



The Standard Bearer

**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

**Special
Reformation
Issue**

The Reformation and the Last Things

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What comfort is it to thee that
"Christ shall come again to judge
the quick and the dead"?

That in all my sorrows and
persecutions, with uplifted head I
look for the very same person who
before offered Himself for my sake
to the tribunal of God, and has
removed all curse from me, to come
as judge from heaven; who shall
cast all His and my enemies into
everlasting condemnation, but shall
translate me with all His chosen
ones to Himself, into heavenly joys
and glory.

**Question 52 of the
Heidelberg Catechism**

**Vol. 76, No. 2
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The Nearness of the End

"But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer."

I Peter 4:7

On the one hand, New Year's Eve is apt to be an hour of reminiscence.* It is apt to be an hour in which we are inclined to glance back upon the way which we have traveled. Another year has again passed by. A year with many and various experiences. A year of joy and of sorrow, of laughter and of tears, of prosperity and of adversity, of health and of sickness, of life and of death. Children were born; others were taken away by the hand of death. Not only of them who reached an old age, but also of them who were still in the prime of life, the Lord took some away. There were defeats as well as victories. We laughed, and we wept; we rejoiced, and we groaned. That

always characterizes our way and existence, as long as we are in this valley of tears.

When we look back upon our way as a church, then we must confess that there was much sin and much unfaithfulness on our part. But on God's part there was nothing but love and faithfulness, if we have but eyes to see it. It really makes no difference whether our days were days of joy or of sorrow, of gladness or of mourning, of laughter or of tears, always the mercy of the Lord was with us. On His part we can see nothing but goodness and faithfulness.

But an evening like this also reminds us of the end. At least it seems so to us. From this point of view, the end of the year is typical of the end of our life. And it is typical of the end of time and of all the things that are seen. Not only does New Year's Eve remind us of the end, but we are also strongly impressed with the fact

that the end is near. How near the end of the year 1938 seems to the beginning of it. Time goes fast. We like to have time go fast. We do not like to have time hang on our hands. This simply means that time is crowded. It is filled to capacity. It is full with events that take place successively.

* This sermon was originally preached on New Year's Eve, 1938, in the worship service of First Protestant Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan. In the nature of the case, what was said on that occasion is fitting for our special issue on the last things. Especially is this so since the time of this special issue is the end of the old millennium. As Hoeksema said of New Year's Eve, the end of the millennium "remind(s) us of the end (and) we are also strongly impressed with the fact that the end is near." Worthy of special attention in the meditation is Hoeksema's insistence on the nearness of the end and his compelling, biblical explanation of this nearness.

— Ed.

Herman Hoeksema was the first editor of the Standard Bearer.

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When we think of these things, we are reminded of the words of our text: "the end of all things is at hand." The practical conclusion is: "be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer."

The End

The text speaks of the end of all things: "The end of all things is at hand." Some say that the apostle is thinking of the end of the Israelitish people, that he is speaking of the destruction of Israel as a nation. But there is in the text and context nothing to suggest such an interpretation. When the Bible speaks of all things, it refers to all things in the heavens and on earth, as we know them. It refers to things as they have become through sin.

Included, in the first place, is time. Time, for us, is an uninterrupted succession of moments. All things that exist in time are also included. Whatever there is, whatever exists — the sun, the moon, the stars, the things on earth, and the earth itself — belongs to those things of which the apostle speaks when he says, "the end of all things is at hand." Not only the things which are in the earth, but also whatever is done in the earth is included in these "all things." All the labor, all the art, all the science, all the inventions are included. The end of all things — nothing excluded — is at hand.

This means that there is such an end to things. Just as when you are riding on a train, and the conductor comes and shouts, "The next station is the end," it means that there is such an end. So when the apostle says, "the end of all things is at hand," it means that there is such an end. There is a certain end to which all things travel. They do not travel toward that end separately, so that first one thing travels toward that end, and then another thing travels toward that end. No, but simultaneously all things travel toward that end.

That end is not in the things that are temporal. That end is God's purpose. That purpose of God is not in this world. That purpose of God is His eternal kingdom of glory. The things in this world must serve God's purpose of building the house of His covenant and kingdom. As soon as they have served that purpose, they may go. Just as a scaffolding must serve in building a building, and when the building is finished, the scaffolding is and must be broken down, so all things are God's scaffolding that must serve to perfect God's work of building His house. It is not the things of this world that are permanent. It is God's kingdom that is permanent. The end comes when the Lord shall come as a thief in the night, and "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up," and all things shall be dissolved (II Pet. 3:10, 11). That end the apostle has in mind when he says, "the end of all things is at hand."

Its Nearness

It does not look as if the words of our text were true. Nineteen hundred years have passed since these words were written. And yet the end has not come. There are those who read Scripture and explain passages like this as though the apostles were mistaken. They say that in the early church there was the expectation that Christ would come again soon. In this light we must read such passages as "the day of the Lord is at hand" and "the end of all things is at hand."

It may be granted that the apostles might have been mistaken in interpreting their own inspired Word. I have no doubt that the apostles had no idea that nineteen hundred years would elapse in the new dispensation. Just as the prophets did not always understand their own prophecies and

had no clear understanding of the realization of their own prophecies, so when the apostle says that the end of all things is at hand, he may have interpreted it as meaning that the end is at once. But this does not mean that the Word of God means this. It would simply mean that Peter was mistaken in interpreting his own inspired words.

But this is not the meaning of this Word, even though Peter understood it this way. Scripture means something different. When we read that the end of all things is at hand, the meaning is, in the first place, that the end is the next event; it is the next step. It is characteristic of the new dispensation that the end is upon us. That was not always so. The church has passed many stations. It passed a station in the flood. It passed a station in the building of the tower of Babel. It passed a station in the calling of Abraham. It passed a station in the giving of the covenant at Sinai. It passed a station when Israel went into captivity. It passed a station in the coming of Christ in the flesh. The church passed many stations. In the old dispensation, they could not say, "the end of all things is at hand." In the old dispensation, they said, "The coming of the Messiah is at hand." But now there are no more hours, there are no more stations. The end is at hand.

In the second place, it also means that all the events of this present age move with the end in view. The end is in them. In the old dispensation, the coming of Christ was in all things. People looked at all things in that light. That was in the bringing forth of children. In all events in the old dispensation was the coming of Christ. But not now. Now in all that happens, the end is. In war and in peace, in prosperity and depression, in all events of history, the end is. Everything preaches that we are moving toward the end.

The end of all things is at hand.

This is emphatically true in our day, more so than in the day of the apostle Peter. It is always true. But as the centuries pass by, it becomes more emphatically true, that the end of all things is at hand. We can see it before our eyes.

In close connection with this truth stands this other truth, that things move fast. God's time is not our time. Christ is coming. He has been coming throughout the centuries. He is coming fast. This is also true. It makes a difference, if we have, let us say, still fifty miles to travel, whether we travel that last fifty miles by horse and buggy, or by automobile, or airplane. God does not travel by horse and buggy. He is coming fast.

The end of all things is near.

The Proper Attitude Toward This Nearness

What then should be our attitude toward this nearness of the end? In the first place, our attitude should be (and this is emphasized in the text) a prayerful attitude. The text says, "be ye therefore sober and watch unto prayer." You must not read the text like this: "be ye therefore sober," and then pause a moment, and then read, "and watch unto prayer." But you must read: "be ye therefore sober and watch, unto prayer." The apostle emphasizes that with a view to the truth that the end of all things is at hand, our attitude

should be an attitude of prayer. That is, an attitude of true prayer, prayer as we have it in Scripture. Prayer in Scripture is not that we are concerned about temporal things. The concern about temporal things does not need any particular admonition. But Scripture does not consider temporal things as a need over which we need be concerned. Scripture tells us to seek the things which are above, to lay up for ourselves treasures which are in heaven. It tells us not to be concerned about temporal things. When Scripture speaks of prayer, it refers to the prayer for the coming of the kingdom of God. It refers to the prayer which has its climax in the words, "Come, Lord Jesus, yea, come quickly."

When the apostle says, "be ye therefore sober and watch unto prayer," the meaning is that we should seek the coming of Christ. Do you not see the connection? Set your heart and mind on the end. Do not live on the scaffolding, but live in the house. When the scaffolding is broken down, do not be standing on it, but be in the house. Look for the coming of the bridegroom, in the way of sanctification. For "he that hath this hope in him purifieth himself" (I John 3:4). If you expect Christ, you do not dance in the world. If you expect Christ, you will keep your garments pure. This, the apostle means when he says, "be ye there-

fore sober and watch unto prayer." For the end of all things is at hand. Look for it. When the scaffolding is broken down, be not found on it, but be in the house. All that does not belong to Christ belongs to the scaffolding. Do not look at the scaffolding, but at the house. Do not look at the temporal things, which pass away, but look at the eternal things, which abide forever.

If we are to assume such an attitude of prayer, then we must do two things. We must be sober and watch. When the apostle says, "be ye therefore sober," he does not mean that we must not be physically drunk. When a man is drunk, his senses reel. When a man is drunk, he has no conception of the value of things. When a man looks for the scaffolding instead of the house, he is not sober but drunk. You must not look at the scaffolding. This, the world does. The world says that their houses are for aye. Be sober. If you are sober, you will be able to distinguish between the temporal and the eternal.

But if you are to be sober, you must watch. If you do not watch, you will not be sober. The opposite is also true. If you are not sober, you will not watch. "Be ye therefore sober and watch unto prayer." Let this be our attitude in this hour, realizing that the end of all things is at hand. In this realization, let us be sober and watch unto prayer. □

Editorially Speaking ...

Our special, Reformation issue of the *Standard Bearer* this year is devoted to the influence of the sixteenth century Reformation on the church's eschatology. Eschatology is the church's understanding and confession of the Word of God on the last things, culminating in the second coming of Christ.

The subject is timely. As we approach a new millennium, many

are distracted by the scare of Y2K. Other professing Christians—millions of them—become excited at the prospect of an imminent rapture of the church, which is utter and bizarre nonsense. Of late, prominent Reformed and Presbyterian theologians and teachers tell conservative audiences that Christ came in AD 70. There is no eschatology, only millennia of

earthly power, peace, and prosperity. Impenitent Rome persists in her eschatology of terror. And then, deadliest of all, there is the danger in all the churches, including the Protestant Reformed Churches, of the earthlimindedness that our Lord warned of: absorption in eating, drinking, marrying, making money, buying and selling, and playing.

We do well to remind ourselves of the Reformation's doctrine of the last things, and to witness of it to others.

A word about the meditation.

The meditation is a sermon preached by Herman Hoeksema in the First Protestant Reformed

Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan on New Year's Eve, 1938. Taken down in his own shorthand as it was being preached, it was then written out in a spiral notebook in his lovely, legible longhand by Hoeksema's faithful scribe, Martin

Swart. For publication in the *SB*, the sermon was edited by the editor of the *SB*. The editing did not affect the content. In the sermon, Hoeksema asserts, and explains, the biblical teaching that the second coming of Christ is "near."

