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Confessing the Living Redeemer

*For I know that my redeemer liveth,
and that he shall stand at the latter
day upon the earth.*

Job 19:25

I know that my redeemer liveth."

What a confession! What a comfort! On this day when we observe the resurrection of our blessed Savior we echo the triumphant cry of victory that the saints who have gone before us have uttered. As pilgrims and strangers whose citizenship is in the kingdom of God we and all of God's children must face the relentless onslaught of Satan as he attacks us by means of the world, our flesh, and himself personally. But in the darkness of despair the Lord always comes to us with the good news of the gospel that the grave could not hold the Lord Jesus

Christ. He lives. And I know that my Redeemer liveth. That is the certain knowledge and blessed assurance of faith.

In our text we have the confession of Job, the likes of whose trials and afflictions you and I have never known and perhaps never will. We know the account very well. In one day he lost all that he had, both possessions and his ten children. In addition he was plagued with a most dreadful disease, which made him so sick that he desired to die. Then there came to him friends who were supposed to comfort him, but only added to his misery. Out of that unspeakable misery, when it appeared that it could get no worse, there came the confident testimony of faith: "I know that my redeemer liveth."

We can understand the significance of having a redeemer when we take a look at what a redeemer is. Then we, too, will be glad that He lives. A redeemer is one who will take up the cause of another in order to help him in his time of need. This redeemer is not only

ready and willing to pay the price of redemption but actually does so. In this way the redeemer vindicates the one in need and delivers him from all his trouble. Along with Job we need a redeemer because we cannot pay the price. We are in bondage by nature with no way out. This is, of course, a spiritual bondage, the bondage of sin and death under the righteous judgment of God. Since this is the righteous judgment of God who is righteous in all His ways, we know that we deserve the eternal woe of hell.

O, but we know of one who has paid the price of our redemption. Indeed, there is one who has atoned for our sins, thereby delivering us out of our bondage and assuring us of everlasting life in glory. Yes, we know as well as Job knew that this redeemer is Christ, the only promised Savior, the perfect and eternal Redeemer.

Job spoke of Him as he saw Him in prophecy, as the one that was still to come. Since the promise was not yet realized, Job did not know the Christ in the full revela-

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tion that we have today. But that does not mean that he was less convinced of his salvation than we are. Just as we do today, the day in which we rejoice in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, so Job could confess with his whole heart and soul: My Redeemer lives.

His Redeemer, even as ours, is Jehovah, the almighty, unchangeable, sovereign God. With His friend Job, God had established His covenant. God says of Job, "This is my servant, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil." How could God possibly say that of Job unless He had taken him into His covenant? The Lord our God was not looking at Job in his nature, but as he was in Christ. What is true of Job is also true of us. Eternally God has engraven us in the palm of His hands. Therefore, before our holy God we are holy and righteous, redeemed and sanctified in Christ.

Thus, as a child of God, Job was first of all deeply conscious of his sin and guilt. But as a child of God he also confessed his sin and obtained pardon. He experienced the blessedness of those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. He loved his God and hated evil. This was evident even at that moment when he was suddenly made destitute and childless. Humbly he confesses, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked I return thither. Jehovah gave, Jehovah hath taken away; blessed be the name of Jehovah." It is in this consciousness that this servant of God can say in harmony with all God's children: It is God who justifies; God is *my* justifier. My Redeemer lives!

O blessed confession, I know that my Redeemer liveth! He lives! He is the Almighty, unchangeable Jehovah, who keeps covenant with His people forever. His grace abideth ever. He does not deal with us after our sins, nor reward us according to our iniquities. He lives! How much richer these words are for us now, since the cross and the

resurrection have become a historical reality. The Son of God came into our flesh, suffered, died, and was buried. For a moment even the disciples despaired, so that they hid themselves in bitter sorrow. He who had professed to be the living Savior, the Christ, the Son of the living God, had perished in the hands of wicked men. His body rested in the grave.

Yet the flame of faith and hope within their souls never entirely faded out. No, suddenly it flared up to shine forth in glorious brilliancy. Jesus arose as victor over death. He had satisfied God's justice. And God raised Him up to exalt Him to power and glory in the highest heavens. We now see Jesus with an eye of faith, crowned with glory and honor, living and reigning with God forever!


He lives! We know that He lives, for He has come to dwell with us in the Spirit. He lives even now within our hearts. I know! That is the confession and testimony of faith. The assurance of faith is always personal. Faith says: *I know*. Faith speaks of *my* Redeemer. Thus we confess together, *I know that my Redeemer liveth*. No one can actually know God without knowing that this God is his God, the God of His eternal salvation. The same is true with respect to Christ. No one can know Jesus Christ as the Savior of sinners without knowing that this Jesus is also his personal Savior. He who confesses God with a sincere heart also says: My God. And he who confesses Jesus to be the Christ also adds the personal assurance: My Lord and my God.

This faith is and will be sorely tried in our lifetime. There are many temptations that beset us. The world and its lusts still appeal to our sinful flesh. We are filled with dread at the scorn of the world. Then there is our old nature with all its sinfulness. We re-

ally need say no more here. Each of us knows his own heart and the sin that arises from it. Added to all that, there are all the sufferings that we must bear. With Asaph we wonder why it appears that the wicked prosper while the righteous must suffer. So our life is filled with a variety of disappointments, adversities, pains, and distresses. Does God really love us? Certainly it would appear to be the contrary. We are inclined to complain with the psalmist in Psalm 77:7-9: "Will God cast us off forever: and will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone forever? Doth his promise fail forevermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?"

Yet, wonder of all wonders, you and I confess in triumph of faith: I know that my Redeemer liveth! That is the good news that is revealed to us in the Scriptures. God has made known to us His eternal love. He has revealed to us His pardoning grace and saving mercy as it is ours only in Jesus Christ. And ultimately we will dwell in heaven in that glorious inheritance which He has prepared for us, His saints.

This I know. How do I know? The Spirit assures us of that in our hearts. How does He do that? By the Word and the preaching of that Word. Through this means He not only convicts us of our sins but points us to the cross. Thus being cast down we are lifted up, being hungry we are fed. Being thirsty we are led to the streams of living water. To the grave we are pointed. O, but do not forget, that grave is empty. He who died for us lives.

Faith says: I know that my Redeemer liveth. Let that word of truth ring forth from now even unto all eternity. That is our victory cry. He lives! 

*He does not
deal with us
after our sins,
nor reward us
according to
our iniquities.*

The Meditations of Gerrit Vos

From the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church Men's Society, I have received a request to bring the reprinting of a book of meditations by Gerrit Vos to the attention of the readers of the *Standard Bearer*. This, I gladly do. Promoting the writings of Gerrit Vos is for me a debt of love. During the three years of my seminary training, he taught me Dutch—the pure Dutch, no, the *purest* Dutch, as spoken in Sassenheim—and many other things concerning the pastoral ministry besides.

The book contains 45 meditations on the Psalms that Vos originally wrote for the *SB*. The title is *O Taste & See: Meditations from the Psalms*. It is a reprint of the book that was first published as a paperback in 1983. The reprint is graced with attractive hard covers. The front cover displays the old Hudsonville Protestant Reformed church building and the genial countenance of Gerrit Vos.

In addition to the devotional expositions of many of the Psalms, the book contains a biographical sketch of Vos by his daughter. How characteristic of him that he wrote out his will on the back of a church bulletin and that the will began, "When I fall asleep in Jesus."

To preach the Psalms well is not the strong gift of every minister. Doing so requires the sanctified soul of a poet. It calls for the man who feels deeply into all the spiritual moods of the Psalms and who then can express these moods with lyrical voice. Such was the soul of Gerrit Vos. Such a man was

the long-time pastor of Hudsonville.

The devotionals that make up this book are instructive, moving, and comforting. They are simple, so that every Christian can understand. They are profound, uncovering the depths of God's revelation of Himself to the soul of His child by the Spirit of Christ.

They are also God-glorifying. God had to have His glory in all the preaching and writing of Gerrit Vos. I saw Rev. Vos' zeal for the glory of God on an occasion that I have not forgotten. As a seminarian, I had spoken a word of edification of a Sunday evening to the congregation of Hudsonville. Rev. Vos was present. Afterwards, he sought me out. He said nothing about the sermon, which, looking back, I recognize as his unfailing kindness. But his face was aglow with delight that in the congregational prayer I had praised "our adorable God."

In the meditation on Psalm 32:1, 2, Vos writes:

God has set a certain mark for every man to shoot at, and has provided man with numerous arrows. From within and from without, the Lord has qualified man for this shooting gallery. From the very heavens and the earth come a thousand voices telling him to shoot and how to shoot. The bulls-eye of this mark is the glory of God, the enhancing of His majesty and power, the singing of His praises forever. Man is called always to honor the Godhead (p. 93).

