertinent information for chapters already completed, he would make marginal notes for updating of, or additions or corrections to, what he had written earlier. Sometimes too he would rewrite certain sections in order to make relevant application of the book of Genesis to *events* in the latter part of the 1970s and early 1980s. And all of this continued right up to the time he had at last to surrender the manuscript to the typesetter. The fruit of that kind of effort, over a period of some thirty years, can be seen now in an extraordinarily fascinating book from his pen.

Rev. Harbach is a scholar. It is apparent too that his commentary on Genesis was written by a learned man. But it is not technical. Frequent reference is indeed made in the book to the Hebrew and Greek, but Rev. Harbach does that in such a way that it is a help rather than a hindrance to the serious reader. One need not have had seminary training in order fully to appreciate this work. Neither, however, was the book intended to be merely devotional. It is that too, to be sure, but, as the reader will very soon learn for himself, the purpose goes beyond that. The book is first of all instructive. Genesis, as the author points out in his preface, is indeed the "key to the rest of scripture." This commentary helps one to get a good hold on that key. Where and when appropriate, various doctrinal errors and false theories are exposed and refuted. And, throughout the book, the truth of

God's particular grace and particular covenant is ably set forth.

His life having been influenced especially by two books — Pink's *Sovereignty of God* and Boettner's *Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* — Rev. Harbach came to appreciate early the truth of double predestination. In all of his ministry he tried to preach in harmony with that great truth. His book gives ample evidence of that commitment. And, having come out of Presbyterian background, Rev. Harbach also learned to appreciate the fact that man's aim in life must be *God's* aim, namely, the glorification of His name. Again, throughout his ministry, Rev. Harbach strove to keep that goal in view — not the saving of souls, but the glorifying of God in all things. To that end he wrote this book. And we thank the Lord for what He has given us through the faithful labors of Rev. Harbach. □

Don Doezema

## Apples of Gold

### To the Earth

Ah, thou pristine globe,  
fresh  
from thy Creator's hand;  
embryo  
within the waters  
of thy firmament land.

Pure and warm,  
the very essence  
of exquisite beauty.  
"It is good,"  
proclaimed He then,  
though not His last words to thee.

Would thy newborn  
innocence remain —  
alas,  
'tis lost, e'en worse —  
thou cursed!  
And thou, what hast thou done,  
but sheltered, fed, and nursed  
the wicked ones!

Yet — thou art promised new!  
Washed  
with cataclysmic dearth;  
thy baptism is unequalled  
upon the earth!

Noah and his sons beheld  
this picture of the seal.  
What will we see  
when we observe  
the coming of the real?

— Connie L. Meyer

**"Reverend or Pastor?"**

It is not the practice, normally, of this rubric, "All Around Us," to respond to articles written in other of our church-related papers. I am making an exception this time — both because of the seriousness of the article itself and because it relates to articles I had written earlier on this same subject.

The article to which I refer appeared in the young people's magazine, *Beacon Lights* (Oct. 1995), titled: "Reverend or Pastor?" by Pastor Bruce Davis. I will not be quoting the article except for brief statements. The reader is referred to that magazine for the article itself.

I wrote on the subject earlier (*Standard Bearer*, Vol. 64, pages 204 and 369). The curious could well examine those articles as well.

I am not overly interested in entering into debates about the proper title of one who serves in the ministry. When proper respect is shown to the office of ministry of the Word, the specific title used is to me not that important. Granted: it must be in agreement with the teachings of Scripture. It must also be granted that language is the means to convey one's thought — also with respect to the matter of titles. One faces also the fact that in some circles, and perhaps some nations, the same word may communicate different ideas to different people. This possibly leads to the differing conclusions concerning specific titles. A minister's "title" might be perfectly acceptable in one area but might be considered in poor taste, if not worse, in other areas.

In the *Standard Bearer* (Vol. 64, p. 204), I quoted an article in which the title "Reverend" was de-

fended by a writer who opposed those rejecting the title for grammatical reasons. The article, in my opinion, was interesting and informative. A reader responded by claiming that *all* titles given to those in the ministry were improper (including that of "pastor"). He insisted, as others also do in the British Isles, that the title of "Mr." is the *only* proper title — just as it is used when speaking to non-clergy. He did not, of course, justify even that title on the basis of Scripture — for it is never used there when speaking of anyone. In Scripture normally only first names were used — something we would consider inappropriate today.

I do think brother Davis' article deserves some response. Pastor Davis insisted that respect must be shown to those in office — not only in the ministry, but also to those in the offices of elder and deacon as well. Rightly he pointed out that this respect is not because of the *individual* in the office, but because of the *office* itself.

The article, however, presented to me some very serious and troubling points. I understand that to convince others of the validity of one's argument, one tends to use the strongest possible language. It reminds me of the "pastor" who would pound the pulpit hard at those points in his sermon which he regarded to be weakest. I understand too the need to come with Scripture above all to prove one's point. The danger here too is that one tends to quote very powerful truths of Scripture — which in fact do not prove one's contention on the issue which has been raised.

One very disturbing argument Pastor Davis presented is this, "...the judgment of God's Word is nevertheless that this is a violation of the third commandment." This he claimed with regard to the use

of the title "Reverend." He "graciously" added, "Even though in such cases the third commandment might be broken in ignorance and not in a deliberate and malicious way, *it is still using the Lord's name in vain*" (italics mine). That is obviously very strong language — and a serious charge against all those who use the title. If this claim is true, there is no more room for debate. It is not even here Pastor Davis' *opinion* about what Scripture teaches; he insists that this is *Scripture's* (God's) judgment. After Scripture's judgment is presented, and I have read and considered it, then even the argument of *ignorance* on my part is no longer valid. At this point all "Reverends" are no longer ignorant, but are deliberately walking in violation to the third commandment. (Even ignorance, however, is never an excuse for sin.) For me to argue against Pastor Davis' position means, in his judgment, that in reality I am arguing against Scripture. If his position is correct, surely he can have no fellowship nor contact with those who (knowingly) use the title "Reverend"; these live *impenitently* in violation of the third commandment. That's a terribly serious position to take.