— DJE

Editorial

An Eschatology of Grace

Someone might doubt whether there is anything to the theme of this special issue.

That the Reformation recovered the gospel of grace and, in connection with this, the sole authority of Holy Scripture is well known. But did the Reformation say anything distinctive about the last things? Did it do much with eschatology at all? Does it not betray the Reformation's lack of interest in the last things that both Luther and Calvin neglected, indeed refused, to write a commentary on the book of Revelation?

To be sure, there was the rejection of purgatory. That was definitely important for eschatology. But other than this, did the Reformation really influence the church's doctrine of the last things?

To all which, the reply is: "Do you, as a Reformed believer, confidently expect to be with Christ at the moment of your death? Do you look forward, without fear, to the coming of Christ as judge in the final judgment? And is this assurance concerning the future your own in a personal, experiential way—the way of heartfelt, living faith in the promise of God?"

You owe this hope (for this is

what the positive answer to the questions is) to the Reformation.

The Reformation set the biblical truths of the last things, particularly the second coming of Christ for judgment and the death of the believer, in the joyful light of the gospel of grace. This was a radical reformation of the church's teaching on the last things.

Day of Wrath, Day of Mourning

The medieval church had plunged eschatology into the gloomy shadows of its gospel of salvation by the will, works, and worth of man. It taught the people to view their death and the coming of Christ for judgment as divine reckoning on the basis of their own works and worthiness.

This was an eschatology of terror.

It terrified the people. The attitude of the people toward the Day of Christ was that of the popular hymn, "*Dies irae, dies illa*" ("Day of wrath, day of mourning"). The paintings of the middle ages vividly portrayed the terrifying eschatology of a gospel of works. A fearsome Christ descends upon the cowering people.

In no small degree, this explains the popularity of the cult of Mary in the developing Roman

church. Representing a god of works and merit, Jesus Christ was frightening to the members of the church. Mary, on the other hand, was seen (and preached up) as a sinner's only hope—another gross insult to Jesus Christ, who "hath loved us, and hath given himself for us" (Eph. 5:2).

The attitude of Martin Luther before his conversion toward death and the judgment was typical. The thunderstorm near Stotternheim not only terrified him with the prospect of death but also drew from him the vow to become a monk. His fear of death was rooted in the notion that only his own works and worth could satisfy a wrathful God. In the monastery, he dreaded judgment and judge with the result that he intensified his feverish efforts to earn acquittal.

The whole of eschatology was a doctrine of damnation and dread. The cause was the false gospel of righteousness by man's own works.

Day of Grace, Day of Laughter

The gospel-truth of justification by faith alone thoroughly revised eschatology. The basis of the final judgment will not be the sinner's own works and worth on account of his free will, but only the per-

fect work of Jesus Christ on his behalf. In the final judgment, the lifelong obedience and atoning death of Jesus Christ will be imputed to the sinner through the faith that God gives him. Indeed, the decisive verdict has already been uttered: the "not guilty" of the gospel, heard by faith. There is nothing, absolutely nothing, for the believing sinner to fear in the coming of Christ for judgment.

On the contrary, there is everything to anticipate!

The judge comes to vindicate the righteous believer publicly, before the world. The judgment will finally bestow the reward of grace, so eagerly desired throughout the burdened and afflicted pilgrimage of the godly: eternal life and glory of soul and body in a renewed creation. And for the enjoyment of both public vindication in the judgment and everlasting bliss as the outcome of the judgment, the body of the elect believer will be raised from the grave into immortal life.

Who would not *long* for the Day of Christ as the day of grace, the day of laughter. Luther called the day of Christ's coming "the most happy Last Day."

The church of the Reformation could again pray, "Come, Lord Jesus."

The good hope of gracious salvation extends to the believing sinner's death. The gospel of grace dispels the nightmare of purgatory, which Luther, in the Schmalkald Articles, called a "noxious pest" and the "excrement of idolatry." How can there be any remaining torment of punishment for one in whose stead Christ died with His all-sufficient death as the gift of a gracious God? The Christian can again face death with calm confidence, indeed *desire* death, as does the apostle in Philippians 1:21-24. Grace compels the king of terrors to become the believer's helpful servant.

The effect of the gospel upon eschatology is reflected in the change of Luther's attitude toward

death. Whereas under the malign influence of the gospel of works he had been terrified at death, as a believer in a gracious God he welcomed death.

We must accustom and discipline ourselves to despise death in faith and to regard it as a deep, strong, and sweet sleep. We must consider the coffin as nothing more than the bosom of our Lord, or paradise, the grave as nothing more than a downy bed on which to lay ourselves. . . . Death and grave mean nothing more than that God neatly lays you as a child in his cradle or soft little bed where you sweetly sleep until the day of judgment.

Luther prayed, "Help us not to fear but to desire death." He confessed, "We should be happy to be dead and desire to die."

Viewing the death of the believer in the light of the grace of salvation in Christ, Calvin rejected the doctrine of soul-sleep. This was the purpose of his first theological work, *Psychopannychia*, dating from 1534. For Calvin, the teaching that the soul of the believer falls asleep at death is a miserable error because it implies disruption of our communion with Christ. It sins against grace.

But we must not suppose that biblical eschatology in the light of grace only enables us to die in peace and to await the coming of Christ without fear. It also empowers us to live. The gospel of works paralyzes the guilty sinner. Or it drives him to work with the motive and demeanor of a slave. The gospel of grace moves the justified sinner to work, with grateful love, in the hope of Christ's coming.

In the hope of Christ's coming!

Not only did the Reformation put all of eschatology under the sign of grace, but it also made eschatology, that is, the second coming of Christ, the goal of the life of the Christian and of the history of the church. Not this life with its trinkets and pleasures, not

the dream-world of an earthly millennium, but the resurrection of the body at the coming of Christ must be the one, lively, steady, intense purpose of every Christian and of the church.

John Calvin gave sharpest expression to this practical aspect of biblical eschatology in that section of his *Institutes* where he treated eschatology: "He alone has fully profited in the gospel who has accustomed himself to continual meditation upon the blessed resurrection" (3.25.1).

This total recasting of eschatology in the light of grace is evident in the Reformation creeds. "What *comfort* is it to you that 'Christ shall come again to judge the quick and the dead?' asks the Heidelberg Catechism in Q. 52. This question was unthinkable for the apostatizing church prior to the Reformation, as it is for the Roman Catholic Church today. The answer of every Reformed believer is that he positively "look(s) for" the coming Christ as judge, to "translate me with all his chosen ones to himself, into heavenly joys and glory." The ground of the comfort is indicated: Christ the judge has "before offered himself for my sake, to the tribunal of God, and has removed all curse from me." In the same spirit, Article 37 of the Belgic Confession declares with a fervor that the medieval church would have thought madness that Reformed Christians "expect that great day with a most ardent desire."

As for death, the Heidelberg Catechism says that the death of believers "is not a satisfaction for our sin, but only an abolishing of sin and a passage into eternal life" (Q. 42). In Q. 57, the Catechism has every believer confessing that "my soul after this life shall be immediately taken up to Christ its head."

Get Up, Dr. Martin!

Not to be overlooked in this Reformation-hope for the coming

of Christ is the fact that every believer is personally assured that he himself, as one of the justified, shares the hope. Certain later traditions, under the influence of teaching that urges saints to engage in doubtful introspection, devote enormous amounts of time and ink to demonstrating that a few in the church can finally arrive at their own personal assurance. The effect, often, is to spread still more doubt. This is foreign to the Reformation, which simply assumes that every believer will be certain that he shares the hope of the coming of Christ. Faith is both a *certain*, or assured, knowledge and a hearty confidence. What this faith believes is the gospel of grace. Thus, the Spirit works assurance in every believer, so that he is no more terrified at death than he is at the prospect of falling asleep and no more apprehensive of the coming of Christ than he is of the ar-

rival of a dear brother.

The lively, spontaneous, personal assurance of every believer regarding his own death and Christ's coming for him, Luther expressed in a touching way: "We must sleep until He comes and knocks at our little grave and exclaims, 'Dr. Martin, get up!' Then in the twinkling of an eye I shall rise again and will rejoice with him eternally."

But this is a reality only under the gospel of grace.

In the Roman Catholic Church, this is an impossibility, as Rome itself acknowledges. A gospel that bases salvation on man's own will, works, and worth denies to all any certainty of salvation in the face of death and the judgment.

An eschatology of terror!

This same terror characterizes most of Protestantism today. Embracing Rome's basic theology of free will, Arminian evangelicals and fundamentalists put their

people in doubt whether they will be saved at Christ's coming.

Other Protestants are showing themselves careless with regard to the comfort in the face of death and judgment that is only possible under the gospel of grace. These are the men who have compromised the Reformation's doctrine of justification by faith alone in the movement, Evangelicals and Catholics Together. These are also the theologians and churches that tolerate the heresy of free will and conditional salvation.

As for us, living and dying in peace is of some importance.

We are determined, therefore, to confess the blessed gospel of salvation by grace alone. We are also determined to curse, damn, and repudiate the false gospel of salvation by the will and works of man.

Here we stand!

In eschatology! □

— DJE

Creedal Amillennialism

Rev. Ron Cammenga

Bound by the Creeds

The Reformed creeds define the Reformed faith. What it is to be Reformed, the creeds establish. The creeds are the standard against which every teaching that claims to be Reformed and clamors for acceptance by Reformed believers is to be judged.

Every Reformed believer is bound by the Reformed creeds. No

one has the right to consider himself to be a Reformed Christian who blatantly contradicts what the Reformed creeds teach.

Especially is the Reformed officebearer bound by the teaching of the creeds. At ordination Reformed ministers, elders, and deacons sign the *Formula of Subscription*. By doing this they affirm that they "... heartily believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine contained in the (Belgic) Confession and (Heidelberg) Catechism of the Reformed churches, together with the explanation of some points of the afore-

said doctrine made by the National Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-'19, do fully agree with the Word of God." In the *Formula*, the Reformed officebearer goes on to promise "... diligently to teach and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine (of the creeds), without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same, by our public preaching or writing."

What is true with respect to all the fundamental doctrines of Holy Scripture is true of the doctrine of the last things (eschatology) and the coming of Jesus Christ. The Reformed creeds have a great deal to

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say on these matters. From what they say, there can be no doubt about it that the Reformed creeds endorse amillennialism.

The creeds are *explicitly* amillennial. The creeds leave no room for postmillennialism or premillennial-dispensationalism. No appeal can be made to the Reformed creeds in support of either of these heretical millennial positions. More than that, the Reformed creeds expressly repudiate the major tenets of both postmillennialism and premillennial-dispensationalism. On the basis of the creeds these teachings are judged as heretical. Those who hold to these teachings embrace false doctrine.

The amillennial character of the Reformed creeds is challenged today. There are those who contend that the creeds are largely silent on the matter of the millennium. Their view is that the Reformed creeds leave the issue of the millennium an open question. They go on to encourage toleration of the variant millennial views in the church. It is argued that one can be a postmillennialist or even a premillennialist and still subscribe to the Reformed creeds.