There is also this characteristic

of Vos' writing, that he shines the light of the Word of God on everyday, earthly life, from the digestion of food and church-janitors to tornadoes. As a sample of the book, and for its own worth, we reprint elsewhere in this issue the meditation that was occasioned by a tornado that devastated Hudsonville and much more of Western Michigan in April, 1956.

The cost of the book is \$12.95.

Since the book is reprinted and sold by the Reformed Book Outlet, I take this opportunity to recommend this bookstore. It is a work of the Hudsonville PRC. A truly friendly and helpful staff volunteer their labor in the service of the Lord and His truth. The bookstore carries all of the publications of the Reformed Free Publishing Association, as well as many other sound books. Many of the books reviewed in the *SB* are available at the Reformed Book Outlet. If the Reformed Book Outlet does not have a particular volume, the staff will make a heroic effort to obtain it. In addition, the bookstore has a supply of both musical and sermon tapes, religious greeting cards, and other items.

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Whether by personal visit, by letter, or by telephone, pick up *O Taste & See* by Gerrit Vos.

— DJE 

Genesis 1-11: Myth or History? No Compromise!*

There may be no compromise with the denial of the historicity of Genesis 1-11. But the evolutionary theory of origins necessarily involves the dismissal of the opening chapters as non-historical. Among many others, David Lack, himself an ardent proponent of Darwinian evolution, has stated this bluntly:

While Darwinism was widely supposed to contradict the accuracy of the Bible, what it actually challenges is the literal rendering of the first three chapters of Genesis, and if these are properly to be regarded as allegorical, no conflict need arise.

Lack is urging Christians to give up the view that these chapters are "literally true" for the view required by evolutionary science, namely, that they are "allegorical." Lack is honest (*Evolutionary Theory and Christian Belief: The Unresolved Conflict*, London, 1957, p. 68).

There may be no compromise, therefore, with the evolutionary theory of origins. None.

Benjamin B. Warfield's surrender of the historicity of the biblical account of creation to Darwinian evolutionary theory was shameful. Warfield made epochs of the days of Genesis 1, allowed for what today is known as the theistic evolution of all the forms and species other than man, and found acceptable the biological development of

man from the apes *as regards the body*. So far would Warfield go with Darwin. Only the soul of man could not have derived from the beasts. This, God had to slip into brutish Adam as a kind of aboriginal *deus ex machina*.

If under the directing hand of God a human body is formed at a leap by propagation from brutish parents, it would be quite consonant with the fitness of things that it should be provided by His creative energy with a truly human soul (*Critical Reviews*, New York, 1932, p. 138).

As regards the biblical account of the creation of Eve, which cannot be harmonized with theistic evolutionary theory and which is virtually impervious to exegetical manipulation, Warfield, though he recognized the difficulty, suggested that the creation of Eve from a rib of Adam could somehow be explained away so as to allow for the evolutionary development also of the body of the woman.

I am free to say, for myself, that I do not think that there is any general statement in the Bible or any part of the account of creation, either as given in Genesis 1 and 2 or elsewhere alluded to, that need be opposed to evolution. The sole passage which appears to bar the way is the very detailed account of the creation of Eve. It is possible that this may be held to be a miracle (as Dr. Woodrow holds), or else that the narrative may be held to be partial and taken like the very partial descriptions of the formation of the individual in Job and the Psalms; that is, it teaches only the general fact that Eve came of Adam's flesh and bone (see "Evolution or Development," in *Evolution, Scripture, and*

Science, ed. Mark A. Noll and David N. Livingstone, Grand Rapids, 2000, p. 130).

At the end of his consideration of the life of Charles Darwin, self-confessed unbeliever and enemy of the Christian faith, Warfield could write: "We stand at the deathbed of a man whom, in common with all the world, we most deeply honor" (*Studies in Theology*, New York, 1932, p. 580).

Warfield refused to oppose the evolutionary theory of origins with its concomitant reduction of the opening chapters of Genesis to myth. Instead, he approved it. Thus, Warfield contributed greatly to the destruction of his Presbyterian Church as a Christian body. Warfield's error is now doing grave damage to conservative evangelical, Reformed, and Presbyterian churches on a wide front. In almost all the conservative churches and seminaries, the theologians are appealing to the great Princetonian in defense of their own acceptance of evolution and rejection of the historicity of Genesis 1 and 2. Instances of this widespread appeal to Warfield include *Darwin's Forgotten Defenders* (Grand Rapids, 1987) and the book edited by Noll and Livingstone mentioned above.

This appeal to Warfield is not without its value. It indicates how far those who make the appeal have gone in their own thinking and how far they are willing to have their churches go. Usually, these theologians are quite reticent about their own views, contenting themselves with striking out against the "fundamentalism" and "anti-intellectualism" of those who insist on a literal reading of Gen-

* This editorial is part of a longer article on the subject that appears in the spring 2001 issue of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*.

esis 1 and 2 as history. By appealing to Warfield, these men show, at the very least, that they are open to epochs of millions of years, theistic evolution as the explanation of all the forms and species other than man, the biological descent of man from the beasts as regards his body, and even "Adam's" begetting of "Eve's" body from a primate. How such thinking answers the question, "Genesis 1-11: Myth or History?" is plain to all.

What explains the vulnerability of Warfield and other otherwise orthodox men of his day to the pressures of evolutionary scientific theory? The explanation is fourfold. First, the assault on the doctrine of creation and on the inspiration of Genesis 1-11 by the enemy of the Christian faith and its God in these last days is powerful and crafty.

Second, Warfield was mistaken in his thinking about general revelation. He supposed that general revelation and Scripture are two equal authorities for Christians. Indeed, in practice Scripture must give way to general revelation. Warfield then naively identified the latest scientific theory with general revelation. Worse still, Warfield thought that God's revelation of Himself in creation to unbelievers, for example, Charles Darwin, resulted in right knowledge of God as Creator, so that the Christian church is required to yield to Darwin's proclamation of the truth of God. Darwin is virtually a herald of God in the world! Warfield confused general revelation with natural theology.

Romans 1:18ff. teaches that the ungodly, including ungodly scientists (probably ungodly scientists *especially*), immediately hold under the knowledge of God that they have from creation, changing the truth of God, for instance, the truth of God as Creator, into a lie. This is all that they can do as totally depraved sinners. God's sole purpose with general revelation for the ungodly is to render them without excuse.

Third, Warfield was not sufficiently impressed with the total depravity of the mind, or reason, of the ungodly. This is also a fundamental error in Warfield's apologetics. Ungodly scientists, for example, Charles Darwin and Thomas ("Dr. Beelzebub") Huxley, do not think neutrally, much less favorably, about God and His Word on the basis of raw data. They theorize in enmity against God and His Word. Their scientific theories are the weapons of their warfare against the church.

Fourth, Warfield's attitude toward the culture of the world of the ungodly, especially the culture of the universities, learning, and science, was not antithetical. It was not the attitude of spiritual separation and warfare. Relations between the Presbyterian Church and its colleges, on the one hand, and the surrounding culture, on the other hand, were friendly. The world would bless the church through its learning, and the church would Christianize the world with its theology. No doubt, the theory of common grace helped to frame this attitude.

Whatever the reasons, by his concessions and compromise, Warfield sold out the historicity of Genesis 1-11.

There may be no compromise with Darwinian, or any other, evolutionary theory of origins. History has abundantly proved the truth of Darwin's own confidence, that the slightest concession to his theory invariably will result in complete surrender.

It early became a maxim with Darwin that those who went a little way toward his doctrine would eventually go much farther, and that those who went a great way, would eventually become converts (William Irvine, *Apes, Angels, & Victorians: The Story of Darwin, Huxley, and Evolution*, New York, 1963, p.174).

On the contrary, faithful churches, with their seminaries, must nail their colors to the mast

on this issue. The Protestant Reformed Churches require all candidates for the ministry to believe from the heart and to confess the historicity of Genesis 1-11, particularly the historicity of Genesis 1 and 2, that is, the seven days of creation and rest. The ministerial candidates must promise that they will not tolerate but oppose every form of the lie of the mythical nature of the opening chapters of the Bible. All members of the churches are required to believe the historicity of Genesis 1-11.

"Suffer the Little Children"

To us, the issue, "Genesis 1-11: Myth or History?" is not intellectual and academic.

In the Protestant Reformed Churches, the covenant children begin their catechism instruction at the age of five or six. These are the questions and answers that they learn in the first lessons of the first book:

- "Who is your Creator? God."
- "Did God create all things? Yes, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."
- "How do we know about this creation? God tells us about it in His Word, the Bible."
- "Who are our first parents? Adam and Eve."
- "How did Satan come to Eve? He used the serpent to talk to Eve."
- "What did God promise? A Savior, to save us from our sin."