But let's consider a few of the possible titles which are or have been used for ministers of the gospel. The one Pastor Davis finds objectionable is that of "Reverend." Evidently many others feel the same way — judging from the shunning of such a label by those who insist on calling themselves "pastors." Whatever one might think of the title itself, or whether one might find a better title, is not the question. Is it a wrong, even a *sinful*, title? It surely is if it is violation of the third commandment. The brother bases this argument not only on the obvious fact that we do not read of "Rev. Paul," or

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Rev. VanBaren is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Loveland, Colorado.

"Rev. Peter," etc. He points especially to one text in Scripture (as others have also) with the claim that Psalm 111:9 will not allow this title to be given to *mere man*. We read there, "...holy and reverend is his name." He is correct: it means here "awesome; dreadful and terrible in majesty; to be feared with the deepest reverential awe." One must understand, however, that even if this is regarded as God's "Name," Scripture shows clearly that one is also called to "reverence" others who are mere creatures. The word describes what is true of God's *name*. The word also means to "reverence" or "to fear" in that godly sense — the concern lest one show disrespect in any way to one in authority. But this word can be, and is, used in Scripture also with respect to humans in authority. But remember also: if the term "reverend" is regarded as God's "Name," which may not therefore be used for mere men, the same must be said about the term "holy." We must not then speak of a "holy" catholic church. We must not use the term "saints" either. The text would be in conflict with Leviticus 19:2 which teaches that we *must* be holy because God is holy.

But note a few other passages of Scripture that speak of "reverence." In II Samuel 9:6, Mephibosheth falls on his face before David and "did reverence." David did not rebuke him for violating the third command. I Kings 1:31 finds Bathsheba bowing before David and she "did reverence to the king." She was not rebuked at all for this. We find in Ephesians 5:33 that the wife is to "see that she reverence her husband." Or we read in Hebrews 12:9, "We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence...." In each instance the "reverence" is directed to those in authority: the king, the husband, the father. If this is proper, if *this* is not violation of the third com-

mand, would not the same apply to this title for the office of minister of the Word? One may dislike the title of "Reverend" for other reasons, but surely not because it in any way violates Scripture and specifically the third commandment. In fact it would appear to be an *appropriate* title in light of the passages quoted above.

Is not the title "pastor" more appropriate? Pastor Davis not only claims that it is, but he claims that it is the only proper *biblical* title. Is this true? If you read the letter in the *Standard Bearer* (Vol. 64, p. 369), you will find that the writer there was not only objecting to the title "reverend," but equally so to "pastor." He wanted only the respectful address of "Mr." Rightly Davis points out that Christ is our "Chief Shepherd." He is correct also in insisting that ministers of the Word are "Undershepherds." But then if he is to be scripturally correct, he should use this word "pastor" in such a manner that it would clearly distinguish him from the "Chief Shepherd." His title would be more correctly, "Undershepherd Bruce Davis," right? Otherwise it might appear to some that he is usurping the position of Christ who is *the* Pastor. Besides, no one is called "Pastor" So-in-so in Scripture. We do not read of "Pastor Paul" and "Pastor Peter."

Pastor Davis refers to Ephesians 4:11 — a beautiful passage. He insists that we are taught there that Christ did not give "reverends" but rather "pastors and teachers" as gifts to the church. But then, following this line of argumentation, why would he not use the *whole* phrase in his title: "Pastor and Teacher Bruce Davis"? That, after all, is what the passage teaches. In spite of Calvin's separation of these two terms "pastors" and "teachers," the grammar of the passage links the two terms clearly. The "pastor" and "teacher" is the same individual. He must serve as a "pastor" but

he must also serve as "teacher." Pastor Davis would nevertheless drop one part and make use of only the other. Why? Ought he to separate what God's Word joins together?

That brings up my second serious objection to his contention that "pastor" is the appropriate and scriptural title for ministers of the Word. The minister must truly be a pastor. He is an "undershepherd." This, however, is not the *extent* of his work. The title Pastor Davis takes to himself and labels as "scriptural" describes only *one aspect* of his labors. The idea of "teacher" is also a *vital* aspect of the work — and Ephesians 4:11 distinguishes between the two. The terms are not identical by any means. I conclude, therefore, that the title "Pastor" appended to a minister's name is, at best, very inadequate because it is incomplete.

So if "Pastor" Davis insists that this is his title, I'm not going to raise any further objections. He ought to consider, however, that the title is likely an imitation of those who insist that the major part of the work of the minister is "counseling" and that "teaching" somehow is minimized or even lost altogether. I would see the title "Reverend" more in harmony with the broad teachings of Scripture. One might say, in line with Scripture's instruction, "See that ye reverence those who are called to minister the Word to you." Such a title does not select one aspect of his work, but rather emphasizes the high calling both to pastor and to teach.

And I trust that Pastor Davis will retract his serious charge that those who have the title "Reverend" are thereby violating the third command.