But this is not honesty to the Reformed creeds. Spokesmen for both the postmillennial and the premillennial-dispensational schools of thought of a former generation conceded this. Dr. John F. Walvoord, one of the most well known dispensationalists of recent time, wrote: "Reformed eschatology has been predominantly amillennial. Most if not all of the leaders of the Protestant Reformation were amillennial in their eschatology..." (*Biblio-theca Sacra*, January-March, 1951).

Samuel G. Craig, writing the biography of Benjamin B. Warfield included in Warfield's *Biblical And Theological Studies*, states:

Many, perhaps most, Calvinists, not to mention evangelicals other than Reformed, do not share Warfield's post-millennialism.

Both of his great Calvinistic contemporaries, Kuyper and Bavinck, for instance, were amillennialists, as was his esteemed colleague, Gerhardus Vos, perhaps the most erudite advocate of amillennialism in America. He himself freely admitted that amillennialism, though not known in those days under that name, is the historic Protestant view, as expressed in the creeds of the Reformation period including the Westminster Standards (p. xxxix).

It is the purpose of this article briefly to demonstrate how incompatible postmillennialism and premillennial-dispensationalism are with the Reformed creeds. Our concern will be with the Three Forms of Unity, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession of Faith in particular.

The Reformed Creeds and Postmillennialism

The teaching of the Reformed creeds is that the New Testament, the time from Christ's first coming until His second coming, will be a period of persecution and suffering for the true church of Jesus Christ. The creeds take the amillennial view of the progress of New Testament history, namely that apostasy and wickedness will become worse and worse. The world will become increasingly evil and the church will be more severely persecuted the nearer the second coming of Christ.

There is absolutely nothing in the Reformed creeds to suggest an earthly kingdom of peace and prosperity dominated by Christians. There is no hint in the Reformed creeds of an improving world, of righteousness prevailing on this present earth, of a "golden age" of a thousand years or more in which sin and the consequences of sin will be well nigh eradicated.

The Second Helvetic Confession (1566) expresses the Reformed consensus when it condemns all hope of an earthly kingdom as "Jewish dreams":

And out of heaven the same Christ will return unto judgment, even then *when wickedness shall chiefly reign in the world* (emphasis mine, RC), and when Antichrist, having corrupted true religion, shall fill all things with superstition and impiety, and shall most cruelly waste the Church with fire and bloodshed. Now Christ shall return to redeem his, and to abolish Antichrist by his coming, and to judge the quick and the dead (Acts xvii. 31).... Moreover, we condemn the Jewish dreams, that before the day of judgment there shall be a golden age in the earth, and that the godly shall possess the kingdoms of the world, their wicked enemies being trodden under foot; for the evangelical truth (Matt. xxiv. and xxv., Luke xxi.), and the apostolic doctrine (in the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians ii., and in the Second Epistle to Timothy iii. and iv.) are found to teach far otherwise (*The Creeds of Christendom*, Philip Schaff, volume 3, p. 852).

The 52nd Question of the Heidelberg Catechism asks, "What comfort is it to thee that 'Christ shall come again to judge the quick and the dead'?" The "thee" in the question is the New Testament believer, every New Testament believer, believers in the days in which the Heidelberg Catechism was written, as well as believers today. The comfort that the 52nd Answer gives expression to is a comfort experienced in the face of "sorrows and persecutions."

That in all my sorrows and persecutions, with uplifted head I look for the very same person who before offered Himself for my sake to the tribunal of God, and has removed all curse from me, to come as judge from heaven; who shall cast all His and my enemies into everlasting condemnation, but shall translate me with all His chosen ones to Himself, into heavenly joys and glory.

The comfort of the New Testament Christian is not fixed on some soon-coming "golden age" in

which all Christ's and our enemies shall be put down. No such false hope is presented. The hope and comfort of the Reformed believer is fixed on the second coming of Christ. Then, and only then, will His and our enemies be judged and we be glorified with Him.

The 127th Question and Answer of the Heidelberg Catechism speak of the threefold enemy of the believer, the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh. According to the Answer, these enemies "cease not to assault us." There never comes a time in this present age when the world is so subdued that for all practical purposes that world ceases to assault the believer. But God's promise, the Answer points out, is to preserve us in this spiritual warfare until at last we obtain the complete victory.

Article 37 of the Belgic Confession presents the same scenario. In the final judgment, elect believers

... shall see the terrible vengeance which God shall execute on the wicked, who most cruelly persecuted, oppressed, and tormented them in this world; and who shall be convicted by the testimony of their own consciences, and, being immortal, shall be tormented in that everlasting fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels.

The article goes on to say that it is only at this second coming of Christ and the time of the final judgment that

... the faithful and elect shall be crowned with glory and honor; and the Son of God will confess their names before God His Father, and His elect angels; all tears shall be wiped from their eyes; and their cause, which is *now* (emphasis mine, RC) condemned by many judges and magistrates as heretical and impious, will *then* (emphasis mine, RC) be known to be the cause of the Son of God.

There is no notion in the Belgic Confession of a future "golden age." There is nothing of the hope

of an earthly kingdom in which finally the world's rulers will promote and enforce the law of God. On the contrary, in this world the persecution which the Reformed churches in the Lowlands experienced — de Brès himself suffering martyrdom — will to a greater or lesser degree be the experience of the church until the return of Christ.

This is confessional amillennialism.

The Reformed Creeds and Premillennial-Dispensationalism

With the same rigor with which the Reformed creeds repudiate postmillennialism, they reject also premillennial-dispensationalism.

It was for this reason that D.H. Kromminga, sympathetic to the main tenets of premillennialism, attempted to persuade the Christian Reformed Church in the 1940s to change Article 37 of the Belgic Confession. In *Perspectives on the Christian Reformed Church*, in a chapter entitled "The Premillennial Eschatology of Dietrich Hinrich Kromminga," Harry R. Boer writes,

For the most part (sic) premillennialism cannot be harmonized with the official Reformed creedal basis. Article 37 of the Belgic Confession, one of the three creeds of the CRC, teaches '...we believe ... that, when the time appointed by the Lord ... is come and the number of the elect complete ... our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven ... to declare Himself Judge of the living and the dead.' For Kromminga the critical phrase in the statement was 'and the number of the elect complete.' This confessional assertion effectively bars belief in the return of Christ before a millennial period in the course of which men will be brought to Christ to complete the fullness of the church and thereby the fullness of the elect (p. 153).

If the Reformed faith parts ways with Roman Catholicism over the little word "alone" (grace alone,

faith alone, Christ alone, Scripture alone), it parts company with premillennial-dispensationalism over the word "one." That little word, all by itself, is the difference between Reformed amillennialism and the premillennial-dispensational teaching that is at odds with Reformed amillennialism. The Reformed amillennialist teaches *one* people of God in both the Old and New Testaments, *one* coming of Jesus Christ, *one* resurrection, *one* final judgment.

Both Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 52, and Article 37 of the Belgic Confession speak of *the* (in the singular) final judgment. There is no mention anywhere in these creeds of another judgment than this judgment. In the same places, these creeds speak of *the* coming of Christ, not of comings of Christ. And absolutely no notion of a secret rapture.

Consistently the creeds identify the church of the Old Testament and the church of the New Testament. They are fundamentally *one*. It will suffice to refer in this connection to the Heidelberg Catechism. According to Question and Answer 19 of the Catechism, the same gospel that is preached in the Reformed church today was the gospel first revealed by God in Paradise, afterwards published by the patriarchs and prophets, and represented by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the Old Testament law. Question and Answer 31 make Christ our King, that is, the King of New Testament believers. According to Question and Answer 54, the church, the one church, is gathered by the Son of God from the beginning to the end of the world. Question and Answer 74 deal with infant baptism. In the 74th Answer there is identification made between the old and the new covenant. Essentially there is one covenant of God, so that baptism replaces circumcision. And Question and Answer 123 identify the church and the kingdom of God.

Article 25 of the Belgic Confession is a very decisive article in repudiating premillennial-dispensationalism. The article is entitled, "Of the abolishing of the Ceremonial Law." With regard to the ceremonies and sacrifices of the Old Testament, it is the teaching of the article "... that the use of them must be abolished amongst Christians." That is significant! The

creedal Reformed position is that the ceremonies and sacrifices of the Old Testament have been abolished, abolished once and for all, abolished forever. They have not been temporarily set aside in order after the present hiatus to be restored in some future millennial kingdom, as is the teaching of premillennial-dispensationalism. They have been abolished!

Amillennialism is the creedal

Reformed position. To embrace the Reformed confessions is to embrace amillennial eschatology. To reject amillennialism, whether for post-millennialism or premillennial-dispensationalism, is necessarily to reject the Reformed creeds.

But the Reformed creeds, in this critical matter of the doctrine of the last things and the return of Christ, are biblical. □

Rome's Dreadful Doctrine of Purgatory

Rev. Kenneth Koole

Other than the worship of the Virgin Mary, the doctrine we most associate with the Roman Catholic church and her abuses is probably her doctrine of purgatory.

It is this teaching that serves to underscore what Rome is all about, namely, ignoring (or better, inventing) Scripture, promoting superstition, inculcating fear into the minds of her members, using fear to extract a steady stream of income, corrupting the gospel of Christ crucified, and destroying the blessed assurance of faith in Him.

It is this doctrine that makes plain from just what a bondage God used the Reformation to deliver His people once more.

The striking thing about this purgatory is that it is not the place of the damned, but, according to Rome, the place of the redeemed. It is where all children of God go (except for an elite, super-pious few), there to suffer agonies and torments not at all unlike those of

hell itself. The only difference between the two has to do with duration, hell's torments being eternal, but purgatory's eventually coming to an end. Still, for many these sufferings are said to last for centuries. Relief from the agony of the fires of purgatory is not meant to come easily for those who die good members of Rome.

The Manual of the Purgatorial Society states:

According to the Holy Fathers of the Church, the fire of purgatory does not differ from the fire of hell, except in point of duration. "It is the same fire," says St. Thomas Aquinas, "that torments the reprobate in hell, and the just in purgatory. The least pain in purgatory," he says, "surpasses the greatest suffering in this life." Nothing but the eternal duration makes the fire of hell more terrible than that of purgatory (cf. *Roman Catholicism*, L. Boettner, p. 220).

In light of the above, one can well understand the great gloom and oppressive grief that marks death and funerals in Romish circles. Death of believers is not to be considered a release from tears

and pain, a victory of faith, and an entry into the glory and the bosom of the Lord, but a descension into an abyss, into the crackling of fire, the smell of smoke, and the groans and cries of thirsty, tormented souls. Understandably, at Romish funerals not songs of triumph and joy are heard, but rather somber, doleful laments. Black with veils is the only appropriate dress.

What moved ambitious churchmen to invent the monstrosity of purgatory is not so difficult to ascertain. It looms as a threat, a sizable club to be used against those who have thoughts of resisting the authority of Rome's clergy; and it has proved an endless source of income in return for the promise of an early release.

Rome of course has not admitted to this reality and charge. She insists that purgatory is a most beneficial and sanctifying doctrine. The council of Trent (Rome's response to the Reformation) commanded her bishops diligently to see to it that "... the wholesome doctrine (emphasis mine — KK) of purgatory ... be believed, held, taught, and everywhere preached by Christ's faithful" (Session XXV).