We want these little children to go to heaven. If they come to doubt all these answers as myth, they will go to hell as unbelievers. Whoever is responsible—parent, preacher, school-teacher, theologian, or synod—it were better for them that a millstone were hanged about their neck and that they were drowned in the depth of the sea.

These little ones, who cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand, must believe a historical Genesis 1-11.

The theologians are called, and privileged, to lead the way.

— DJE

■ The Holy Spirit Speaking Through the Preaching

In his answer to my letter in the November 15, 2000 issue of the *Standard Bearer*, Rev. Laning maintains that Christ and the Spirit are the ones speaking in the external aspect of the preaching, and he does so on the basis of Romans 10:14. I will try to explain why I believe it is only proper to speak of the church as the one who speaks in the external aspect of the preaching.

In the same sense that the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper are not in themselves the very body and blood of Christ, the external aspect of the preaching cannot in itself be the very voice of Christ or the Spirit speaking externally. The very body and blood of Christ are present only spiritually in the Lord's Supper, and the very voice of Christ and the Spirit are heard only spiritually (John 6:63) through the official preaching of the gospel. It is important to maintain both of these positions over against Roman Catholicism. It is the Roman Catholic position that the external aspect of the preaching is grace itself. It is the Reformed position that the external aspect is the chief means of grace, and that only the internal aspect is grace. It is only spiritually that the church is organically united to Christ, her Head, by means of the external aspect of the preaching and the sacraments.

Christ personally performs the internal aspect of the preaching by sending us His Spirit, the Comforter (John 15:26). He performs the external aspect by sending His preacher by means of the instituted church. Christ, through His Spirit working in the church, guides the church into all truth (John 16:13) and directs where He wants the gospel to be preached (Rev. 6:2).

But it is still the church that performs the external aspect of the preaching according to the commandment of Christ (Titus 1:3). This is why it is imperative that the preacher carefully exegete and preach Scripture, without which Christ performs neither the internal nor the external aspect, even if the preacher is lawfully called and sent by the instituted church. But let there be no misunderstanding. We speak here not of the work of the Spirit in regeneration, for the Spirit regenerates independent of either the external or internal aspect of the preaching of the gospel.

Nor does Romans 10:14 teach that Christ or the Spirit is the one speaking in the external aspect of the preaching. When Romans 10:14 speaks of the elect hearing Christ, it refers to the internal aspect of the preaching whereby the Spirit causes the regenerated elect to hear Christ and believe. It cannot be referring to the external aspect because the external preaching itself cannot bring the elect to conscious knowledge of their salvation. Faith can only be effected by the voice of Christ, the living and abiding Word (I Pet. 1:23-25). Romans 10:14 goes on to explain that the Spirit performs the internal aspect when the instituted church officially performs the external aspect of the preaching through its lawfully called and ordained preacher. The reprobate hear the same external preaching as the elect, but they do not believe because they cannot hear the living Word, whom to hear is to believe and live (John 5:24, 25). Herman Hoeksema insisted on this distinction between the external preaching of the gospel and the living and abiding Word in his interpretation of I Peter 1:23-25, and other related texts, in support of the doctrine of im-

mediate regeneration (*Reformed Dogmatics*, pp. 645-655).

Chuck Doezema
Holland, MI

■ Do We Detest the Error of the Anabaptists? Ought We?

I was very disappointed to read the recent contribution from our brother Jonathan Moore (*SB*, Feb. 1, 2001). I seriously question the wisdom and spiritual propriety of stoking up personal hostility between paedobaptist and anti-paedobaptist as encouraged, intentionally or not, in his article. This is true from whichever side of the argument one comes. In a magazine sent to me recently Calvin is described as a "man burner," one who "burn[ed] dissidents," and Calvinism as "a deception whose own bloody history testifies that it is wrong" (Jacob Prasch, in *Moriel Prayer and Newsletter*, New Year 2001). A slanging match of this kind is an easy option that helps no one. Over the years I have grown increasingly weary by the low standard of polemic which the subject of baptism engenders. Surely the last thing we need is to lower it still further by name calling and the trading of insults. There is nothing to be gained by it today and I doubt very much whether there was in Calvin's day either. It is certainly of no help to those who struggle with the subject in their hearts. The article is not really fair to Calvin. Chapter 16 of Book IV of his *Institutes* is lengthy. The expressions with which he denigrates his opponents, and which the article concentrates into just one paragraph, are scattered over nearly thirty-five pages of the McNeill edition (Westminster Press). Some of them do not even relate to the subject of baptism per se. For example, the reference to "fickle spirits" who

"gravely *sin*" is found to be in connection with the need to compare Scripture with Scripture (p. 1334); and the description "they unjustly and wickedly shut God's power within ... narrow limits" relates to the denial of infant regeneration (pp. 1340-1). The real issue raised by this section of Calvin's *Institutes* is not the manner in which he expresses himself — that is a distraction and in itself not worthy of consideration, however uncouth it may be to our taste — but the validity or otherwise of the doctrinal and Scriptural arguments which he and the Anabaptists used. Also it should be borne in mind that the theology of today's "Reformed Baptist" bears little resemblance to that of the 16th Century Anabaptists, as even a cursory examination of the latter's literary output will confirm. This may not be dismissed lightly. Even so, the gulf between paedobaptist and anti-paedobaptist is considerable, extending far beyond the simple matter of baptism itself. What is needed is the careful study and application of the Word of God. In doctrinal warfare the Word is our only weapon; for spiritual light it is our only lamp; for instruction in righteousness it is our only authority. Finally, for a more considered assessment of Calvin's attitude toward the anti-paedobaptists of his day one could do no better than to read Willem Balke's *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, a book recommended to me by both Protestant Reformed and Baptist ministers alike, with equal enthusiasm!

John Hooper
Saltash, England

RESPONSE:

1. I made it plain in the opening paragraphs that my purpose was *not* to examine the theological merits of Calvin's argument, but to examine his *attitude*. Hence John should have judged the article on whether or not it is a fair examination of Calvin's attitude. Of course my article cannot stand as an ar-

gument against antipaedobaptism. It was never intended to do so. But I would be surprised if even a Baptist did not think it was a fair summary of Calvin's attitude. It is therefore irrelevant for John to talk about "the low standard of polemic" about baptism. That may or may not be true, but for our purposes here it is not relevant, since I was not arguing for paedobaptism at all but presupposing it.

2. John should also have judged my article on whether my "Questions by Way of Contemporary Application" flowed legitimately from the evidence presented. For it is obviously this section that is the main thrust of the article. Yet interestingly, he does not indicate that any one of these questions is illegitimate from the evidence presented or irrelevant to the contemporary scene. So at least I can suppose he doesn't have an argument against the main thrust of the article.

3. The length of IV.16 I also find irrelevant to John's case, and a mere clutching at straws. If someone called me 'a vomiting dog' ten times in a book of 35 pages, I would still find this as offensive as if the book only had five pages. But in either case the author would have made his point equally well: that he didn't think much of my theology and was not about to invite me to preach in his pulpit.

4. I also would disagree with John's contention that not all my quotations from Calvin in my second section are relevant. They are *all* taken from just one section of the *Institutes*, a section explicitly and only devoted to the question of antipaedobaptism, and I omitted ones that I did not think were incontrovertibly relevant. But even if only *half* the quotations I finally used were relevant (and John has only questioned two out of 37!), the main thrust of the article still stands unscathed. So I won't waste space in defending my use of the two quotations John does mention.

5. I also cannot accept that the doctrinal merit of Calvin's argumentation is "the real issue" of IV.16. It is one issue, and a very important one too, but this section raises many issues. All I chose to do was to address just one of these issues, and, having carefully delineated my remit as was my right to do, I sought to encourage reflection and self-examination on the part of Reformed believers concerning this one issue. As far as I can see, this is perfectly legitimate.

6. In the section entitled "Some Questions by Way of Contemporary Application," please note that I do not ask, "Are we abusive enough to Baptists? Why are we not repeating Calvin's insults more often against Baptists? Why are we no longer smashing Baptists like in the good old days?" Nowhere do I commend Calvin's language (although nowhere do I condemn it either — that would be irrelevant to the main point of the article). Rather, these "Questions" actually clearly reveal that the purpose of the article was an implicit rebuke to those Reformed churches which have allowed infant baptism to become a loosely held belief, and one that can easily be compromised in order to promote Christian 'unity.' The purpose of the article was not to encourage personal hostility towards Baptists. Rather it was firstly to demonstrate that for Calvin infant baptism was *not* a loosely held belief, and secondly to encourage self-criticism amongst the Reformed churches. I repeat, the criticism encouraged by the article is of ourselves as Reformed churches, and not of Baptists, at least not directly. For example, there are today professing confessional Presbyterians who are happy to make Baptists officebearers in the church, make them trustees, exalt them to teaching posts in the church, and make infant baptism entirely optional for members of the congregation — in essence a dual constitution model. These ministers teach their people (occa-

sionally) to believe in God's covenant, but (continually) to live as if it didn't matter. I think this is unacceptable and indefensible, and I also think that Calvin — if we may speak like this for a moment — would be horrified if he knew what his successors now do. I also know many 'Reformed Baptists' who find this situation absolutely deplorable too, and who long that these Reformed churches might be more consistent and less equivocal. Right-minded Baptists would rather have the Reformed churches being wrong but consistent, than descending into sacramental anarchy, doctrinal indifferentism, and religious pragmatism. That doesn't help anyone. The more doctrinally explicit and consistent we all are, the closer we are to coming to full doctrinal unity. For it is when the light is shining with least impediment that more helpful debate and development of positions can occur. It is then that error can be most easily exposed for what it is, and then be rejected and left behind. But no one can progress very far in the fog of compromise where the very errors that plague the church are made taboo subjects and swept under the ever-rising carpet of 'secondary issues.'