If we were to follow strictly the scriptural pattern, we would not use *any* of these titles (not even "Mr."). One notices repeatedly that New Testament writers use the term "servant" or literally,

"slave." Paul speaks of himself as "servant of Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:1; Titus 1:1). The term is used by the other writers as well (James 1:1; II Pet. 1:1; Jude 1). And Paul

addresses Timothy and speaks of the minister of the Word as the "servant of the Lord" (II Tim. 2:24). Properly, therefore, Pastor

Davis should rather label himself as "Bruce Davis, slave of Jesus Christ." It does have a better ring, does it not? And that is surely his calling and mine. □

## Search the Scriptures

Rev. Mitchell Dick

# The Truth Shall Make You Free

## John 8:30-36

Certainly the key verse in this passage is verse 32. There Jesus says: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

What wonderful gospel here! Truth! Yes, there *is* truth! No, everything is *not* relative. No, all is not chaos. There *is* truth!

Besides, *it can be known!* Besides, this truth *does something*. And that something is *very wonderful!* The truth, and only the truth, and nothing but the truth *makes us free!*

### For Study, Meditation, and Discussion

#### Jesus the Truth!

☞ When Jesus speaks of the *truth* making one free, He is speaking of *Himself* making one free. Prove this from the passage in John 8:30-36. Show from other Scriptures that Jesus is the truth.

☞ The question is: what does Scripture *mean* by calling Jesus *the truth*? Just what *is* truth (cf. passages such as Deut. 32:4; Ps. 31:5; 51:6; 117:2; 119:42; Prov. 8:7; Jer. 9:2b-6; John 1:14; 14:6ff.; Rom. 3:3, 4, 7; 15:8, 9; I Tim. 3:15)?

☞ Show from Scripture how truth is revealed in *creation, inspiration, incarnation, proclamation, and through the indwelling of the Spirit of truth*. Which revelation of truth "sets free," that is, *saves*? When

Jesus says the truth shall make you free, what is He saying about who is the Author of salvation, and how He saves? Show other passages which teach the same things (for example, Jonah 2:9b; Rom. 10:14, 15; Eph. 2:8).

☞ Jesus Christ *is* the truth. Comment, in this connection, on what is called the Judeo-Christian ethic. What does Jesus' being *exclusively* the truth say of our involvement in non-Christian organizations which aim to promote what is said to be the common goals and values of all people?

☞ We have asked, "What is truth?" Pilate asked the same question (John 18:38). Would he have known truth had He been staring him in the face?! Why or why not? In this connection ponder the following questions: Does mere *exposure* to the truth imply that the truth is *revealed* to all who

are exposed to it? How do Jesus' words in Matthew 11:25, 26 bear upon Pilate's blindness?

#### Believing the Truth!

☞ In verse 30 it is said that many believed on Jesus. Was this true faith (cf. the context)? How is it possible for one to believe on Jesus and yet not be saved (cf. 2:23; 7:31; 12:42; Matt. 13:1-23; Heb. 6:1-6; James 2:19)?

☞ Jesus describes both the character and the fruit of true faith in verses 31, 32. True faith involves "continuing" in Jesus' word; it is that which makes for true *disciples* (disciples indeed!); it is characterized by and yields the fruit of a certain "knowledge" of the truth. Comment on these things in light of passages such as Matthew 16:24-26 and John 15.

☞ What, according to John 8:33, did the Jews believe was their

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"ticket" to salvation? What are we sometimes tempted to trust in instead of Jesus Christ? Is it possible to trust in faith itself and not in the Lord? How? And why would that be wrong?

### Free Indeed!

☞ When Jesus speaks in John 8:32 of the truth making one *free*, He is speaking of the great blessing of *freedom from the slavery of sin*. This is being free indeed (v. 36)! That truth's freedom is freedom from sin's slavery is clear from the context (v. 34), in which Jesus speaks of those who commit sin (that is, those who *live* in sin, those who are "accustomed to do evil") as being servants or slaves of sin. Show from Scripture that the fallen sinner is a slave to sin. What does the reality of sin make of the idea of "free will," as it is held by many so-called evangelicals? Those who commit sin can, for a while, and

as the Jews were, be "in the house" of God (v. 35). What is the reason for their not abiding for ever?

☞ Of what does our Christian liberty consist? Is it possible for us believers to become enslaved to sin? If this happens, how do we get out? How is the freedom of the Christian enjoyed through *knowing* the truth (v. 32)?

☞ Think on how people can become enslaved to other things besides sin itself such as: circumstances, a church tradition, drugs, other earthly things, our past, the future, peers, enemies. How does the truth liberate us from all these things?

☞ Many are the wrong notions of *liberty*. The Jews in Jesus' day, for example, claimed they "were never in bondage to any man" (v. 33). What was the Jewish idea of liberty? Americans love their liberty. But is the "American idea" of liberty, and setting people free, biblical? Comment, in this connec-

tion, on the American Civil Liberties Union; the statue of liberty; "Give me liberty or give me death"; the Boston Tea Party; the Emancipation Proclamation; the inalienable right of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; "liberty and justice for all."

☞ Jesus speaks in verse 35 of the *ground* of anyone's true liberty. *He Himself* is the ground! This is because He is, as He says, *the Son who abides forever*. He is the eternal and natural Son of God (LD 13). And as this Son of God, Jesus, as the commentator D.A. Carson notes, "not only enjoys inalienable rights as unique son of God, but exercises full authority vested in Him by the Father (John 3:35) to liberate slaves!"

☞ God's people: free forever in and through Jesus Christ! And loving it! Give me *that* truth, and give me *that* liberty ... or give me death! ☐

**Decency and Order**

**Rev. Ronald Cammenga**

# Admittance to the Lord's Supper

None shall be admitted to the Lord's Supper except those who according to the usage of the church with which they unite themselves have made a confession of the Reformed religion, besides being reputed to be of a godly walk, without which those who come from other churches shall not be admitted.