Rome argues that purgatory is

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a place of restitution for one's sins. Various kinds of sins make one liable to two sorts of divine punishment, eternal and temporal. Receiving the various sacraments takes care of the eternal punishment, while acts of penance and of good works are meant to deal with temporal punishment. But good works and penance commonly prove a sporadic thing. So purgatory is the place where one makes the final restitution for those evils one's own sporadic good works failed to overcome. There the completion of one's just punishment takes place. Those members of the church who have been lax and careless in living a life devoted to God and the church, and especially in listening to the exhortations of the priest, can expect that restitution to be long and severe indeed. What could be more just than that?

Besides, Rome argues, such a threat will have a sanctifying effect on believers in this life. Knowing what awaits one if one is lax and careless in one's spiritual devotion should put enough fear of the Lord into one to give him strong incentive to refrain from many a temptation and evil. Without this threat, members would simply take advantage of the protecting grace of the church and be inclined to lifelong carelessness.

History has proved how deceptive and spiritually bankrupt Rome's justification of the doctrine has been. The worldliness and immorality of Rome's members, to say nothing of the scandalous behavior of her clergy in every age, has demonstrated again and again how little effect the looming threat of this fictitious purgatory has had on the improvement of the morals, to say nothing of the spirituality, of her members' lives. Threats and dread may produce a bit of restraint in some areas of immorality, but never will such produce spirituality and true godliness. That is the product of heartfelt gratitude. And there is precious

little thankworthy about the abyss of purgatory.

Besides, the wholesale monetary abuse of purgatory by Rome's clergy is too well documented to be refuted. The sale of indulgences is written large on the pages of her sacrilegious history. If one cannot work one's way out of purgatory, his relatives can buy his way out of the abyss by contributing sums of money to the church in the name of the dearly departed (or by paying for a solemn Mass for the dead). The church claims the authority to determine by how much each contribution shortens one's stay. Of course, how the church is able to calculate just how long one was sentenced to suffer in the first place is a great mystery, but when you are dealing with people steeped for centuries in such superstitions, such questions are seldom asked.

The doctrine of purgatory was declared an article of faith by the Council of Florence in 1439, which explains the flurry of indulgences at the time of the Reformation, but it had already received ecclesiastical recognition at the time of Pope Gregory the Great (AD 590-604). Though the Reformation soundly denounced the practice, the sore abuse, sad to say, did not end with the Reformation. The ongoing abuse is well chronicled by the autobiography of the Canadian priest, Father Chinique, converted to Protestantism in the 1800s. He wrote,

How long, O Lord, shall that insolent enemy of the gospel, the Church of Rome, be permitted to fatten herself upon the tears of the widow and of the orphan by means of that cruel and impious invention of paganism — purgatory? (*Fifty Years in the Church of Rome*, p. 48).

The "fattening" to which Chinique referred was the extorting of money from the vulnerable, the lonely, and those in grief. The church, like the Pharisees of Christ's day, was not above de-

vouring widows' houses.

It scarcely needs mentioning, does it, that such a system does not curtail immorality and ungodliness, especially amongst the wealthy, but promotes it. What need is there of godliness and repentance, when money turns the same trick! The wealthy have an advantage over the poor.

The whole business is a travesty.

First of all, it is invention without a shred of biblical support. Rome's primary "biblical" support is in one of the Apocryphal books, of all things, II Maccabees 12. But even this is a doubtful reference. Another so-called proof is I Corinthians 3:12-15, which speaks of one's works being tested by fire. But this is a testing of one's "works," not a burning of one's "soul"; and it refers to what will take place on the judgment day, not in some intermediate state. Every other passage used is as forced and misused as the one in I Corinthians.

Further, Rome's doctrine would deprive believers of the blessed Word of God that gives them (us!) that sweet assurance of glory directly upon the experience of death, passages such as John 5:24: "He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life." Notice — "...and cometh not into judgment." As Paul declares, for the believer to be "absent from the body" is to be "at home with the Lord" (II Cor. 5:8).

But centrally, as with all of Rome's major doctrinal errors, her teaching of purgatory is a direct assault upon the gospel of Christ crucified, and the power, value, and full sufficiency of His atoning sacrifice for sin. The "once for all" character of Christ's death and suffering is mutilated and slandered (cf. Heb. 9:12, 26-28 and 10:14, 18). As the apostle John declares, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin" (I John

1:7). Christ Jesus died exactly so that we would not be as those characterized by a "... certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation" (Heb. 10:27).

In the name of the gospel, and

the full sufficiency of Christ's atonement for everyone who believeth, the dreadful fiction of purgatory must be denounced and dismissed. Rome ought to pay special heed to the scathing words of

her first pope, the apostle Peter, to Simon the magician who also thought spiritual things could be purchased with money. "Thy money perish with thee..." (Acts 8:20). □

The Reformation's Repudiation of Chiliasm

Prof. Russell Dykstra

At the end of 1533 the Anabaptist group at Munster in Westphalia, under the leadership of a former Lutheran minister Bernard Rothman, gained control of the city council. Early in 1534 a Dutch prophet and ex-innkeeper named John of Leyden appeared in Munster, believing that he was called to make the city the new Jerusalem. On 9 February 1534 his party seized city hall. By 2 March all who refused to be baptized were banished, and it was proclaimed a city of refuge for the oppressed. Though the Bishop of Munster collected an army and began the siege of the city, an attempted coup within the walls was brutally suppressed, and John of Leyden was proclaimed King of New Zion, wore vestments as his royal robes, and held his court and throne in the market-place. Laws were decreed to establish community of goods, and the Old Testament was adduced to permit polygamy. Bernard Rothman, once a man of sense, once the friend of Melancthon, took nine wives.

They now believed they had been given the duty and the power of exterminating the ungodly. The world would perish, and only Munster would be saved. Rothman issued a public incitement to world rebellion: 'Dear brethren, arm yourselves for the battle, not only with the humble weapons of the apostles for suffering, but also with the glorious armour of David for vengeance...in God's strength, and help annihilate the ungodly.' An ex-soldier named John of Geelen slipped out of the city, carrying copies of this proclamation into the Netherlands, and planned sudden coups in the Dutch cities.... At last, on 25 June 1535, the gates of Munster were opened by sane men within the walls, and the bishop's army entered the city. The cages where the corpses of Anabaptist leaders were hung are still hanging on the tower of St. Lambert's Church.¹

Such is the record of this shocking uprising of radicals who held to an earthly kingdom of Christ. The revolt at Munster had a profound effect on Europe. The rulers were alarmed at this radical group labeled "Anabaptist," and serious efforts were made everywhere to root out these dangerous fanatics.

Munster had serious consequences for the Reformation as well. Rome did everything in its power to link the Anabaptists with Luther and the whole of the Reformation, and that with considerable success. Catholic rulers used the (real or alleged) presence of Anabaptists in their regions as an excuse to persecute any and all Protestants. For years thereafter, the Protestants would be seeking to distance themselves from "the Anabaptists."²

The term "Anabaptists" is not

the best, because it refers only to those who rejected infant baptism and were therefore *baptized again* (the literal meaning of the term). The more accurate title would be

1 Chadwick, Owen. *The Reformation* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997) pp. 190-191.

2 See Calvin's dedicatory letter to his *Institutes*, sent to Francis, King of France, in 1535, and still included in the 1559 edition of the *Institutes*. See also the Belgic Confession, Articles 18, 34, and 36, written in 1559.

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"radicals of the Reformation," of which group, it is true, the Anabaptists made up a large part. These radicals were convinced (often times by reading Luther) of the need to forsake Rome. With some of the doctrines of the Reformation they agreed, but they soon went beyond Luther to one extreme or another. Doctrinally unbalanced, they overemphasized some elements of doctrine to the exclusion of others. Application of their beliefs to life was likewise rigorous and extreme.

These groups were radically different from the Reformers Luther, Calvin, and the rest, both theologically and spiritually. The Reformers faced the teaching and practices of these radicals head on, demonstrated their errors, and rejected them.

The radicals included such diverse men as Menno Simon, the pacifist Anabaptist and father of the Mennonites; the violent John of Leyden described above; and the heretic Michael Servetus, who was condemned and burned in Geneva on account of his denial of the Trinity.

Our interest in this element of the Reformation centers on their chiliastic views, that is, their ardent desire for an earthly kingdom of Christ.

Chiliasm is the belief that Christ will return to establish a glorious kingdom of peace on this earth for one thousand years. The term comes from a Greek word that means one thousand, and arises out of the reference in Revelation 20 to a thousand-year period in which Satan is bound and the souls of martyrs reign with Christ. Chiliasm is distinct from the present day premillennialism in that chiliasm does not teach a secret rapture or emphasize dispensations. Some of the early church fathers held to a form of chiliasm. However, it died out in the church after Augustine came to understand that the millennium is not a literal one thousand-year period, but is the era

from Christ's ascension to His second coming.

Chiliasm was resurrected by the radicals of the Reformation. Willem Balke (*Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*) asserts that "in spite of their differences, all of these Anabaptist groups [in Strasbourg, RJD] shared a common, feverish longing for the advent of the kingdom of God."³ In his comprehensive study, *The Radical Reformation*, George Williams concludes that the expectation of a golden age or kingdom was not only a significant common thread among the radicals, it also accounts for their rash and often violent behavior. He writes that "the churches of the Radical Reformation were sustained and emboldened by the conviction that they and their charismatic leaders were the instruments of the Lord of history in the latter days."⁴

Luther encountered these radicals in the early days of the Reformation. In 1521-22, while Luther was in hiding in the castle of Wartburg, radicals took over in Wittenberg. Several of the "Zwickau prophets," men identified by the city from which they had come, came to Wittenberg in Luther's absence. Claiming they had special revelations, they heavily influenced Andreas Carlstadt, the friend and colleague of Luther, who began to impose radical changes upon the churches. Luther had been content in those early days to lead the people away from the *practices* of Rome through preaching of true *doctrine*. The radicals were impatient, and began instituting wholesale changes in the liturgy and life of the churches. Wittenberg was in an uproar.

The troubles brought Luther back to Wittenberg. There Luther preached a series of eight sermons in which he patiently and gently reproved the radicals for their haste and instructed them on their errors.

Although the conflict did not involve chiliasm directly, it is evi-

dent that wrong ideas of the kingdom lay behind this radicalism. Luther made the point in the first sermon, "Dear friends, the kingdom of God—and we are that kingdom...."⁵

Another of the Zwickau men, Thomas Munzer, established himself in Allstedt in 1523. He began to preach that the ungodly were to be eliminated and that the elect (those who received the Spirit, that is, special revelations) would establish a kingdom of God on earth. Luther warned some by private letter about Munzer, and finally came out publicly with the "Letter to the Princes of Saxony Concerning the Rebellious Spirit." Luther pointed out the evil and unbiblical "spirit" that was guiding Munzer and his ilk. He wrote, "I have already heard from the spirit himself here in Wittenberg, that he thinks it necessary to use the sword to carry out his undertaking." Luther reminded the readers that "before Pilate, Christ rejected such an aim, saying that His kingdom is not of this world. He also taught His disciples not to be rulers of the world."⁶

All the Reformers contested the teachings of the radical leaders of that day, but none so thoroughly or effectively as John Calvin. In his ministry in Strasbourg (1538-1541) Calvin was used by God to bring a number of Anabaptists back to the fold of the Reformed churches. Calvin's *Institutes* grew and developed over the years in direct response to the contact with the Anabaptists and other radicals.