7. I would also have to reply that it is not true to say that "the theology of today's 'Reformed Baptist' bears little resemblance to that of the 16th Century [sic] Anabaptists." Of course there are

big and important differences, and for that we can be thankful. However, there are very big and important similarities, not least a common denial that the promise is to us and to our children, and a common exclusion of children from membership in the Kingdom of God, to name but two. And there is no need to go further. This should be enough to grieve the heart of every Reformed believer. This is what really "may not be dismissed lightly." Indeed this is what should fill us with righteous anger and deep anguish, akin to that shown by our Lord in Mark 10:14 (note the force of the verb *αγαπακτεο* in the context of infant exclusion from the blessings of the covenant, a verb attributed to our Lord in no other context).

8. I am familiar with Balke's excellent and standard study that John mentions, and I admire Balke's stature as a Calvin scholar, as well as his evident desire to be fair to both sides — a desire I also share. However, for the reasons mentioned above, I still cannot see this book as directly relevant. Nor does John state what it is about Balke's study that he finds so pertinent. Of course, if you were to ask me whether the Reformers were blameless or exemplary in their treatment of the Anabaptists, I would, without hesitation, say, No. If you were to ask me whether Calvin's stance towards the Anabaptists was partly a function of his social, ecclesiastical, and his-

torical context I would, of course, say, Yes. But again, nowhere in my article do I suggest anything to the contrary. But what I do suggest in my article is that for Calvin — no matter what the Anabaptists themselves may have preferred to emphasise — the great sin of Anabaptism was its antipaedobaptism. As far as I can see, Balke's book does nothing to detract from this claim.

9. John should not be surprised to find such articles as mine appearing in the pages of denominational magazines that uphold the Three Forms of Unity. For the Belgic Confession, in its thirty-fourth article entitled "On holy baptism," unites all its subscribers in affirming that we "detest the error of the Anabaptists." It does not say, that we "beg to differ from the interesting perspective of our dear friends, the Anabaptists," but rather, we "detest the error of the Anabaptists." Yes, we still do, and it will show not just in what we profess to believe, but in how we defend it. It will show not just in what we preach, but in how we govern our churches. The Reformed faith lives on. Let him deny it who will deny it, and let him doubt it who will doubt it, but God will maintain His covenant with our children, even to a thousand generations of them that love Him and keep His commandments.

Jonathan Moore
Cambridge, England

Feature Article

Gerrit Vos

Visited by Majesty on High

Gerrit Vos was a pastor in the Protestant Reformed Churches. This is a reprint of a meditation by Rev. Vos, written for the April 15, 1956 issue of the Standard Bearer.

Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations He hath made in the earth. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.

The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

Psalm 46:8, 10, 11



ur village received a very special visit by the Lord Christ.

It was a visit of the Majesty on High.

What we really received was a little foretaste of the end of the world.

Some of us went to heaven in the process of that visit. Others are in the hospital because of that visit. Some of us had a brush with death. All of us were deeply impressed by that visit.

God came to us, and He roared. I have never before heard a voice such as we heard around supper time, Tuesday evening, April 3, 1956. It sounded as though a thousand express trains were traversing the sky.

His footsteps were seen. He walked from the southwest to the northeast, skirting our village. Everyone was aware of His august presence.

And we were afraid. Many cowered in the basement of their homes while God ravaged their (?) properties. He flung houses and barns far and wide. Such debris was mixed with black muck and the dust of the earth. He snuffed out the lives of some of us, broke the bones and the flesh of others. They were left moaning in His wake.

Oh yes, no one can dispute it: God walked among us; His Christ paid us a special visit; He left desolation, death, pain, and misery.

But also awe, the awe of the childlike fear of Jehovah.

One man said, "My Jehovah was beautiful in His raging!" And that man lost half of his worldly goods, and his life was in jeopardy.

Yes, I have seen Him too.

His pathway through Hudsonville was about three or four city blocks from my dwelling.



But in it all is a terrible accusation.

We have paid attention to this little walk of God, a walk whose results are still among us in many ways. We have paid marked attention to that little walk. Both the good and the bad, the saints and the wicked, the church and the world have seen Him, heard Him, and marked His works. The blue-coats of the State Police are still among us, as are the members of the National Guard. Life has not returned to its normal beat.

Everyone is still talking about that little walk of Jesus through Hudsonville, visiting us. He is constantly among us. From the time when Zacharias sang his song of salvation until now, Jesus and the God of our salvation has His march among us, and He always speaks, shouts, beckons, and calls to us His people.

Zacharias sang, "The dayspring from on high hath visited us!"

And He is still with us.

He promised, "And lo, I am with you always!"

And He kept His word. Jesus is constantly walking through Hudsonville. He is constantly singing His song of the eternal covenant of God's grace.

He sings that song as a lullaby at the cradle of the covenant babies. He sings and He speaks of the everlasting love of God when we are very young and we gather as little boys and girls in catechism and Christian schools. His speech and His works become plainer to us as we grow up. Oh, how wonderful is His voice from the pulpit Sunday after Sunday, year after year.

His song of the covenant: "I love you so much that I died for you on the accursed tree." You can hear it in Hudsonville, both in the home and from the pulpit. His footsteps drop with fatness. He leaves in His

wake regeneration, conversion, faith, justification, and sanctification. But also glorification, when Hudsonville's children go to heaven.

That Tuesday, He left in His wake a picture of the desolation of hell. After I saw it for the first time I grew very still. It was awful.

When Jesus is conducting business-as-usual, He leaves in His wake the glories of the Christian, the blessings of salvation, and we are blest.

Now here is the terrible accusation: we can see Christ in His usual business day after day and night after night, year after year and lifetime after lifetime, and we stay calm and orderly.

"How are things?"

"Oh, so-so!"

After all, His daily and nightly walk through the village is much more beautiful than His special visit on that Tuesday, is it not?

Everyone wanted to get into Hudsonville. It took hundreds of special blue-coats and guardsmen to keep the crowds from hindering disaster cleanup. Last Sunday afternoon I had me a time getting out and getting back into my village.

But we do not need the cops on Sunday!

How easily do we leave our place empty on Sunday during worship of God who is in our very midst day and night? How easily do we fall asleep during the service, skip the reading of God's Word after a meal, and a prayer or two?

That Tuesday He came and said, "This is the way of My final coming, when the heavens and the earth shall be destroyed by fire,

tornado, and earthquake, and then the hearts of men shall fail them because of My terror!"

We heard it and paid attention. Oh, how we paid attention!

*God came to us,
and He roared.
I have
never before
heard a voice
such as we heard
around
supper time,
Tuesday evening,
April 3, 1956.*

But every waking and sleeping hour He is in our very midst and says: "I love you with an everlasting love, and all My endeavor is to get you with Me in the new earth and the new heaven. I move the heavens and the earth and the depth of hell to get you away from the world, the devils, and the powers of sin. I send angels and My Holy Spirit of grace who explains and applies My precious Word so that you may eat and drink spiritually and be satisfied. I am a flaming wall of fire around you and your children, so that no harm may come near your dwelling. I suffer no man to do you wrong. I give men for thee and nations for thy salvation. Oh, I do love you and your seed and I have unutterable salvation in store for you. Listen to Me, My people: I, the eternal God, am thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms!"

That is what God, what Jesus, what the Spirit, says unto the churches.

And do we pay as close attention to it as to that Tuesday's tornado?

There is our accusation.

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Yes, I do know that the tornado came so that the wicked will have no excuse in the day of His final coming.

I know, too, that this tornado came as a sign of His final coming so that the church might take courage and know that her deliverance is nigh.

But I also am persuaded that the tornado came to shake the church awake, to direct us to His more beautiful voice of the gospel, to remind us of His daily and nightly presence among us.

The church was crowded Sunday morning. I am told that such was the case also in the other churches in our little village.

The tornado calls us to a re-

dedication, to a reconsecration. It did that to me. We have given our answer to God's visit in our communal prayer. And we tremble at His presence now. For God says, "Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth."