Church Order, Article 61

Articles 61-64 of the Church Order deal with the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. These articles lay down the fundamental guidelines that safeguard the administration of the sacrament in Reformed churches. There is evident

in these articles a deep concern for the proper administration of the Lord's Supper, the purity of the sacrament, and the protection of the sacrament against profanation.

The concern of our Church Order rests on the conviction of our Reformed fathers that the proper administration of the sacraments is a distinguishing mark of the true church of Jesus Christ in the world. Neglect of the principles

set forth in these articles in many Reformed churches today is a glaring indication of the extent to which these churches have forsaken their heritage and come under the influence of apostasy.

### Supervision of the Lord's Supper

The concern of the Church Order is the responsibility of the consistory with respect to the Lord's Supper.

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This is not to say that the *individual* Christian has no responsibility for the proper administration of the Lord's Supper. Not at all! The individual Christian has a responsibility with respect to himself. He must examine his own heart and life and be sure that he partakes of the Lord's Supper worthily. "But let a man examine *himself*, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (I Cor. 11:28, 29).

The individual Christian also has a responsibility with respect to his fellow church members. If he is aware that he is the occasion of offense against any other member, he must clear up the offense before coming to the Lord's Supper. "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee: leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matt. 5:23, 24). Or, if he has knowledge that a brother is walking in sin, in order that the sacraments not be profaned and in order to gain the brother, he must deal with the brother in the way prescribed in Matthew 18:15-20.

But the focus of Article 61 is the responsibility of the *consistory* with respect to the administration of the Lord's Supper. The elders of the church have the calling from Christ to guard the sacrament. In the past this responsibility was often referred to as the elders' calling to "fence" the sacrament.

Article 61 makes plain that this calling means not only that the elders bar from partaking those who are living impenitent in sin. But the calling goes further. The elders are to do all in their power to assure that those who do partake are worthy to partake.

### Confession of Faith

In order to assure that only

those who are worthy partake of the Lord's Supper, Article 61 requires of consistories that they admit to the sacrament those who "... have made a confession of the Reformed religion, besides being reputed to be of a godly walk...." Confession of faith is the way to the Lord's table.

This confession is to be a confession of "the Reformed religion." Faith is necessary for a right partaking of the Lord's Supper. But faith is knowledge. Only those are to be admitted to the Lord's Supper who have a knowledge of the fundamentals of the Reformed faith. If one's knowledge is deemed deficient, the consistory ought to delay admittance to the Lord's Supper in order that further instruction can be received.

Faith is also confidence. The knowledge of the Reformed faith is not merely, therefore, head knowledge. But there must also be expressed the personal conviction on the part of the one making confession of faith of his own heartfelt belief of the truths of the Word of God.

If this faith is a genuine faith, it will also be a faith that produces the fruit of holiness. This, too, must be a concern of the consistory in those who are admitted to the sacrament: "... besides being reputed to be of a godly walk." For this reason, novices and strangers must not be admitted to the Lord's Supper. It may very well be that they are walking godly. But the consistory must *know* this about them. The consistory must be sufficiently acquainted with those whom it admits to the Lord's Supper that it can testify to the uprightness of their walk of life.

If a confession of faith is required of those who are to partake of the Lord's Supper, it is plain that Article 61 prohibits young children from partaking of the sacrament. Paedo-communion, a practice gaining acceptance in many Reformed and Presbyterian churches in our day, not only runs

counter to Reformed tradition, but is contrary to the Scriptures. It ought to be plain that no child can carry out the requirements of I Corinthians 11 with a view to partaking of the Lord's Supper: self-examination (v. 28); discerning the Lord's body (v. 29); judging ourselves (v. 31).

This is not to deny that there are varying degrees of understanding on the part of those admitted to the Lord's Supper. This is certainly the case. There are those of greater and lesser intellectual capacity who confess their faith and seek to come to the Lord's table. More will be required of those brought up in the church all their lives than of those quite new to the faith. Those who are new to the faith will often require private instruction by the pastor before making confession of faith. All these factors must be taken into consideration by a consistory. Still there must be a sufficient grasp of the fundamentals of the faith and evidence of the putting of the teachings of the Word of God into practice in everyday life.

### Procedure for Confession of Faith

No specific procedure for confession of faith is set forth in Article 61. The procedure followed in our churches rests on the principles of the article.

Those seeking admittance to the Lord's Supper first make confession of their faith before the consistory. Usually the minister leads their examination, asking questions with regard to doctrine and life. Members of the consistory are also given opportunity to question the individual. It is to be recommended that those making confession of faith before the consistory be examined individually, and not as a group. If there are a number of confessions of faith to be heard by a consistory, a separate evening ought to be set aside to allow for sufficient time to examine each one personally. In their absence, the consistory ought

to take a formal decision approving the confession of faith and setting the date for their public confession of faith before the congregation. The person is summoned into the meeting once more and is informed of the decision. This is followed usually by a prayer of thanksgiving and expressions of gratitude by the individual consistory members.

The second step in confession of faith is public confession before the congregation. Notice of public confession ought to be made, usually by way of the weekly church bulletin, on at least two successive Sundays. This allows for the approbation of the congregation. Barring any lawful objections, the public confession takes place on the date specified, during a regular worship service and with the asking of the questions for "Public Confession of Faith" that have been adopted in the churches.

#### **Admittance of Those from Other Churches**

Although the procedure differs when a consistory receives communicant members from other churches, the principle of Article 61 applies: "... without which those who come from other churches shall not be admitted."