The main conflicts between the radicals and the Reformed was not

3 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1981), p. 126.

4 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), p. 859.

5 *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Works*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), p. 415.

6 *Luther's Works*, Vol. 40. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), p. 51.

over chiliasm, but more often involved doctrines such as infant baptism, the church and covenant, the interpretation of Scripture, and purity of life. Nevertheless, Calvin emphatically rejected the idea of an earthly kingdom in general, and of chiliasm in particular.

In his Commentary on Romans (13:1), he criticized those "tumultuous spirits who believe that the kingdom of Christ cannot be sufficiently elevated, unless all earthly powers be abolished...."⁷

Commenting on Acts 1:8, Calvin pointed out how Jesus rejected the notion of an earthly kingdom and affirmed the heavenly and spiritual.

For hereby [Jesus] meant to drive out of his disciples' minds that fond and false imagination which they had conceived of the terrestrial kingdom, because he showeth unto them briefly, that his kingdom consisteth in the preaching of the gospel. There was no cause, therefore, why they should dream of riches, of external principality, or any other earthly thing, whilst they heard that Christ did then reign when as he subdueth unto himself (all the whole) world by the preaching of the gospel. Whereupon it followeth that he doth reign spiritually, and not after any worldly manner.

In that same context Calvin specifically rejected the chiliast view, and affirmed rather the spiritual kingdom in our hearts. He wrote:

Wherefore, we see that those which held opinion, that Christ should reign as a king in this world a thousand years fell into the like folly. Hereupon, also, they applied all such prophecies as did describe the kingdom of Christ figuratively by the similitude of earthly kingdoms unto the commodity of their flesh; whereas, notwithstanding, it was God's purpose to lift up their minds higher. As for us, let us learn to apply our minds to hear the gospel preached...which prepareth a

place in our hearts for the kingdom of Christ.

Calvin considered the chiliasts' errors too childish even to need refutation because they were without scriptural support. He wrote, "Nor do they receive any countenance from the Apocalypse, ... since the thousand years there mentioned refer not to the eternal blessedness of the Church, but only to the various troubles which await the Church militant in this world." He insisted that "the whole Scripture proclaims that there will be no end either to the happiness of the elect, or the punishment of the reprobate" (*Institutes* III, 25, 5).⁸

Commenting on I Thessalonians 4:17, Calvin insisted that the kingdom of Christ may not be limited to a thousand years.

To those who have been once gathered to Christ he promises eternal life with him, by which statements the reveries of Origen and of the Chiliasts are abundantly refuted. For the life of believers, when they have once been gathered into one kingdom, will have no end any more than Christ's. Now, to assign to Christ a thousand years, so that he would afterwards cease to reign, were too horrible to be made mention of.

Calvin elaborated on this in his *Institutes* (III, 25, 5). He considered the blessings of the elect and those of Christ to be inseparable.

Those who assign only a thousand years to the children of God to enjoy the inheritance of future life, observe not how great an insult they offer to Christ and his kingdom. If they are not to be clothed with immortality, then Christ himself, into whose glory they shall be transformed, has not been received into immortal glory; if their blessedness is to have an end, the kingdom of Christ, on whose solid structure it rests, is temporary. In short, they are either most ignorant of all divine things or they maliciously aim at subverting the whole grace of God and power of Christ, which cannot have their

full effects unless sin is obliterated, death swallowed up, and eternal life fully renewed.

The issue of chiliasm was sufficiently important that, not only the individual theologians, but also the churches addressed and rejected it. In 1530, the Lutheran Churches adopted the Augsburg Confession. Article 17 condemned those "who now scatter Jewish opinions, that, before the resurrection of the dead, the godly shall occupy the kingdom of the world, the wicked being every where suppressed."

Out of the Reformed camp came the Second Helvetic Confession (1566) which likewise repudiated chiliasm.

We further condemn Jewish dreams that there will be a golden age on earth before the Day of Judgment, and that the pious, having subdued all their godless enemies, will possess all the kingdoms of the earth. For evangelical truth in Matthew 24 and 25, and Luke 18, and apostolic teaching in II Thessalonians 2, and II Timothy 3 and 4, present something quite different. (Chapter 11)

This explicit rejection of chiliasm (and thus of all forms of premillennialism) is the confession of all Reformed churches to the present day who are faithful to the Protestant Reformation. As Calvin affirmed, chiliasm "insults" Christ and His glorious kingdom. It is unthinkable that the Christ, who redeemed His people by sustaining the infinite and eternal wrath of God, that that Christ would be rewarded with a millennial kingdom, and then turn it over to His Father. □

⁷ All quotations from Calvin's Commentaries are taken from the translation by John Owen, published by Baker Book House.

⁸ All quotations from Calvin's *Institutes* are taken from the Beveridge translation published by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Calvin's Interpretation of Isaiah 2:1-4

Prof. Robert Decker

Calvin understood this prophecy to be a "confirmation" of the "doctrine ... concerning the restoration of the Church."* Calvin viewed this prophecy of the restoration of the church as a special vision added by God, "... by way of confirmation, in order to make it more certain and undoubted that, whatever calamities might arise, his Church never perish" (p. 90). That which God confirms by this vision is the promise revealed in Isaiah 1: 26 and 27, "And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness."

Chapter one of Isaiah speaks of the terrible sin and rebellion of the kingdom of Israel, the typical manifestation of Christ's kingdom, Christ's church in the Old Testament era. On account of this rebellion the holy and righteous God will pour out His judgments on Israel. They will be taken into captivity by Babylon. For the sake of the faithful remnant according to God's eternal election of grace in Christ, the Lord promises to redeem and restore His church. Her judges and counselors will be restored, and she shall be redeemed through judgment and called the city of righteousness, the faithful city. This promise, or, as Calvin calls it, this doctrine, is confirmed

by the vision of chapter 2:1-4. God confirms the doctrine of redemption and restoration by this vision of the glorious, victorious kingdom of Christ. He does so to reassure and comfort His beleaguered, suffering, captive saints in Babylon.

"Doctrine sometimes has not sufficient weight with us, God therefore adds *visions*, that by means of them he may seal his doctrine to us" (p. 90). Calvin sees God as having a twofold purpose with this doctrine or promise of the future restoration of the church (chap. 1:26, 27) as sealed by what he calls the vision of chapter 2:1-4. And here Calvin's pastoral heart is beautifully manifest. Calvin is the great theologian of the sixteenth century Reformation and he is rightly called "the prince of expositors," but he remains a pastor, an undershepherd of Christ's sheep! Writes Calvin, "First, since Isaiah, and others who came after him, were unceasingly to proclaim terror, on account of the obstinate wickedness of the people, until the temple should be burnt and the city destroyed, and the Jews carried into captivity, it was necessary that such severity should be mitigated towards believers by some consolation of hope. Secondly, as they were to languish in captivity, and as their minds were shaken, even after their return (Note well! Calvin makes clear by this statement that he does not regard the return of the remnant and the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple as the ultimate fulfillment of this prophetic vision), by a succession of varied calamities, and at length were almost overwhelmed with despair by the dreadful desolation and confusion, they might a

hundred times have fainted, if they had not been upheld" (p. 91).

That Calvin does not view this prophecy as being fulfilled in some earthly sense (pre- or post-millennial) is obvious from his interpretation of "the last of the days" of verse two. Calvin writes, "When he mentions the end or completion of days, let us remember that he is speaking of the kingdom of Christ" (p. 91).

The reason why the Lord refers to the kingdom of Christ as "the last of the days" is that until that time everything may be said to be in a "state of suspense, that the people might not fix their eyes on the present condition of things, which was only a shadow, but on the Redeemer, by whom the reality would be declared" (p. 91). Calvin continues by making the point that since Christ came in His first advent, we of the New Testament era have arrived at the end of the ages, or, as the text puts it, "the last of the days." The saints by this prophecy were urged to extend their hope to the end of the ages. Under Christ the condition of the church would be perfected. To Him, the Redeemer and His restored, perfected kingdom is the faith and hope of the saints directed. In the fierce storms about to descend upon the church in Babylon's captivity, every believer "seized on this word as a plank, that by means of it he might be floated into the harbour. Yet it ought to be observed, that while

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* This quotation and others to follow are taken from the reprint by Baker Book House (1989) of William Pringle's translation of Calvin's *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, 1850 edition, p. 89.

the fullness of days began at the coming of Christ, it flows on in uninterrupted progress until he appear the second time for our salvation (Hebrews ix:28)" (p. 92).

In the last of the days, verse two through four reveals, "the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow into it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

Calvin views this as a wonderful vision of the glorification of the church which shall take place when "Christ appears the second time, without sin unto salvation" (Heb. 9:28). God, Calvin insists, intended by this vision to bring consolation to support the minds of the people during the captivity (p. 93). God gave the vision "... so that, although there should be no temple, and no sacrifices, and though all should be in ruins, still this hope would be cherished in the minds of the godly, and amidst a condition so desolate and so shockingly ruinous, they would still reason thus: 'The mountain of the Lord is indeed forsaken, but there he will yet have his habitation; and greater shall be the glory of this mountain than of all others.' To prevent them, therefore, from doubting that such would be the result, the Prophet has here, as it were, sketched a picture in which they might behold the glory of God..." (p. 93).

The vision holds before us the glory of God in His church brought

to completion. The elect, not just out of Judah but out of all nations, shall flow into the exalted mountain of God's church. There they will be taught the ways of the Lord. As a fruit of this teaching, they will walk in the paths of God. The reason is that out of Zion will go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

By "law," Calvin writes, the prophet does not mean merely the ten commandments. He mentions a part for the whole. Law means instruction. It is the Word of God as that Word expresses God's will for His saints in Christ. That will is summed in God's law.

This prophecy, Calvin holds, "... was fulfilled, when the preaching of the gospel began at that very place, (for Christ first taught at Jerusalem, and afterwards his doctrine was spread throughout the whole world,)..." (p. 96). Again, in this context Calvin emphasizes that God gave the saints this beautiful picture to "fortify their minds, which otherwise on manifold occasions might have been crushed" (pp. 96, 97). How the godly remnant needed this. Not only would they be sorely tried in the captivity of Babylon, but that would continue after the remnant returned to Judah. It did not take long before the false prophets and priests again held sway in Israel. Were it not for this wonderful vision of the glory of God in His church, the godly would have despaired.