God desires to be exalted. And, let us never forget it, He *will* be exalted. Therefore He walked through our town on a bias, on a line from the southwest to the northeast. Even the dogs saw Him and trembled.

He was exalted. Even by the reprobate, although they will not admit it. Some of them took time out to insult Him. I saw a headline in a daily paper which called it a "brutal" tornado! That carries the proof with it that God was exalted. It was the wicked's answer to His footsteps. When God says in their hearts, "I am God and there is no other God," then they say, "There is no God!"

Did you note that the daily papers did not connect the tornado with God and His Christ?

But we are still, Father! We know that Thou art God. And we exalt Thee, even while we cower in the southwest corner of our basements.

◆◆◆ ◆◆◆ ◆◆◆

Yes, we are still. And we are going to listen as never before. That is our promise to Thee. We plead for grace to keep our promise.

And we are reassured, for Thou continuest: "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge!"

God was seen for a few minutes. He was clothed in black, the black swirls of dust, muck, trees, planks, and bodies of men and animals. We saw Him for a few minutes such as He will be seen again in the clouds of darkness of the final tempest, the fi-

nal tornado of the last day, the *Yom Jehovah*.

But He is still with us, even though we have often forgotten. He is still with us in His dear Son. He was in a hurry to come on Pentecost — the sound of a fiercely driven wind. And He never left us.

He is so intimately close to us that theologians are still fighting about the two natures of Christ. Oh, God is very close to man.

Do you realize that the sentence "The Lord of Hosts is with us" is a name of Jesus? Immanuel means "God with us." Well, for the name of God in the sentence, my text has "the Lord of Hosts."

He came well-nigh two thousand years ago, He united Himself with man, and henceforth we are Zion, the city of God. His finger touched the earth. It was the greatest tornado the world has ever seen. It was dark too. It was the Son of God dying on the accursed tree. There God embraced us with all our sin and guilt.

Then the tornadoes of God began to howl. It was an eternal tornado of wrath of Almighty and Holy God.


And when the tornado was over, it became still. It was very still in the garden of Joseph. The stillness of the peace of God that stole over and within the church of God.

That stillness shall last through all eternity. That is our refuge.

The papers say, "Get to the basement." They even specify the exact corner which is safest: the southwest. Or under a table or a bed if you have no basement. I have no quarrel with the scientist. We must use the means.

But there is a refuge that is better, far better.

We hide in the shadow of the cross of our Jesus.

And all is well. Amen. Hallelujah! 

Thomas à Kempis and Medieval Mysticism (1)

Introduction

The error of mysticism has never been absent from the church of Christ in the new dispensation. It appeared early in the Montanist movement in the third century and has, in a remarkable way, maintained itself to the present. The church has always had to fight off mysticism.

Not a single period in the Middle Ages was without its mystics. Sometimes they were present in multitudes; sometimes only individual mystics kept the flame of mysticism burning. But never did the church free itself from them. In fact, the church had no interest in condemning the mystics. They were never considered heretics. One gets the impression, on the contrary, that the church encouraged them. I suspect there were good reasons for such encouragement. The mystics were, almost without exception, faithful and loyal members of the church and supporters of the hierarchy. But, perhaps more importantly, the church seemed, almost unconsciously, to recognize that, in the cold formalism of Roman Catholic liturgy, the warm and experiential piety espoused by the mystics was a necessary and healthy counterbalance.

Mysticism is a term with a very vague and fuzzy meaning. It covers a wide range of views and practices and describes a broad spec-

trum of people. In some instances mysticism cannot be distinguished in any significant way from genuine orthodoxy. In other instances mysticism is radical, extreme, and as far removed from orthodoxy as pantheism is from the truth of creation. Indeed, some mystics were pantheists, a heresy which identifies God with the creation itself. Between these two extremes was such a wide diversity of opinion that no single book could contain all the differences and nuances between various branches of mystical thought.

That makes our present task a daunting one, and forces us to limit our discussion, for the most part, to the main ideas which mysticism of every sort had in common.

It is also for this reason that I have chosen Thomas à Kempis as an example of medieval mysticism. He was by no means the worst of the mystics. In fact, he was a late mystic from the Netherlands who was one of a group of mystics who had an influence on the reformers and the Reformation. His book, *The Imitation of Christ*, is considered a classic and is still read by Protestants as well as Roman Catholics.

He is, therefore, ideally suited for our purposes. From him we can learn what mysticism is all about and what are the dangers in mysticism against which we have to fight.

The Life of Thomas à Kempis

The surname, à Kempis, means "from Kempen." That was the name of the village in which Thomas was born in 1380, a little less

than 200 years before the beginning of the Reformation. The village of Kempen is near Cologne, Germany. His birthplace helps us explain, I think, the mysticism to which Thomas was committed, for Cologne and Kempen are both in the Rhine Valley, and the fog-shrouded Rhine River Valley was the center of the mystical life.

Thomas was born of poor parents who were unable to provide any kind of education for him. Their surname was Hemerken, a name almost totally unsuited to Thomas, for it means, "Little Hammer." Thomas was about as gentle a man as it is possible to find.

A biography of Thomas à Kempis would hardly fill ten pages, for he was determined that nothing would happen to him in his life; and so, under God's providence, it turned out to be.

He was a studious young lad and very serious-minded. He resolved, therefore, at about 13 years old, to seek an education somewhere where he could receive it at an affordable cost. Such a place was to be found in the circles of "The Brethren of the Common Life." One community of these "Brethren" was to be found near Deventer in the Netherlands, a city straight east of Amsterdam, and on an arm of the Rhine.

A word about the "Brethren of the Common Life" might be in order. In a sense one could call "The Brethren of the Common Life" a community of mystics; but that designation would not be entirely accurate. They were made up of a fairly large number of communi-

ties stretching from Strassburg all the way to Rotterdam. They were loosely tied together with little or no organizational unity, but brought together by a common desire to cultivate the Christian life and emphasize genuine piety. These communities put a great deal of emphasis on establishing schools for children and educating them in the knowledge of godliness. They built hospitals and were assiduous in caring for the poor. They were very influential, produced some outstanding theologians in the tradition of mysticism, and influenced the Reformation in Germany and the Netherlands.

During the years of his study, Thomas developed his skills as a copyist and used these skills to support himself. All his life he continued in this work, copying books for the libraries of theologians of the "Brethren of the Common Life," copying various manuscripts of importance to the community, and copying Scripture. There was as yet no such thing as a printing press, although the invention of a movable-type printing press was just around the corner. Thomas made in his lifetime four copies of the Scriptures, one of which is extant.

While in Deventer, Gerhard Groot observed the studious and pious ways of the young boy and took him into his own house. This put Thomas in the center of the life of the "Brethren," for the house of Gerhard Groot was the headquarters of the community located in the city. The influence of the mysticism of the "Brethren" molded his entire life.

After completing his studies, and being attracted to the ascetic life, Thomas entered an Augustinian convent in Zwolle, twenty or thirty miles north of Deventer. Thomas' brother was prior of this convent, and in it Thomas found a congenial home. He was ordained a priest in the Roman Catholic Church in 1413, and in 1429 he became sub-prior. After his brother

died, Thomas was prior for a short time, but he found the administrative work too burdensome and asked to be relieved of that position.

From that point on, his life can be summed up in a few sentences. He spent his time in three activities: copying, devotional exercises, and writing. It was a quiet life, removed from the bustling world about him, placid and serene, noiseless and routine, without any variation in the activities of the day. He himself wrote: "In all things I sought quiet and found it not save in retirement (from all aspects of life in the world, HH) and books."

Thomas died in Zwolle in 1471 and was buried in the convent cemetery.

The Imitation of Christ

Thomas possessed a prolific pen. Yet, of all he wrote, he is remembered for only one book, *The Imitation of Christ*. No less a theologian than Charles Hodge has called this book the "pearl of German-Dutch mysticism." It has been given the highly-honored place of being one of three great devotional books, of which the other two are Augustine's *Confessions* and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Today there are more than 2000 editions of the book, over 1000 of them found in the British Museum in London. It was written originally in Latin, in which over 545 editions exist. It was translated into many languages, including English. Over 900 editions exist in French alone. Its English editions are available today and are read by many. Dr. Samuel Johnson, the great English lexicographer and friend of James Boswell, learned Dutch by reading *The Imitation of Christ*.

One writer says the following about the book.

It consists of four books and seems to have been written in meter and rime.... The work is a

manual of devotion intended to help the soul in its communion with God and the pursuit of holiness. Its sentences are ... pitched in the highest key of Christian experience.... Behind and within all its reflections runs the council of self-renunciation. The life of Christ is presented as the highest study possible to a mortal.... That which makes it acceptable to all Christians is the supreme stress it lays upon Christ and the possibility of immediate communion with him and God.