In the case of those who come from churches outside the denominational communion, the consistory must be assured that they confess the Reformed faith and are reputed to be of a godly walk. It is recommended that those who request to join one of our congregations and who come from another fellowship be visited by a committee of elders. Only if this committee can report that they are one with us in the Reformed faith and life should their membership be approved and admittance be granted to the Lord's Supper.

Those transferring from one congregation to another within the denomination must receive membership attestation from the

consistory of the church from which they are transferring their membership. This membership transfer will attest that they are "sound in faith and upright in walk." Within the communion of the denomination, this attestation must be honored. This is also the case with respect to membership transfers from sister churches. If the person concerned cannot be given such an attest because he is the object of church discipline, this must be noted by the consistory on the transfer of membership. If a consistory has reason to question the attest, the matter must be taken up with the individual concerned and with the consistory which granted the attestation.

#### **Open, Closed, or Close Communion?**

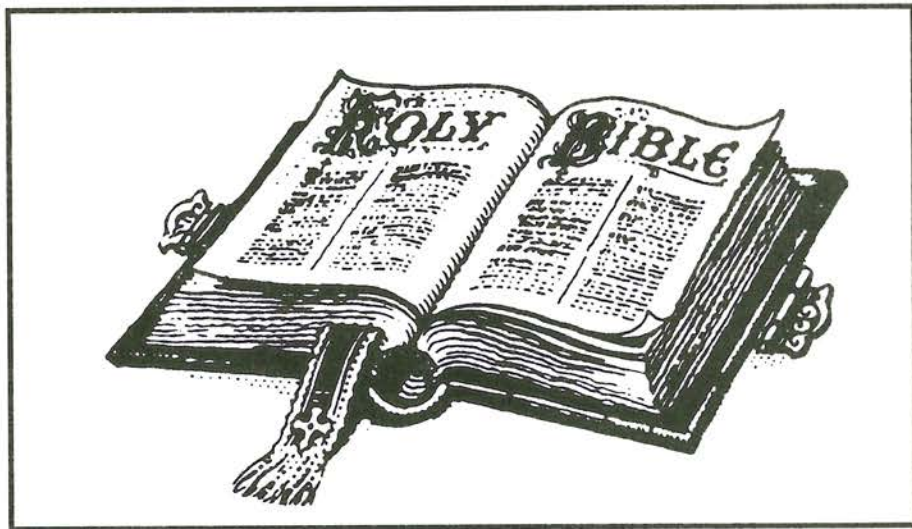
It ought to be plain that Article 61 opposes the practice of open communion, that is, the practice of opening the Lord's table to all who desire to partake. Partaking of the Lord's Supper is not merely a matter of the individual conscience. Consistories must exercise proper supervision. For this reason it is a good practice that on the Sunday of the administration of the Lord's Supper, a notice be placed in the bulletin that supervision is exercised over the administration of the sacrament, so that only those who are members in good standing or those who

have received special permission from the consistory may partake.

Does this mean that the churches ought to practice "closed" or "close" communion? Closed communion means that admittance to the Lord's Supper is granted only to those who are members of the congregation or are members of a sister church.

Our churches practice close communion. This allows for those who are not members of our churches or of a sister church to partake after they have received special permission from the consistory. This may include those who are in the process of joining the congregation, or those who for one reason or another are unable to partake of the sacrament in their own congregation. It may be that they are forced to be absent from their own congregation temporarily because of work assignment or because they are pursuing an education.

These will be rare exceptions. A consistory must exercise good judgment in each of these cases, granting special permission to partake only to those who make "... a confession of the Reformed religion, besides being reputed to be of a godly walk...." In this way the sacrament will be protected, lest it be profaned and the wrath of God fall on the whole congregation (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 30, Q/A 82). □



# Infralapsarianism

*I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.*

John 17:6

Behind the question of the place of children in the covenant which so preoccupied the Reformed churches in the 1940s, there were several other disjunctives (propositions that appear to be mutually exclusive of each other) which had troubled the Dutch churches for many years: the question of whether regeneration is mediate or immediate (brought about by means of the preaching of the Word or not); whether justification takes place in eternity or in time; and, perhaps most basic of all, that of *Infra* and *Supralapsarianism* (the question of whether election or the fall is first in the counsel of God). These questions have carried on through the years, and in contemporary theology the Liberated churches are possibly the strongest proponents of the one position, and the Protestant Reformed of the other. Accordingly it is perhaps not surprising that, in spite of our affinity on church political matters in the 1940s, there arose inevitable differences between us theologically. Rev. Hoeksema and Rev. Ophoff were quite right when they

said that we had to come to some kind of an understanding on these matters before we could possibly draw closer together ecclesiastically.

Of these differences the problem of *Infralapsarianism* and *Supralapsarianism* is probably the most difficult to grasp, and yet the most basic; and, as difficult as it is, we should try to understand this, considering first the idea of *Infralapsarianism*, then *Supralapsarianism*, and finally their relationship to each other and to the counsel of God.

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The word "*infralapsarian*" is based on the Latin prefix *infra*,<sup>1</sup> meaning "under," and *lapsus*, meaning "the fall." The idea is that the fall comes after or under the fall of Adam in the counsel of God; that is, that God first decided that the man whom He had determined to create should fall into sin, and after that determined to elect some of them to salvation and to leave others in the end to be damned for their sin. Furthermore, we cannot escape the fact that the Bible, as well as the creeds, often speak of it as taking place after the fall in a rather *infralapsarian* way.