Not only so, but Calvin points out that this prophecy was a great consolation to the apostles as well! "And undoubtedly," he writes, "this had very great authority and weight with the Apostles, when they knew that they were appointed to perform those things which are here promised. Otherwise they would never have had courage enough to venture to undertake the office, and, in short, would not have been able to endure the burden, especially when the whole world furiously opposed them" (p. 98). We add to this that

we can be certain that Calvin himself derived no little consolation from this very prophecy when it seemed that Geneva and the whole world of Roman Catholicism furiously opposed him!

In the last of the days, the prophecy promises, God will judge among the nations and rebuke many people. The effect of this judgment and reproving will be "a condemning of our vices ... and a reformation of our morals" (p. 99).

The fruit of God's reproving judgment will be that "they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." Calvin notes that the prophet "does not merely say swords shall be broken in pieces, but they shall be turned into mattocks" (p. 101). A mattock is a hoe. In other words, Calvin instructs us, instead of committing acts of violence against one another, God's people in the nations will cultivate peace and friendship. The result will be peace, perfect peace among the saints in the church. They will have peace with one another and they will together have peace with God.

This last of the days has dawned, according to Calvin. We of the New Testament era are already living in it. But we have only a beginning of the wonderful glory here prophesied. We never reach the perfection here revealed through the prophet on this earth. Here we must be satisfied with the beginning. In the church on earth there is always an ungodly element, or, as Calvin puts it, "the good have not yet reached the goal, and are widely distant from that perfection which is required from them," and, "the good are always mixed with the bad" (p. 102).

Calvin concludes his comments with this instruction: "The fulfillment of this prophecy, therefore, in its full extent, must not be looked for on earth. It is enough, if we experience the beginning, and

if, being reconciled to God through Christ, we cultivate mutual friendship, and abstain from doing harm to any one" (p. 102).

Clearly, the fulfillment and the perfection and the peace come when Jesus returns, raises the dead,

executes God's righteous judgments on all men, destroys the present heaven and earth in the fire of God's wrath, and creates the new heaven and earth in which righteousness shall dwell (II Pet.

3:10 - 13). There God's great glory will shine in the church made perfect, world without end.

Seeing we look for such things, let us be diligent that we may be found of Christ in peace (II Pet. 3:14). □

Hope and Holiness

Rev. Dale Kuiper

"Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope purifies himself, even as he is pure."

I John 3:2-3

It is an amazing fact of church history that when the Reformers battled hard against salvation by the works of the law, they did not throw away the baby with the bathwater. They did not throw out the biblical doctrine of good works with the foul water of works' righteousness. They insisted, against Rome, that salvation was by *faith alone* without man's works in any sense. That they gave large and proper place to good works of thankfulness as the fruits of salvation was due to their humble submission to the Scriptures. For them, all theology, all doctrine, all matters of the Christian life were ruled by *Scripture alone*. They went where Scripture sent them; they emphasized what Scripture stressed. This was true of Martin Luther and this was true of John Calvin. We will restrict

ourselves in this article to the teachings of John Calvin as delineated in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, especially the section entitled "The Lord of the Christian." We will examine his teaching in connection with the return of Jesus Christ at the end of the world, and the Christian's lively hope for that return. (All references and quotations are taken from the *Institutes*, translated by John Allen, Vol. I, Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, 1949.)

Spiritual Arguments

Hope is the expectant, certain longing that burns within the child of God for the bodily return of Jesus Christ at the end of the ages to take His church unto Himself and to make all things new. Hope is *expectancy*. It looks forward into the unseen future, when God's promise is fully come; for hope that is seen is not hope, but a man hopes for what is not seen. Hope is *certainty*. Without a shadow of a doubt, without any fear of being put to shame, the saint is absolutely convinced, not only that Christ will return, but also of his own part in the great resurrection unto glory and life. And hope is *longing*. With patience we wait for it, but it is never out of our hearts and minds. We cannot wait, even as we must wait!

Every aspect of hope is based

on the resurrection of our Savior from the dead, for we read in I Peter 1:3 that we have been "begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Christ's resurrection is a *sample* of our resurrection. As He was raised up the third day as our Head, so shall it be with every member of His body. His resurrection is the *proof* of our inheritance. God raised Him up in announcement that His justice was satisfied and the title to our inheritance secured. Christ's resurrection is the *power* of the new life. When His heavenly life is given us in regeneration, we have all of Christ, including the blessed hope.

Hope is really the power of the Christian's life as he makes his pilgrimage through this present life. Hope keeps him on the way to Zion, correcting him when he goes astray. Hope powerfully encourages him when he is weary, disappointed, and doubtful. And hope is the power that sanctifies him as long as he is in the body of this death. He who has this hope purifies himself!

Calvin grounds the life of holiness, first, in the divine admonition, "Be ye holy; for I am holy" (I Pet. 1:16). In language that breathes covenant theology, and that hints at the covenant as friendship, he sees the purpose of salvation that God might associate Him-

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self with us. "When we hear any mention of our union with God, we should remember that holiness must be the bond of it; not that we attain communion with Him by the merit of holiness, but because it is the peculiar property of His glory not to have intercourse with iniquity and uncleanness" (p. 747). Further, because our future is to inhabit the holy city of Jerusalem which God has consecrated to Himself, this heavenly city cannot be occupied by impure inhabitants. "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart" (Ps. 15:1, 2).

Secondly, Calvin grounds the Christian's holiness in the pattern that God has provided, that we should be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 6:4; 8:29). Since Christ has reconciled us to God from our degenerate, fallen state, we should exhibit His character in our lives. He argues that since God has revealed Himself to us as Father, since Christ has purified us in His blood, since the Spirit has dedicated us as temples to God, it would be the basest ingratitude on our part if we did not "exert our most strenuous efforts to preserve our bodies and souls pure and uncorrupt till the day of the Lord" (p. 748).

The French Reformer was no perfectionist. He did not insist that one who breathes anything other than the perfect gospel cannot be a Christian. He did not require evangelical perfection. For then all would be excluded from the church. "What then? Let us set before our eyes the mark, to which alone our pursuit must be directed. Let that be prescribed as the goal towards which we earnestly tend. For it is not lawful for you to make such a compromise with God, as to undertake a part of the duties prescribed to you in His word, and to omit part of them at your pleasure" (749). Encouraging us al-

ways to strive, reminding us that growth in sanctification comes with small, daily steps, he holds before us the victory that is ours when Christ returns. "Til we have arrived at a perfection of goodness, which indeed we seek and pursue as long as we live, and shall then attain, when divested of all corporeal infirmity, we shall be admitted by God into complete communion with Him" (p. 750).

Self-Denial

Holiness involves the Christian in a twofold, simultaneous action: separating himself from sin and dedicating himself to God, or fleeing *from* sin and fleeing *to* God. Calvin finds a large part of holiness, therefore, in self-denial. He discovers the principle of the Christian life in Romans 12:1, 2, that we are to present our bodies as living sacrifices to God, by not being conformed to the world, but by being renewed in our minds. And he shows the reasonableness of this kind of service since we are not our own but the Lord's. In language that anticipates the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day I, he writes, "We are not our own; therefore neither our reason nor our will should predominate in our deliberations and actions. We are not our own; therefore let us, as far as possible, forget ourselves and all things that are ours. We are not our own; therefore let us not propose it as our end, to seek what may be expedient for us according to the flesh. On the contrary, we are God's; to Him, therefore, let us live and die. We are God's; towards Him, therefore, as our only legitimate end, let every part of our lives be directed. O, how great a proficiency has that man made, who, having been taught that he is not his own, has taken the sovereignty and government of himself from his own reason, to surrender it to God" (pp. 751, 752)!

Recognizing the difficulty of forsaking all carnal considerations and devoting ourselves exclusively

to God and the neighbor, Calvin quotes Titus 2:11-14, commenting that "Paul recalls our attention to the hope of blessed immortality; apprizing us that our efforts are not in vain, because, as Christ once appeared as a Redeemer, so, at His final advent, He will manifest the benefits of the salvation He has obtained. Thus he dispels the fascinations which blind us, and prevent our aspiring with becoming ardor to the glories of heaven, and at the same time teaches us that we must live as strangers and pilgrims in the world, that we may not lose our inheritance?" (pp. 754, 755).

The difficulty of self-denial is to be found especially in our natural desire to have preeminence above others. Each of us has within him the heart of a king. And we possess an amazing ability to deceive ourselves. Our own vices we consider trivial, and we even try to turn them into virtues. The virtues of others we refuse to acknowledge, seeking rather to diminish them. We easily forget that whatsoever abilities we have are the free gifts of God, and that we are to honor others for their God-given gifts, and especially for the image of God in them. "For we shall never arrive at true meekness by any other way, than by having our hearts imbued with self-abasement and a respect for others" (p. 756).

How difficult to seek the advantage of our neighbors! How contrary to our natures to exercise charity with kindness and long-suffering. The lawful use of God's gifts is the liberal giving of them to others. "Let this, then, be our rule for benignity and beneficence — that whatever God has conferred upon us, which enables us to assist our neighbor, we are the stewards of it, and must one day render an account of our stewardship; and that the only right dispensation of what has been committed to us, is that which is regulated by the law of love" (p. 757). The

needy may be worthless and contemptible in our eyes. They may be of no advantage to us, have never done us any good, may in fact have provoked and injured us. No matter. They are to be embraced in the arms of love. For we are debtors to our neighbors.

But what of the morrow and of our needs in the future? Should we not lay up against the day of pestilence, disease, death, and war? We do well to consider daily the paternal goodness of God. We are the sheep of His pasture. And all things are ordained by Him. The rule of piety is to acknowledge that God is the Governor of all things. He discharges both blessings and calamities with kindness and justice. As the saints await the return of Jesus Christ, they are thankful in prosperity and patient in adversity.

Bearing the Cross

The Reformer from Geneva describes the bearing of our crosses as an important branch of self-denial. A true disciple of Christ must take up his cross. God dealt with His only begotten Son in this way, and He continues in this way with all His children. "Why then should we exempt ourselves from that condition to which it behooved Christ our head to be subject; especially since His submission was on our account, that He might exhibit to us an example of patience in His own person" (p. 765)? This is part of our being conformed to Christ. It enables us the better to partake of His resurrection.

Calvin assigns five reasons for cross-bearing in this life: 1) That we may learn our extreme *frailty*, in order to invoke God's strength, and stand. 2) That we may learn *patience*, be quickened in hope, and rely upon God in the future. 3) That we may learn *obedience*, even as Christ learned obedience by the things which He suffered. 4) That we may learn to examine ourselves regarding the past, to discover past offenses and make the proper cor-

rections. 5) That we may learn the blessedness of suffering for righteousness' sake, not only in the defense of the gospel, but in the vindication of every just cause.

Calvin was no Stoic, and he had no time for their iron-hearted philosophy. Jesus left us an example of shedding many tears, of experiencing terrors, and of being sorrowful unto death. He was the man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. Christ teaches us that "the world shall rejoice, but ye shall weep and lament" (John 16:20). When the master theologian writes of these things, he reveals a pastor's heart! He has great concern that the people of God not despair under their crosses. He would excite them to reverence for God, who appoints all our afflictions, and to submission to His will in all things with cheerfulness.