At the same time, it was written by a Roman Catholic mystic and has references in it to the merit of good works, transubstantiation, purgatory, and the worship of saints — although these references are few in number and easily ignored.

A few quotes from the book will give the reader a taste of its contents.

Love to be unknown and to be reputed as nothing.

Where the crowd is, there is usually confusion and distraction of heart.


Love solitude and silence, and thou wilt find great quiet and good conscience.

Choose poverty and simplicity.

Humble thyself in all things and under all things, and thou wilt merit kindness from all.

Let Christ be thy life, thy reading, thy meditation, thy conversation, thy desire, thy gain, thy hope and thy reward.

Zaccheus, brother, descend from the height of thy secular wisdom. Come and learn in God's school the way of humility, long-suffering and patience, and Christ teaching thee, thou shalt come at last safely to the glory of eternal beatitude.

In our next article, we will examine the mysticism of Thomas à Kempis and the mysticism of the Middle Ages. 

■ How's That Again?

That apostasy abounds is beyond dispute. What was held precious after the great Reformation is no longer important to many. The infallibility of Scripture is increasingly denied by those even in main-line denominations and churches. Universal atonement and a universal salvation of all are being taught. Some insist that Christianity is not the only religion and Christ is not the only way of salvation. Others propose that all peoples of all religions will be saved through Christ. He saves those who believe in Him, but He also saves all others as well. It matters not whether one is Hindu, Muslim, or atheist—Christ ultimately will deliver them all. These views are increasingly being accepted within the church-world. Even we ourselves might begin to wonder: are we really correct in our confession—and all of these others wrong? Is God's power and grace so weak that it can save only a "little flock"?

These thoughts came to mind as I read several articles recently in the *Grand Rapids Press*. In the Saturday, March 10, 2001 *Press* there was a featured article on Marcus Borg titled, "Theologian reads his Bible, but not literally." The reporter was Kym Reinstadler. The article stated:

In Marcus Borg's view, Jesus was a Jewish mystic who was crucified as a troublemaker.

For centuries Christians also have believed he was born of a virgin, performed miracles and physically rose from the dead.

Their Bible tells them so.

But Borg, a controversial theo-

logian, was at Christ Community Church in Spring Lake last weekend to caution believers about confusing the Jesus of history with the Jesus of faith.

Borg says it's clear the Bible doesn't have all the facts straight. The Gospels pronouncing Jesus as Messiah were written decades after his death, probably to advance the personal agenda of the writers.

Scriptures, he says, should be interpreted as the Israelites' and early Christians' literary response to the experience of God.

"You don't have to have an infallible word of God to have faith in God," said Borg, the Hundere Distinguished Professor of Religion and Culture at Oregon State University.

His newest book, "Reading the Bible Again for the First Time: Taking the Bible Seriously but Not Literally," released this week, sold out of 150 copies after Borg's March 2 lecture, arranged by the Center for Religion and Life, an adjunct ministry of Christ Community Church.

About 350 people also paid for lecture last Saturday. Another 700 came to hear Borg preach last Sunday.

His visit coincided with the Rev. Richard Rhem's 30-year anniversary at the church, which left the Reformed Church in America in 1997 after conflicts over theology and Scriptural interpretation.

...He says the historical and metaphorical lens through which he reads the Scriptures appeals to those who seek a relationship with God, but can't ignore scientific knowledge to believe that the Earth was created in six days or that Jesus walked on water.

Borg believes the Gospels are rich with metaphors that probably never happened, but illustrate greater truths.

The empty tomb assures the spirit that was in Jesus is still present in the world. Jesus' feeding of a multitude of people from the food in one basket shows his

spirit can satisfy hunger in all souls. Jesus' healing of the blind and the lame demonstrates how the spirit of God enlightens and heals.

Borg's approach to Scripture is an abomination to Christians who believe the Bible is infallible and that Jesus' miracles and resurrection prove he is divine and the hope for humankind....

...He says Protestants in particular are too hung up on doctrines, dogmas, creeds and catechism.

These only drive divisions between people, he said.

The historical Jesus' message wasn't cluttered, he said. It is: Love God. Love your neighbor. Love yourself.

One doesn't have to be Christian to see the wisdom in following Jesus' lead on this one, Borg said.

"This post-Reformation, post-Enlightenment notion that all God wants from us is correct beliefs is relatively impotent," Borg said. "There are more transformative ways we can look at faith."

One hardly needs to attempt a refutation of the above presentation. The reporter correctly assesses also our response in stating, "Borg's approach to Scripture is an abomination to Christians who believe the Bible is infallible and that Jesus' miracles and resurrection prove he is divine and the hope for humankind."

But, one would claim, the man is not Reformed and was addressing a congregation that left the Reformed Church in America because of these erroneous views which they taught. But the same article presents the response of a retired Reformed Church minister (I assume he is in good standing) to Borg's position:

"Marcus Borg is saying what a lot of us are saying, but he's say-

ing it best," said the Rev. Bob Bedingfield, a minister retired from Central Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. Bedingfield took a study leave from his seasonal ministry in a Florida retirement community to hear Borg speak.

One can only hope and pray that Bedingfield does not speak on behalf of the Reformed Church in America nor of Reformed people generally. Yet increasingly the views of Borg are considered acceptable, or at least allowable, within Reformed circles. That became plain also in a "Public Pulse" letter which appeared in the *Grand Rapids Press* of March 13, 2001, written by the Rev. Sierd Woudstra. He too is a retired minister, but in the Christian Reformed Church—and, I understand, in good standing there. He writes:

I guess Western Michigan is one of the few places in the country where it could happen. I mean, having it stated in a Public Pulse letter that "the Bible says that far more people will end up in hell than in heaven" ("Christianity is open to all," March 2).

Imagine, casting the devil in the victor's role. I should like to point out that authentic Christianity is much more positive.

Among major religions, the Christian faith is a latecomer on the block; only Islam is of more recent origin. Also, along with other religions, including Islam, Christianity shares the distinction of having often been advanced by dubious means.

Already on the face of it, for such a religion to claim that only those who in some sense espouse it will make it to heaven must be deemed arrogance. Isn't this the stuff of which religious wars are made?

One should be wary of any belief structure that absolutizes itself, whether it be a brand of Christianity, Muslim fundamentalism or the militant atheism of the late Madalyn Murray O'Hair.

Thankfully, authentic Christianity is not absolutist in that sense. A key Christian belief is that Jesus

Christ is the world's only true Savior. But that does not translate into a wholesale condemnation of all who hold different beliefs. The truth is otherwise.

A basic perspective of the Old Testament scriptures is that in some future time all nations of the world will share in the beneficent reign of Israel's God, the God Jesus also believed in and prayed to.

The New Testament echoes the same encouraging hope. Jesus Christ gave his life for the whole world. St. Paul writes that "the living God is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe" (note the peculiar wording).

As I understand the Christian faith, it teaches that sin and evil, though terribly real and strong, will be no match for the power of God's grace.

I was astounded!! Can it be that this Christian Reformed retired preacher believes in a universalism? Yet, how else can one understand his letter? Evidently he too would agree with much of what Borg teaches. It matters not of what religion they may be; it matters not whether they believed in Christ or not. Jesus is the "Savior of all people." If most (or any) are cast into hell, Woudstra would conclude that the devil has the victory.

Woudstra could profitably read Calvin on I Tim. 4:10 (or Hendriksen's excellent commentary, for that matter). Did he not subscribe (presumably, without "tongue in cheek") to the Reformed creeds, including (among others) Art. 16 and 37 of the Belgic Confession and Art. 15 of the First Head of Doctrine in the Canons of Dordt? One trusts that Woudstra's views do not represent those commonly held in the Christian Reformed Church—but can one remain a minister or member in good standing within that denomination while publicly espousing views contrary to the creeds (and Scripture)?

■ 1924 Revisited

The *Christian Renewal*, March 12, 2001, gives an interesting report of an overture which appeared on the floor of Classis Grand Rapids East of the Christian Reformed Church. The report states:

Three-quarters of a century after the Rev. Herman Hoeksema was deposed by Classis Grand Rapids East of the Christian Reformed church, that same Classis was asked to apologize to Hoeksema's ecclesiastical descendants for the church's handling of the matter.

But amid a hail of concerns and protests, the apologetic overture was replaced by a recommendation that a denominational committee seek to discuss the matter with the denomination Hoeksema helped to establish, the Protestant Reformed Churches.

The debate, held during Grand Rapids East's Jan. 18 meeting, was rooted in a pair of *Calvin Theological Journal* articles penned by Dr. John Bolt, Calvin Seminary's professor of systematic theology. (These articles appear on the Web Site: www.PRCA.org and under the "Recent Articles" section—GVB.)

In his articles, Bolt examined the circumstances, claims and actions that led to the CRC's adoption of its Three Points of Common Grace and Hoeksema's eventual deposition from office.