In the Old Testament this is true almost exclusively. Take, for example, some of the very earliest references to election. They were made by Moses in his final, great discourses to the children of Israel shortly before his death. "And because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in his sight with his mighty power out of

Egypt" (Deut. 4:33). And in greater detail, in Deuteronomy 7:6-8: "For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: but because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."

It is not our purpose to exegete these passages in detail, but there are several things we should note:

1. To begin with, these passages speak of election in a very warm and personal way. There is nothing academic or abstract about them. Election is not a harsh and tyrannical imposition by a God whose only interest is in proving His own power, but rather it reflects the love and warm tenderness of a God who knows His people and whose concern is with maintaining a relationship of friendship with them, as He had begun to do with their fathers.

<sup>1</sup> We see a reflection of this in our word "inferior." Another variation of this, which was often used at the time of the Synod of Dort when this terminology originated, was "*Sublapsarian*," in which the prefix *sub* was used with *lapsus* but meaning exactly the same thing.

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2. This elective love is causal as to the manner in which Jehovah would deal with Israel thereafter. It is a causality, however, not in terms of a calculating philosophical argument, but in the old Hebraic, biblical sense of the word. It is based on the responsibility of a personal faithfulness which God in His unconditional immutability provides, and from which He will not turn away.

3. For us, however, the important thing is that this revelation of divine election appears within historical context. Very easily and naturally these texts ascribe the divine election and choosing to nothing more than a prior commitment to their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — a commitment made unconditionally, long before these Israelites were born, but distinctly nevertheless, *after the fall*. In short, it is what we might call an *infralapsarian* presentation of election.

Again, much the same can be seen in a variety of Old Testament references which in their own beautiful and historically dramatic way speak of God's election of His people, as, for example, Psalm 65:4: "Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts." Or, Isaiah 43:4: "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life." Each of these texts in its own way speaks of election as taking place at a certain point in time, unconditional and founded purely on love, but within an historical context *after the fall*.

And the same may be said of many New Testament passages.

In John's presentation of the gospel, for example, the idea of election would seem to be inherent to the whole structure of the book, particularly when it speaks of "those whom the Father hath given me" directly or in a related variation.<sup>2</sup> In a smooth and natu-

ral way this thought runs through the various discourses of Jesus.

Of these, John 6:38, 39 is perhaps the most significant example: "For I came down from heaven," says Jesus, "not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." In this passage we have one of those great summary statements of Reformed theology. Jesus takes predestination and relates it to the reason for His incarnation, for His coming "down from heaven," as well as to the "Father's will which hath sent me," relating the whole matter very closely to the purpose of the divine decrees, and yet in what we might well consider an *infralapsarian* way. Election is related to the redemption of a people already lost in sin and in need of salvation, and thus after (*infra*) the fall (*lapsus*).

And so the book continues throughout until we come to that great High Priestly prayer of Jesus in chapter 17, where in verse 6 He identifies the elect as "the men which thou gavest me *out of the world*," as *infralapsarian* an expression as one can think to find.

And John is not alone in this. Possibly no passage identifies more closely with the doctrine of predestination in both its positive and negative dimensions than does the ninth chapter of Romans, as in that foundational passage in verses 10-13, "And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." Here we have what is perhaps the classic scriptural passage as far as the

equating of election and reprobation is concerned, and with emphasis on the fact that both are completely unconditional. Still this unconditionality is spoken of, not in terms of eternity, but as following the conception of the children in Rebecca's womb, prior to their birth, to be sure, but at a point in time well after both creation and the fall of the human race into sin. Although the decree may have been in eternity, the context in which it is set forth is distinctly in time, *after the fall*, and thus in an *infralapsarian* way.

And, for the most part, although with somewhat less clarity, this can even be said of verse 21: "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?" This passage is significant, of course, because it, perhaps more than any other, constituted the ground over which the *lapsarian* battle tended from the first to be fought. At least, it was certainly here that Theodore Beza, the successor of Calvin and often considered the father of *Supralapsarianism*, most frequently and most pronouncedly made his *supralapsarian* stand, insisting that the "same lump" of this passage is a clear reference to the undifferentiated human race prior to God's choosing between the "vessels unto honor" and the "others unto dishonor," and even more prior to the determination that there should be a fall. The problem is that this passage can be seen to fit into the *infralapsarian* scheme of thought equally well. The clay may easily, and perhaps even more naturally, be understood as referring to the human race as it is found after the fall, and out of which God by His own sovereign predestination determined to make two kinds of ves-

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<sup>2</sup> John 6:37-40, 44, 64, 65; 10:16, 25-29; 12:39-40; 13:18; 15:16; 17:2, 8, 9

sels, some of honor, and others of dishonor. With that, predestination is seen as being after (*infra* or *sub*) the fall (*lapsus*), providing an infralapsarian framework of thought. The passage by itself can be taken rather easily either way.

And, accordingly, it is noted that our confessions often speak in the same way. The *Heidelberg Catechism*, at the only point where it touches on predestination, in Lord's Day 21, speaks of it in its own profoundly beautiful way: "The Son of God from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to himself by his Spirit and word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith, and that I am and forever shall remain, a living member thereof." The statement is brief, but as much to the point and as personal as the doctrine of election can be. In one short sentence we see the working of election over the whole expanse of time, only to have it come to focus on the individual believer who finds himself living and confessing membership in the church of God. But it is in time and *after* the fall.

Even more directly we find the infralapsarian approach to election used in the *Belgic Confession*, Article 16: "We believe that all the posterity of Adam being thus fallen into perdition and ruin, by the sin of our first parents, God ... delivers and preserves from this

perdition all, whom he, in his eternal and unchangeable counsel of mere goodness, hath elected in Christ Jesus our Lord ... leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves." Here again, addressing the subject of predestination more directly, we find it presented as taking place after the fall, in what might well be considered an infralapsarian manner.