The Future Life

The author of the *Institutes* counsels us unto a contempt of the present life, in order that we may be excited by a contemplation of that life which is to come. God shows us the vanity of this present life by sending us wars, tumults, exile, famines, family troubles, diseases, etc., so that we learn that nothing can be expected on this earth but conflict. We may think of happiness and a crown only when we raise our eyes to heaven. He writes, "There is no medium between these two extremes; either the earth must become vile in our estimation, or it must retain our immoderate love" (p. 776). We must despise this world in order to meditate wholeheartedly on the life to come.

But Calvin was no ascetic. Our contempt of earthly existence may not lead us to hate life or fail to be thankful for God's gifts. All of God's temporal gifts are designed to advance our salvation. With a rather neat argument, Calvin says, "Here we begin in various blessings to taste the sweetness of Divine benignity, that our hope and

desire may be excited after the full revelation of it" (p. 780). Scorning unbelief which says, "The greatest blessing is not to be born, and the next, to die immediately," Calvin sets forth the biblical view of death. "If heaven is our country, what is the earth but a place of exile? If the departure out of the world is an entrance into life, what is the world but a sepulchre? What is a continuance in it but an absorption in death? If deliverance from the body is an introduction into complete liberty, what is the body but a prison? If to enjoy the presence of God is the summit of felicity, is it not misery to be destitute of it? But till we escape out of the world, 'we are absent from the Lord'" (p. 781). Therefore he counsels us to follow Paul, who was ready to glorify God in life and in death, and leave the limits of life and death to God's decision. Answering the objection that permanence is the best and highest state, he agrees and states that "we ought therefore to direct our views to a future immortality, where we may obtain a fixed condition, which is nowhere to be found on earth" (p. 782). That believer has made good progress in the school of Christ. He joyfully expects both the day of his death and the day of his final resurrection.

Living out of hope, striving after holiness, denying self, and bearing his cross, the child of God experiences what it means to be accounted as sheep for the slaughter. He keeps his thoughts on heaven, looks beyond the appearance of things, and firmly believes that God will one day receive the faithful into His kingdom while casting the wicked into inextinguishable fire. "To conclude in one word, the cross of Christ triumphs, in the hearts of believers, over the devil and the flesh, over sin and impious men, only when their eyes are directed to the power of the resurrection" (p. 784). □

Reformed Eschatology (Amillennial) Since the Reformation

Rev. Charles J. Terpstra

It is probably well known that the Reformation did not develop Christian doctrine in the area of eschatology very strongly. In part this was due to the fact that, in general, the Reformers accepted the long-standing, amillennial eschatology of Augustine set forth c. AD 400. And partly this was due to the fact that the various doctrines that belong to eschatology were not all that controversial at the time of the Reformation. An exception to this was the chiliast error (literal millennialism, i.e., thousand-year reign of Christ on earth) that arose again in the church, this time in the Anabaptist camp. The Reformers rejected this, as had Augustine twelve centuries earlier and the church consistently thereafter. Perhaps another controversial area was the Reformers' view of the Antichrist, whom most believed to be the Roman Catholic papacy.

This is not to say, however, that the Reformers did not have a firm, orthodox belief of the last things. They certainly did, as other articles in this special issue demonstrate. In simple, straightforward fashion they followed the teaching of Scripture concerning the hope of the church. They understood this present age to be the so-called millennium of Revelation 20:1-6 and the last before the return of Christ. They believed the end of this age would be marked by increasing wickedness in the world and apostasy in the church, culminating in the rise of the antichrist. They held

to the personal, visible, glorious coming (only one!) of Christ when all things were full according to God's counsel. They embraced the truth of the bodily resurrection of all the dead, the final, public judgment, and the re-creation of the heavens and the earth by Christ upon His return. And they believed the everlasting states of the righteous and wicked — unending bliss with God in the new creation for the former, and unending torment in hell for the latter. The Reformation doctrine of the last things may be seen (and read), for example, in the brief but beautiful thirty-seventh article of the *Belgic Confession*.

Yet what we are saying here is that the Reformers did not develop the doctrines of eschatology, at least not very far. Witness the fact that neither Luther nor Calvin produced a commentary on the book of Revelation. They basically repeated what the church had held for over a thousand years. We may also say concerning this that it was not God's purpose that they should develop doctrine in this area. His purpose with them was otherwise, namely, to return the church to the heart of the gospel — the doctrines of sovereign grace — and to reform her organizationally and liturgically according to the Scriptures. In God's wisdom it would fall to the church in future generations to develop the truths of eschatology. This is indeed what has happened. And, we believe, this development is still continuing.

Our intention in this article is to point out this subsequent development of Reformed eschatology. Our focus is on development of the amillennial view, because this is the

position which this writer and the PRC hold, believing it to be the truth of God's Word.

Having said this, one can hear some of our readers snickering at the writer's apparent ignorance of developments in the area of eschatology. "Developments in amillennialism?! Hardly," many would say. "Amillennialism is dead and buried! The progress in the doctrine of the last things has been in the premillennial and postmillennial camps," they would argue. And there is no question that these teachings have dominated the modern church-doctrinal scene. Yet it is our contention that these views are departures from the classic Reformed-biblical position, and that in spite of all the attention paid to these views amillennialism has not only quietly survived but also powerfully thrived. Amillennialism is alive and well! It simply has not received the attention which it deserves. Amillennial teaching has made progress precisely because it has had to contend with premillennialism and postmillennialism. And though it has for that reason had to be negative in much of its presentation, yet amillennialism has developed positively too.

Perhaps a brief listing of prominent amillennialists in the last century will help us to appreciate this fact. After all, the "pre's" and "post's" are not the only ones with whom we amillennialists should be familiar. For every "Darby" and "Scofield" in premillennialism, for every "Warfield" and "Kik" in postmillennialism, there is an amillennialist to answer. We mention a select few here, along with their writings where pertinent.

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Among the Dutch Reformed there are Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920); Herman Bavinck (1854-1921; *The Last Things: Hope for This World and the Next*, 1996. This is part of an English translation of his *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 1895-1901); Albertus Pieters (*The Lamb, The Woman, and the Dragon*, 1937); Louis Berkhof (*Systematic Theology*, 1941); William Hendriksen (*More Than Conquerors*, 1939; *The Bible on the Life Hereafter*, 1959); Herman Hoeksema (*Reformed Dogmatics*, 1966; *Behold He Cometh*, 1969); Anthony Hoekema (*The Bible and the Future*, 1979). Among Presbyterians we may note Robert L. Dabney (*Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 1878), Geerhardus Vos (*Pauline Eschatology*, 1930), William C. Robinson (*Christ the Hope of Glory*, 1945), George Murray (*Millennial Studies, A Search for Truth*, 1948), Jay Adams (*The Time Is At Hand*, 1966), and William E. Cox (*Amillennialism Today*, 1966). While there are variations in the details of the amillennial position set forth by these men, all held to and advanced the basics of the historic amillennial position of the church.

But to move on, we ought to note in what areas amillennial teaching has developed since the Reformation. What are some of the distinctive elements of Reformed eschatology? In the first place, we may mention its emphasis on the *sovereignty* of God. Being one of the cardinal tenets of Reformed theology, God's absolute sovereignty has also been an inseparable part of her doctrine of the last things. The doctrine is applied to eschatology in several ways. For one thing, the sovereignty of God is applied to the very idea of the end of all things. Reformed amillennialism teaches that if all things have their beginning in God (and they do, for He is the sovereign Creator of all things!), then they also have their end in Him. God is the Source of all things and He is the Goal of all things. This means that all things, including the

end of the world, have their meaning and purpose in God. From this comes the idea of the consummation of all things, that God is leading all things to a "wrapping up," a "bringing together," indeed to a climax of His sovereign purpose, which is His own glory through the full redemption (glorification) of His elect church and the renewal of His entire creation in Jesus Christ. Thus, Reformed eschatology ties the end of all things to the sovereign, eternal counsel of God (predestination) and to His almighty providence in time and history. H. Hoeksema writes, for example, in his *Reformed Dogmatics*:

...The consummation of all things presupposes a willing and decreeing God, Who is before all things, and Who made all things according to His own counsel unto a definite end and purpose, and Who by that counsel controls and guides all things unto the end He has in mind. Without the presupposition of this counsel of a personal God the world can have no purpose and no destination unto which it was called into being. And without an all-ruling providence, according to which God controls all things according to His good pleasure, there cannot possibly be any definite line or stability in the development of all things, and there is no guarantee that they will attain to the purpose unto which they were called into being (Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1966, p. 737).

Reformed eschatology also stresses the sovereignty of God in connection with the powers of darkness that rise up against the Lord and seek to frustrate His purpose with all things, especially in the end. Rejecting the dualism taught by paganism and by much of the church-world, the Reformed faith holds that God is absolutely sovereign also over all the evil in the world. He is Lord of Satan and his hosts, Lord of the ungodly nations and peoples, Lord of all sin and darkness, Lord of Antichrist

and all his forces. Being Lord over them, He uses them for the accomplishing of His own purpose. All the rantings and ragings of the beast against God and His people only serve to fulfill His will. It is right here that Reformed eschatology provides the believer with great comfort and peace as he lives in these last days. Nothing and no one can possibly overthrow his God and thwart His purposes! His cause is and will be triumphant! And, therefore, every elect child of God will reach the goal of his salvation.

In the second place, we may mention that Reformed eschatology is *covenantal* in focus. Covenant theology has always been an important part of the Reformed faith. So too the doctrine of the covenant has been brought to bear upon the doctrine of the last things in Reformed amillennialism. The eternal purpose of God concerning all things is viewed in connection with God's eternal covenant of grace with His people in Christ, a covenant that embraces all of creation too. Christ, the Head of the church and creation and the Mediator of the covenant, is at the center of God's eternal purpose with all things. All that God has done in the past, is doing in the world now, and will do yet in the future is for the realizing of His covenant plan in Christ. The end (goal) to which all things are leading is the realization of God's gracious covenant of redemption in Christ. When the end comes in the return of Christ, God's covenant will be complete.

It was especially H. Hoeksema who developed this covenantal eschatology. While other Reformed theologians before him certainly applied the doctrine of the covenant to eschatology (H. Bavinck is a case in point), Hoeksema wove it throughout the whole of theology and thus made it the warp and woof of eschatology as well. He did so in connection with his biblical development of the idea of the covenant itself, that it is in its es-

sence the bond of living friendship and fellowship with His people in Christ. This truth he applied to the doctrine of the last things, so that, for example, when he wrote on Revelation 21:1-4, he said,

Heaven and earth, therefore, shall be united in Christ. The New Jerusalem shall have its abode on earth, yet it shall inhabit all creation. And the whole creation shall be heavenly, made like unto the risen Lord. In that new creation all things shall be perfectly adapted to serve the resurrected and glorified church in Christ, in order that we may serve our God and enjoy the fellowship of His covenant forever and ever (*Behold He Cometh*, p. 677).

Such a covenantal emphasis reveals the unity of God's purposes throughout the ages and casts a warm, relational light on the doctrine of the last things. What bliss beyond compare the church looks forward to according to the purposes of her faithful, covenant Father!