A pastor at the Eastern Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, Hoeksema was instrumental in seeing Calvin Seminary professor Ralph Janssen dismissed for allegedly teaching a non-Reformed higher criticism method of Scriptural interpretation. Janssen's defense appealed to the doctrine of Common Grace – a doctrine Hoeksema vehemently denied afterward in pamphlets, fueling a new controversy.

Reviewing how the CRC's broader assemblies handled the matter in 1924-25, Bolt concluded that participants acted hastily and absent due charity. "There is considerable evidence that powerfully placed church leaders acted in concert to get Hoeksema," Bolt wrote in the April 2000 issue of

the *Calvin Theological Journal*. "It looks for all the world ... like an ecclesiastical blitzkrieg, a hurried and well-orchestrated attack on the person and ideas of Herman Hoeksema."

Through his consistory at Plymouth Heights CRC, Bolt overtured Classis Grand Rapids East to ask synod 2001 to express "profound sorrow and regret to our brothers and sisters in the Protestant Reformed Churches for the actions of CRC assemblies in 1924 that led to the forced departure from the CRC of Revs. Herman Hoeksema, Henry Danhof, G.M. Ophoff and the majorities of their councils." It also sought admission "that many of the actions were hasty, did not always follow due and just process, and forced objectors to submit to a synodical declaration on which synod itself had observed there was no common opinion and that it was not essential to Reformed doctrine."

Bolt said the overture avoided the doctrinal issue and did not

seek to heal all wounds with a single treatment. "I'm not anticipating that we're going to become one big happy denomination," he said. Instead, Bolt said he wanted to decrease the hostility fostered by 75 years of unhappy separation.

The overture was withdrawn over numerous concerns. Among them, delegates said, were that Bolt's claims were speculative; that the issue was better left alone due to the deep personal pain involved; and that there were better procedures for accomplishing the same goals....


Prof. David Engelsma was also quoted, giving his evaluation of the decisions of Classis Grand Rapids East:

...Dr. David Engelsma, professor of dogmatics and Old Testament studies at Protestant Reformed seminary, said Grand Rapids East's refusal to consider Bolt's original overture seemed to rest

more on animosity than procedure. Bolt's overture included five pages of explanation that demonstrated the CRC's injustices in 1924-25, Engelsma said, "but not one delegate so much as referred to the grounds," and many delegates expressed open hostility toward the PRC.

Engelsma praised Bolt's overture as having had potential to improve relations between members of the two denominations and, most importantly, as having sought righteousness before God. But Classis Grand Rapids East wanted none of it.

"It was Classis East, Grand Rapids, of the CRC that deposed Herman Hoeksema from the CRC ministry in January 1925. By this act, it killed one of the prophets," Engelsma said. "Seventy-six years later to the month, delegates of the same Classis made no bones about it, that they are children of them who killed the prophet."

That's well stated! 

A Word Fitly Spoken

Rev. Dale Kuiper

Potter (Clay)

No figures of speech set forth the sovereignty of God more clearly and more strikingly than those figures which use the terms potter, clay, and vessels. By God's sovereignty we mean the freedom and the right of God to do what he pleases with every one of His creatures. "Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places" (Ps. 135:6). May He not do what He will with His own (Matt. 20:15)?

Rev. Kuiper is pastor of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

"Hath not the potter power over the clay" (Rom. 9:21)?

We are clay. "Remember, I beseech thee, that thou hast made me as the clay" (Job 10:9). Created out of the earth, the dust, the clay, all men belong to the same lump (Rom. 9:21). As to origin, as to nature, men do not differ one from another. Only as to destiny do men differ. And human destiny is determined by the Potter.

How is it that some confess "But now, O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand" (Is. 64:8), while others are broken with a rod of iron and dashed in pieces like a potter's vessel (Ps. 2:9)? How is it to be ex-

plained that God loved Jacob and hated Esau before they were born or had done good or evil? Why does God have mercy on some while hardening others? This cannot be explained by the willing or the working of any man (Rom. 9:16). It can be explained only by the sovereignty of God in predestination. Although this explanation is unpalatable to the proud hearts of men, this is really the only answer there is! "Hath not the potter power (authority, right) over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor?" (Rom. 9:21). Not only is this God's right and prerogative, not only does this serve God's purpose in revealing His


wrath and power as well as the riches of His glory, but God is righteous when He makes this discrimination between men. No one may complain fatalistically that he cannot resist God's will, and no one may charge God with unrighteousness with the question, "Why hast thou made me thus?" (Rom. 9:20).

The righteousness of God's sovereignty is shown in Jeremiah 18:1-10. "O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel." And the Lord goes on to explain that if they turn from their evil, He will repent of the evil He thought to do unto them, but if not, He will repent of the good wherewith He would benefit them. This same righteousness of God is shown in the prophecy of Zechariah 11 and fulfillment in Matthew 27. The prophet tells Israel to give unto him his price, what they thought of him. They weighed for his price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord told Zechariah to cast that "goodly price" that he was prised at to the potter. Now Judas Iscariot had

covenanted with the chief priests to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. When he saw that He was condemned (Matt. 27:3), he tried to return the pieces of silver, but the priests and elders piously refused to take it because it was blood money; so they bought with it the potter's field in which to bury strangers. This all makes plain that the prophets preached Christ to the people, and it is because the people despised Christ that they are destroyed. The righteousness of God in respect to the Esaus, the Pharaohs, the false church, the raging heathen nations is perfectly vindicated. Since we are all but clay, let us "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him" (Ps. 2:12).

Since the divine Potter is our Father, we ought to look into the matter of our being vessels of honor more fully. Vessels of honor are vessels of mercy. Empty vessels in themselves, they are filled with God's mercy in order to show forth the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus. In that consciousness

we can ask humbly and reverently, "Why hast thou made me thus?" Why me, an unworthy lump of clay, and not others? Not because I willed it, or deserved it by my running (working), but of God that sheweth mercy! The child of God confesses the power of the Potter over the clay; he rejoices in the sovereignty of God; he gladly kisses the Son in faith and places his trust in such a great and good God. God ordained that Paul would spend a large part of his life in persecuting the church, but he was powerfully converted, "for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" (Acts 9:15, 16). Yes, we are also willing to suffer for the name of God's Son!

"But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (II Tim. 2:20, 21). 

Bring the Books

Public Prayer*

* Chapter 24 of *Southern Presbyterian Robert L. Dabney's Evangelical Eloquence*. The book is reviewed elsewhere in this issue. The chapter reprinted here is instruction to seminarians concerning congregational prayer. Reprinted with permission. — Ed.

You are aware, young gentlemen, that, during the "Dark Ages," the disgraceful incompetency of the clergy resulted, first, in the introduction of forms of prayer, and, second, in the customary disuse of the divinely-appointed ordinance of preaching. The Reformation reversed all this. It has become the characteristic of the Popish religion that it makes the liturgical service nearly the whole of public worship, and of the Reformed that it makes

the sermon the prominent part. This difference is imprinted upon the very speech of the people. The papist says: "I go to mass"; the Protestant, "I go to preaching." Many ignorant Protestants depreciate the devotional acts of the sanctuary too much. I would protest against this unseemly and mischievous extreme. It is for this reason, in part, that I would give great emphasis to the minister's duty of preparing himself thoroughly for public prayer, and performing his

part in it with propriety. I trust you will not graduate the relative importance which I attach to the sermon and the prayers, according to the relative space here bestowed on the two subjects; for the principles which regulate pulpit eloquence apply also to the devotional parts of it. I beg you to consider me, once for all, as applying them all to this important branch of your duty.

I deem that the minister is as much bound to prepare himself for praying in public as for preaching. The negligence with which many preachers leave their prayers to accident, while they lay out all their strength on their sermons, is most painfully suggestive of unbelief toward God and indifference to the edification of their brethren. When the sermon is appropriate, nervous, finished, but the prayers of the same minister are rambling, aimless, and nerveless, how distressing is the impression upon every pious heart! This lamentable indifference in the spiritual guides accounts sufficiently for the feeling which the worldly part of our congregations so plainly betray, that in their eyes the sermon is the only part of the proceeding which can possibly interest them, while the devotional acts are only the wearisome "grace before meat," the irksome form which detains them from their indulgence, to be evaded in any way not positively indecent.

Some affect to think that the spiritual nature of the exercise ought to preclude preparation; that because it is the Holy Ghost which teaches us to pray, we should not attempt to teach ourselves. This argument is a remnant of fanatical enthusiasm. Should we not also preach with the Spirit? Why, then, do we not extend the same sophisms to inhibit preparation of the sermon? The answer is, that the aid of the Holy Spirit does not suspend the exercise of our own faculties. He works through them as his instruments, and in strict conformity to their rational nature. He

assists and elevates them. He helps us also in prompting us to help ourselves.