And the same can be said most distinctly of the *Canons of Dort*, which is certainly the most detailed and leading creedal statement concerning predestination in the history of the Christian church. It opens with a reference to the fall into sin, I:1, "As all men have sinned in Adam, lie under the curse, and are deserving of eternal death"; and from there it goes on to note with a simple historical statement similar to that of the other two creeds, "Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, he hath out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of his own will, chosen, from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault, from their primitive state of rectitude, into sin and destruction, a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom he from eternity appointed the Mediator and Head of the elect, and the foundation of salvation." Once again, election is spo-

ken of in terms of the already existing fall, and would appear to be very much infralapsarian.

The point of all this is that the Scriptures are for the most part written from a historical perspective in time; and this is in turn the way in which we meet this great reality in our experience. We are born as part of a sinful world, and we do not know, and cannot know, the true reality of grace until God comes and chooses us out of the world, unconditionally and sovereignly, to gather us into His fellowship and love. And this is often the way in which we can best explain this truth to those who find it difficult, by expressing by our own confession and walk the wonder of the reality that God has chosen us, who are no better than the greatest of all sinners, to be gathered into His love.

In all of this, however, there is another thing which should be noted. While there are many instances in which the Scriptures and the confessions speak of election as taking place after the fall, they are not doing so in terms of the counsel of God. All of these passages are speaking of election as it enters into the experience of man, and that is of course after the fall. But the lapsarian controversy was not about that.

So, in turn, there are many other passages that speak of these things quite differently; and to these we must return. □

## Book Review

*Always Obedient: Essays on the Teaching of Dr. Klaas Schilder*, ed. J. Geertsema. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1995. vx + 137pages. n.p. (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. Herman Hanko.]

If any one should want a brief overview of the teachings of Dr. Klaas Schilder, this is an excellent book to purchase. After a chapter describing Schilder's life and work,

five different authors deal with five aspects of Schilder's thought. Treated are Schilder's covenant view, his view of Christ and culture (with a comparison between A. Kuyper and Schilder), Schilder's view of the church, a review and analysis of Schilder's book on heaven, and Schilder on the subject of revelation.

Of particular interest to Protestant Reformed people is the discussion of Schilder's covenant

view. S. A. Strauss, in dealing with this subject, points out that Schilder's concern was to keep intact and emphasize properly man's responsibility and the importance of history. Especially in connection with the latter, Schilder is correctly said to have rejected the eternal decrees of God as a dogmatist's starting point (21), and thus to have emphasized a covenant which was in its essence an agreement, and was

therefore bilateral and conditional.

It is evident from Strauss' article that this has led to an Arminian conception of the covenant. Describing Schilder's view of baptism, Strauss writes: "One's baptism, therefore, does not imply a dogmatic proclamation, for instance, that God confers salvation on the elect. But in my baptism I receive a concrete address from God, a message that God proclaims to everyone who is baptized, personally: if you believe, you will be saved" (28, 29).

J. M. Batteau, in his chapter on "Schilder on the Church," reiterates some of these ideas and pointedly states that on the doctrine of the covenant Schilder moved away from election as the source of the covenant.

Schilder was a man of many gifts, without any doubt. Anyone who has read his writings, even some of them, will readily acknowledge that he possessed the ability to look at various theological questions in different ways and to express his ideas in sometimes eloquent ways which were often fresh and new. But if you ask: Was Klaas Schilder the original thinker and theologian he is sometimes claimed to be (also in this book)? the answer is, No. Indeed, the book brings that out. In the chapter on "Christ and Culture," N. H. Gootjes finally sums up Schilder's thought by telling us that Schilder emphasized that the Christian must do his work well whatever it is, and that he must do it to God's glory. In Batteau's chapter on "Schilder and the Church," al-

though the author speaks of a new development in the Reformed tradition given us by Schilder, he points to Schilder's distinction between the church militant and the church triumphant as an example, a distinction almost as old as Reformed theology.

Even in the centerpiece of his theology, the doctrine of the covenant, Schilder had essentially nothing new to offer. The idea of a bilateral and conditional covenant goes back at least to the early 17th century in both continental and Presbyterian thought. And Schilder's insistence on this idea of the covenant did little, if anything, to advance the truth of Scripture with regard to this crucially important doctrine of the Reformed faith. □

## News From Our Churches

*Mr. Benjamin Wigger*

### Evangelism Activities

We are happy to include here a progress report of the plans by our Grace PRC in Standale, MI to begin a Bible Study on the campus of Grand Valley State University, which is virtually on Grace's back door, a campus with an enrollment of some thirteen thousand students.

After sending surveys to every PR young person attending GVSU, Grace called a meeting for October 20. Approximately 20 students attended. That group elected from among themselves four officers from various of our west Michigan churches to represent them (a requirement of the University in order to register the group).

The name adopted by the young people is "Christians in College," and the topic for discussion, although subject to change, will be

"Fundamentals of the Christian Faith."

The officers have been busy registering the group with the University, arranging for the use of a room, and looking into some sort of publicity. Through these efforts and with the help of the Evangelism Committee of Grace, plans now call for the first Bible Study to be held January 7 at 7:00 P.M. in Cabin C on the third floor of the Kirkhoff Center, with Rev. M. Dick, pastor at Grace, leading the study.

Again this past December the Evangelism Committee of our Hudsonville, MI PRC advertised their worship services on Old Year's and New Year's days. Rev. Gritters planned to preach on "The Heavenly Home We Seek" on Old Year's, and "The Christian Life: Pilgrim and Stranger" on New Year's.