A third distinctive element of Reformed eschatology is its sober, balanced *interpretation of prophecy*. A proper hermeneutic of both Old Testament and New Testament prophecy is essential to and characteristic of Reformed amillennialism. It takes a careful, comprehensive approach to under-

standing the prophetic words of Scripture, avoiding the crass literalism and false dispensationalism of premillennialism on the one hand, and the inconsistent interpretation of postmillennialism on the other hand. Over against these, amillennialism has recognized the unique features of biblical prophecy, that it has elements which are to be taken literally, historically, symbolically, and spiritually. It has also maintained, developed, and applied two important Reformation principles: 1) that the Scriptures present a unified revelation of God; and 2) that Scripture interprets Scripture. In harmony with these principles, Reformed amillennialism stresses that Old Testament prophecy must be understood in the light of the New Testament, and New Testament prophecy in the light of the whole of Scripture. This applies, for example, to those Old Testament prophecies which were spoken to Old Testament Israel as a nation and seem to promise her yet future, earthly blessings, but which, when interpreted in harmony with the New Testament Scriptures, are seen to be fulfilled in the church and in her future glorification in the new heavens and earth at the second coming of Christ.

H. Bavinck does a masterful job of laying out this proper Reformed hermeneutic in chapters four and

five of his book *The Last Things*, especially in opposition to the chiliast interpretation of Old Testament prophecy. We give here a brief example of the Reformed interpretive approach in Bavinck's words:

The New Testament views itself...as the spiritual and therefore complete and authentic fulfillment of the Old Testament. The spiritualization of the Old Testament, rightly understood, is not an invention of Christian theology but has its beginning in the New Testament itself. The Old Testament in spiritualized form, that is, the Old Testament stripped of its temporal and sensuous form, is the New Testament.

... All Old Testament concepts shed their external, national-Israelitish meanings and become manifest in their spiritual and eternal sense (in the New Testament, CJT).

... Therefore the New Testament is not an intermezzo or interlude, neither a detour nor a departure from the line of the Old Covenant, but the long-aimed-for goal, the direct continuation and the genuine fulfillment, of the Old Testament (Baker, 1996, pp. 96-98).

These, then, are a few of the distinctive features of Reformed amillennialism as it has developed since the Reformation. May the Lord be pleased to spread the knowledge of the *true* hope of the saints far and wide! □

Report of Classis West

September 1 - 4, 1999
South Holland, Illinois

The September meeting of Classis West was held at the South Holland Protestant Reformed Church from September 1-4, 1999.

An officebearers' conference was held the day before. The theme of the conference was "Fully Equipped for the Work: A Conference for Elders and Deacons." The conference was attended not only

by many of the delegates to classis, but also by a large contingent of men from Western Michigan, including the seminary students and professors, as well as many other visitors. Rev. Charles Terpstra gave the keynote address, the theme of which was "The Reformed Understanding of the Office." Several sectionals were also made available for both elders and deacons.

The delegates of Classis West gathered Tuesday evening, to-

gether with the congregation of South Holland Protestant Reformed Church, in a special worship service which was conducted by Pastor-elect Garry Eriks, who had received the call to the Loveland PRC in Loveland, Colorado. The sermon he delivered was part of his classical examination.

Classis convened Wednesday morning, September 1. Rev. Wayne Bekkering chaired the meetings of classis and provided careful leadership. Most of Wednes-

day was given to the extensive examination of Pastor-elect Eriks for the office of the ministry. With gratitude to God we may report that he passed his examination with unanimous approval, and that the Loveland PRC in Loveland, Colorado was instructed to proceed to his ordination and installation into the office of the ministry of the Word and sacraments. That installation has since taken place, and Pastor Eriks has taken up his labors in the ministry.

In an extended session which lasted from Wednesday through Saturday morning, classis faced several important matters. Ten appeals and a protest were treated by Classis West. Some of them were rejected as not legally before classis, but several were adjudicated. All were dealt with in closed session. There were cases

in which appellants were sustained in their protests against the actions of their consistory, as well as cases in which consistories were sustained in the appeals brought against them. All the appeals were different and were treated with great care. A protest against a decision of classis last March was rejected, and the previous decision of classis unanimously sustained.

Among other business conducted, two discipline cases were carefully considered in closed session and approval was given to the decisions of the consistories in each case. Classical appointments were again assigned for Hull PRC as follows: Rev. W. Bekkering (October 10 and 17); Rev. M. DeVries (November 21 and 28); Rev. S. Key (December 12 and 19); Rev. A. Brummel (January 9 and 16, 2000);

Rev. C. Haak (February 6 and 13, 2000); and Rev. A. denHartog (March 5 and 12, 2000).

We may thank God that the meetings showed a good spirit of unity throughout. Careful advice and instruction were formulated by the various committees of pre-advice, and are reflected in the decisions taken. The importance of the broader assemblies was again very evident, as well as the carefulness with which matters are deliberated and decisions are made. May God use the decisions and instructions given by classis for the welfare of His church, and the restoration and preservation of peace in the churches.

The March 2000 meeting is scheduled to be hosted by Bethel PRC, Roselle, Illinois, convening on March 1.

Rev. Steven Key, Stated Clerk

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Denominational Activities

The Theological School of our churches opened its doors again this year on September 7 at Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI with its Seminary Convocation. Pray for our four professors and their important labors on behalf of our churches. The student body this year includes three special students, Mr. Mark Shand from the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia, Brisbane congregation, and Mr. Paul Goh and Rev. Lau Chin Kwee, both from the Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore. Besides these three, Mr. Angus Stewart, from the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland, is now entering his third year in our seminary. The three men from our churches continue their studies for the ministry. They are Mr. William Lang-erak, in his first year, from the Hope PRC in Walker, MI, and in

their second year, Mr. Rodney Kleyn, a member of the Southwest PRC, and Mr. David Overway, also a member of the Hope congregation.

In addition to an introduction of this year's student body, the convocation also featured special music provided by the Hope Heralds and a timely address by Prof. H. Hanko based on Ezekiel 23:30, entitled, "Training Men for the Gap."

Speaking about the seminary reminds me that, the Lord willing, Prof. and Mrs. H. Hanko planned to leave September 20 for six months of labor in Singapore, where they will be helping in the establishment of the ERCS Bible School. Let us remember them in our prayers as they are laboring overseas.

Congregational Activities

It's not too unusual for weekly church events to be canceled by winter snowstorms, or spring tornadoes, but we may have a first in our churches when the regularly scheduled consistory meeting of

the Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ was postponed in September because of Hurricane Floyd.

The sanctuary of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI continues to near completion. Each bulletin from them now indicates progress being made on finishing touches on the inside, such as carpet and stained glass window installation. A Dedication Program Committee has been appointed by their Council, although no date has been set at the time of this writing. Their Building Committee has tentatively set October 17 as the first Sunday they could possibly use their building for services.

Our churches were blessed last month when, not one, but two young men were examined by their calling churches' respective classes and installed and ordained into the office of pastor. What a wonderful evidence of God's faithfulness to us, His people.

Pastor-elect Nathan Brummel was ordained into the ministry of the Word and sacraments on September 10. He becomes the first

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

pastor of the Cornerstone PRC in Schererville, IN. His former pastor, Rev. A. Spriensma, preached the sermon; his brother-in-law, Rev. M. Dick, read the Ordination Form; and his brother, Rev. A. Brummel, gave the closing admonitions and prayer. You may also want to make a note that Cornerstone installed a new phone line in their parsonage. It can be used for church business and also as a fax line. The number is 219-864-9684. The Brummel's personal phone is 219-865-1108.

About nine days later, Pastorelect Garry Eriks was ordained into the ministry of the Word and sacraments at the Loveland, CO PRC. Rev. A. denHartog, pastor of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA, led the worship service on September 19. He preached a sermon based on II Timothy 4:1, 2, entitled, "The Minister's Grand Calling." Rev. Eriks became the seventh pastor of Loveland's congregation. Loveland welcomed the Eriks with a grocery shower and a short program of welcome after the evening service on September 19.

In an effort to get their fall society season off to a good start, the congregation of the First PRC in Holland, MI traditionally holds an Inspirational Meeting before the society year begins. This year Rev. R. Cammenga was the featured speaker.

Evangelism Activities

From the bulletin of the Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ we learn that Rev. M. VanderWal began leading a Bible Study every Monday night in New York City. This study began September 13 and will consider the book of Romans. Congregation members were also encouraged to attend.

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Minister Activities

Rev. B. Gritters has declined the call he had been considering to serve as pastor of the Hull, IA PRC.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

LECTURE/PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Sponsored by Faith and Grace PRC

Evangelism Committees

October 28, 29, 1999

at Faith PRC

10/28: 8:00 P.M.

Rev. Mitchell Dick

"Reformation and Evangelism"

10/29: follow-up panel discussions

7:30 P.M.

"Pamphleteering and the Circular File"

Rev. James Slopsema, leader

8:30 P.M.

"From the Weather to the Water of Life"

Rev. Ron VanOverloop, leader

Refreshments and fellowship will be each evening.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On October 9, 1999, our parents,

WILBUR and HATTIE LINKER,

celebrated their 35th wedding anniversary.

We are thankful to our covenant God and Father that He has granted us such loving and caring parents who have shown us throughout the years the truth of God's Word in their words and deeds. May the Lord continue richly to bless them in the coming years.

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep his covenant and to those that remember his commandments to do them" (Psalm 103:17, 18).

- ❖ Bert and Jackie Mulder
Joshua, Eric, Bethany, Stephen, Thomas
- ❖ David and Christine Linker
Jessica (in glory)
- ❖ Paul and Melonie Linker
- ❖ Michelle
- ❖ Sarah

Lacombe, Alberta, Canada

Food For Thought

"Of all vocations, the Christian ministry is the most sacred, the most exacting, the most humbling."
— Sir William Nicoll ☐

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

September 10, 1999 marked the 45th wedding anniversary of our parents,

HENRY and TRUDY KUIPER.

We rejoice with them, and thank our covenant God for their godly instruction and faithful confession and walk. Our prayer is that He will continue to supply their every need, and grant them many more years together with us.

"Our soul waiteth for the Lord: he is our help and our shield. Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, according as we hope in thee" (Psalm 33:20, 22).

- ❖ Henry and Betty Kuiper
Sydney
- ❖ Keith and Wanda Bruinsma
Brian, Greg, Sheila, Janelle, Calvin,
Micah
- ❖ Barbara Kuiper
- ❖ Dan and Deb Kuiper
Brittany
- ❖ Henry and Judy Buiter
Nathan, Alicia, Monica, Ryan
- ❖ Paul and Christine Kenner
Steven
- ❖ Dave and Karla Zandstra
Bart, Rhonda, Krysta, Caleb
- ❖ Dolores Solmon
- ❖ Greg and Mary Flint
Cassi, Ciarra, Colby

Lynden, Washington

NOTICE!!

Please note the change of address of Rev. Gise VanBaren:

4683 Crescent Dr.
Hudsonville, MI 49426
Home: (616) 662-9389
FAX: (616) 629-9346