### Mission Activities

A couple of mission updates: first, Rev. M. Dick, at the request of our churches' Domestic Mission Committee, preached to a group

of interested believers in Pittsburgh, PA on Sunday, November 24. And, second, on Sunday, December 8, also at the request of our Mission Committee, Rev. R. Cammenga and Mr. Gary Kaptein visited with our missionary Rev. T. Miersma and the members of the San Luis Valley Mission in Alamosa, CO.

### Congregational Activities

The Building Committee of our Grace PRC in Standale, MI reported to their council that they have contracted an architect to prepare drawings for their church building.

The men and ladies of our Edgerton, MN PRC were invited to meet together on December 16 for their annual Christmas Social. Plans called for a debate and discussion concerning the question "Is Christmas Christian?"

Another interesting question for discussion caught my eye recently when the Ladies' Bible Study of our Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI met last month to consider the question: "Was

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*Mr. Wigger is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.*

Pharaoh drowned in the Red Sea?  
Two Possible Answers."

Our most recent update of Rev. C. Terpstra and his family had him preaching his farewell message on December 22. After the service, there was a special farewell coffee in the church basement. On Saturday, December 21, the Terpstas' possessions were moved to Holland, MI. Their new address and phone number are: 300 E. 18th St., Holland, MI 49423, (616) 396-8303.

Our last "News" included a couple of items regarding recent Christmas choir concerts, and now we add a few more. The choir of our Peace PRC in Lynwood, IL gave their Christmas program on December 15. The choral societies of our Grandville and Southeast PRC presented a joint concert in Grandville on December 15. The choir of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI presented a brief

concert immediately following their evening service on December 15. The choir of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI presented their annual Christmas concert on December 22.

#### **School Activities**

Church choirs were not the only ones busy with programs in December. Several of our schools also gave all-school programs that month.

The students of our South Holland, IL PR Christian School gave their program, entitled "In the Fullness of Time," on December 19. On the same night our Loveland Christian School in Loveland, CO gave their all-school Christmas program, as did also the students of the Free Christian School in Edgerton, MN. The latter developed the theme, "To Us a Son is Given."

#### **Minister Activities**

On December 14 Rev. Robert Harbach was taken home by the Lord at the age of 82. Rev. Harbach had actively served our churches for some 24 years as both pastor and missionary. Even after his emeritation in 1979 he continued to serve our churches. We extend our sympathy to the family, asking that we remember them in our prayers.

May God guide the congregation of Hull, IA PRC as they continue to call a man to be missionary in Ghana. Their latest trio for that call consisted of the Revs. S. Key, K. Koole, and R. VanOverloop.

#### *Food For Thought*

"Flattery is dangerous. Self-flattery is more dangerous, but self-flattery in the realm of spiritual is most dangerous of all."

— W.E. Best □

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

#### **RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY**

The Council of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church expresses its Christian sympathy to Lorna VanderVennen and her family in the death of her husband,

#### **HENRY VANDER VENNEN.**

Henry was a fellow officebearer and long-time member of our church. "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteous: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Psalm 17:13).

Rev. Dale Kuiper, Pres.  
Mr. Timothy R. Pipe, Clerk

#### **RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY**

The Council of the Doon PRC expresses its heartfelt sympathy to our fellow officebearers in the death of their mother and grandmother,

#### **MRS. MINNIE VAN DEN TOP.**

May God's rich grace sustain them and their families in their sorrow and may they be comforted with the words from Psalm 74:12, "For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth."

Rev. Richard J. Smit, Pres.  
Gene VanBommel, Clerk

#### **WEDDING ANNIVERSARY**

With thankfulness to God, we are pleased to mark the 40th wedding anniversary of

#### **MR. and MRS. JIM SCHIPPER**

on January 16, 1997. Jehovah has provided in abundance for their spiritual and physical needs. They have taught us to glory only in the knowledge and understanding that Jehovah is our Sovereign Savior through Jesus Christ. We pray that Jehovah will guide them by His counsel throughout their earthly pilgrimage.

We rejoice with them in the words of Isaiah, "My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord from henceforth and for ever" (Isaiah 59:21).

- \* Gordon and Nancy Schipper  
Dale, Eric, Kevin
- \* Randy and Lindy Looyenga  
Brent, Jared, Kristin
- \* Dan and Julie Kaiser  
Ross, Alex
- \* Nathan and Jill Kamps  
Sydney, Nicole

Grand Rapids, Michigan

#### **ATTENTION TEACHERS!**

Hope Christian School of Redlands, CA, is in need of an administrator/teacher or teacher for the 1997-'98 school year. For more information, interested persons should contact the school principal, Mr. Ed Karsemeyer, at the school at (909) 793-4584, or Doug Pastoor at (909) 792-9392, or Glenn Feenstra at (909) 794-5859.

#### **RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY**

The Council of the Doon PRC expresses its Christian sympathy to our fellow officebearer, Edwin VanGinkel, in the loss of his brother-in-law,

#### **MEASE VAN BEEK.**

May he and his family find comfort from Joel 3:16, "But the Lord will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel."

Rev. Richard J. Smit, Pres.  
Gene VanBommel, Clerk

#### **NOTICE!!**

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet at the Doon Protestant Reformed Church in Doon, Iowa, on Wednesday, March 5, 1997 at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All material for the classical agenda is to be in the hands of the Stated Clerk by February 3. An officebearers' conference is also planned for Tuesday, March 4.

Rev. Steven Key, Stated Clerk