Bethink yourselves, my young brethren, that it is no slight undertaking to guide a whole congregation to the throne of the heavenly grace, and to be their spokesman to God. To speak for God to men is a sacred and responsible task. To speak for men to God is not less responsible, and is more solemn. The public prayers of the pastor are apt to be the models of the devotions of his people; when he leads them in prayer he is really teaching them to pray. Prayer is the Christian's vital breath. Prayer is the appointed channel of his whole redemption. How mischievous is that man who by his coldness, inappropriateness, irreverence, vagueness, unbelief, chills the aspirations and obstructs the access of a whole multitude which he should have led up to the mercy-seat!

The many blemishes which we hear in public prayers are to be traced to two sources: first, deficient piety, and, second, deficient preparation. It is this delinquency to duty which gives the advocates of an enforced liturgy all their plausible objections against *extempore* prayer in public worship. We, who claim liberty from such restrictions, and who assert the superiority of the free method of the scriptural saints, are bound to commend our opinion by our practice. I shall recite some of the blemishes by which Christian ear and heart are most often offended, in order to guard you against them.

It is a grave fault to repeat frequently and mechanically any *formula* of words; as interjections, the names and titles of God, or favourite phrases. Inordinate repetition grates on every ear. These "words, of course," betray either odious mannerisms, or a vacuity of heart in the sacred service which is utterly profane. We sometimes hear the name of the majestic Being to whom prayer is addressed repeated so heedlessly, that it is a

literal "taking of it in vain." In a word, the mere commonplaces of devotional language are not the dress in which that soul clothes its desires, which has a true errand at the throne of grace. Such a heart will be very far from going to seek after the novelties and pedantries of language, but the sincerity of its emotions will give a certain freshness to its language of request. This mechanical phrase is obnoxious to every charge of formalism, monotony and lack of appropriate variety, which we lodge against an unchangeable liturgy, while it has none of its literary merit and dignified and tender associations.

He who speaks to God for others is bound to eschew all provincialisms, solecisms, vulgarisms, and grammatical errors in his language. He should never be guilty of thrusting into the mouths of worshipers such locutions as the request that God would "solemnize their souls," or that he would "grant to bestow" his grace. You will have need here for great jealousy of the imitation of the current phrases; because usage has blinded even many educated men to odious blemishes, and given these faults a species of pious license. But why should the devotions of those who have some feeling for their mother-tongue be disturbed by violations of her integrity? Does God take pleasure in bad grammar? He has spoken to us in good Greek, thereby showing us that he expects us to address him in good English.

We observe that desire is always definite when it is earnest; our petitions, therefore, should be definite also. But this does not excuse an indelicate or trivial minuteness of detail. The pastor may feel that, in asking temporal blessings, after the example of the petition, "Give us this day our daily bread," he may appropriately ask for "rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness"; but good taste should prevent his descending to such par-

ticulars as that the bloom of the peach might escape the spring frosts. To pray nominally to God, but really at a fellow-creature, to flatter or revile in prayer, to insinuate a witticism or sarcasm, to arouse by allusions to party strifes, political prejudices and asperities — all these are nauseous to a true taste and a genuine piety as well. The man who is really inspired with the spirit of prayer will be incapable of such crimes against propriety. What must be the unbelief and irreverence of that man who can make a pretext of approach to a God so pure, majestic, and good, for displaying his smartness or his malice, or for loading the ear of the eternal Judge with flatteries of a fellow-culprit?

Half-educated or spiritually proud men frequently indulge in an indecent familiarity with the Most High, under the pretence of filial nearness and importunity. It

is the amazing privilege of justified believers to call this exalted Being their "Father which is in heaven," and, through their divine Advocate, to approach him with filial trust; but this joyful affection should always be tempered with adoring reverence and tender contrition. The proper language for the accepted sinner before the mercy-seat is, therefore, that of profound veneration. Especially are all fondling and amatory expressions, addressed to either person of the Trinity, abhorrent to the truly pious heart. Our affection for the Author of our redemption should be too unique, and elevated by its sanctity too far above all carnal emotions, to borrow their language. The prophets and apostles surely apprehended God, and knew how to praise him better than we; but they are never found addressing Jesus Christ or the Father or Spirit in any of these fulsome

terms: they speak only the language of holy adoration.

Vague and aimless language indicates very clearly a vacant mind devoid of true spiritual affections. Too often the prayers offered before sermon are such as to suggest no other real purpose, than to comply with an expected form and fill decently the allotted time. So, the prayer which closes the sermon is often so pointless, that it amounts to nothing more than a mechanical mark for the ending of the ceremonial. Sometimes there is an absence of any intelligible order in the prayers; and we hear petitions for a mixed medley of objects, interspersed with thanks, confessions, and praises.

Now, in opposition to all these faults, I would point out to you the proper mode of performing this duty, by referring you to the instruction of our Directory for Public Worship.*

* I. It seems very proper to begin the public worship of the sanctuary by a short prayer; humbly adoring the infinite majesty of the living God; expressing a sense of our distance from him as creatures, and unworthiness as sinners, and humbly imploring his gracious presence, the assistance of his Holy Spirit in the duties of his worship, and his acceptance of us through the merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

II. Then, after singing a psalm, or hymn, it is proper that, before sermon, there should be a full and comprehensive prayer: *First.* Adoring the glory and perfections of God as they are made known to us in the works of creation, in the conduct of providence, and in the clear and full revelation he hath made of himself in his written Word. *Second.* Giving thanks to him for all his mercies of every kind, general and particular, spiritual and temporal, common and special; above all, for Christ Jesus, his unspeakable gift, and the hope of eternal life through him. *Third.* Making humble confession of sin, both original and actual; acknowledging and endeavouring to impress the mind of every worshipper with a deep sense of the evil of all

sin, as such; as being a departure from the living God; and also taking a particular and affecting view of the various fruits which proceed from this root of bitterness — as sins against God, our neighbour and ourselves; sins in thought, in word, and in deed; sins secret and presumptuous; sins accidental and habitual. Also, the aggravations of sin, arising from knowledge, or the means of it; from distinguishing mercies; from valuable privileges; from breach of vows, etc. *Fourth.* Making earnest supplication for the pardon of sin, and peace with God, through the blood of the atonement, with all its important and happy fruits; for the Spirit of sanctification, and abundant supplies of the grace that is necessary to the discharge of our duty; for support and comfort, under all the trials to which we are liable, as we are sinful and mortal; and for all temporal mercies that may be necessary, in our passage through this valley of tears — always remembering to view them as flowing in the channel of covenant love, and intended to be subservient to the preservation and progress of the spiritual life. *Fifth.* Pleading from every principle warranted in Scripture; from our own necessity; the

all-sufficiency of God; the merit and intercession of our Saviour; and the glory of God in the comfort and happiness of his people. *Sixth.* Intercession for others, including the whole world of mankind; the kingdom of Christ, or his Church universal; the church or churches with which we are more particularly connected; the interest of human society in general, and in that community to which we immediately belong; all that are invested with civil authority; the ministers of the everlasting gospel; and the rising generation: with whatever else, more particular, may seem necessary, or suitable, to the interest of that congregation where divine worship is celebrated.

III. Prayer after sermon ought generally to have a relation to the subject that has been treated of in the discourse, and all other public prayers, to the circumstances that gave occasion for them.

IV. It is easy to perceive that in all the preceding directions there is a very great compass and variety, and it is committed to the judgment and fidelity of the officiating pastor to insist chiefly on such parts, or to take in more or less of the several parts, as he

1. Our Standards here discriminate between the grace or spirit, and the gift of prayer. The former is a devout, believing, thankful frame of heart, which "hungers and thirsts after righteousness," superinduced by divine grace. The latter is the ability to express this frame appropriately in words. The former only is necessary for the right performance of the duty of secret prayer; both are necessary for him who would lead the devotions of others. Now, the grace of prayer is to be secured only by a life of personal and private devotion. He who carries a cold heart into the pulpit betrays it not only to God, whose detection of it is inevitable, but almost surely to the hearers also. The pretended gift without the grace is a body without spirit. The display of it only serves to distress and chill the truly devout, to confirm the slumbers of drowsy Christians, to encourage the prayerless tendencies of the ungodly, to place the

shall be led to by the aspect of Providence; the particular state of the congregation in which he officiates, or the disposition and exercise of his own heart at the time. But we think it necessary to observe, that although we do not approve, as is well known, of confining ministers to set or fixed forms of prayer for public worship, yet it is the indispensable duty of every minister, previously to his entering on his office, to prepare and qualify himself for this part of his duty, as well as for preaching. He ought, by a thorough acquaintance with the Holy Scriptures, by reading the best writers on the subject, by meditation, and by a life of communion with God in secret, to endeavour to acquire both the spirit and the gift of prayer. Not only so, but when he is to enter on particular acts of worship, he should endeavour to compose his spirit, and to digest his thoughts for prayer, that it may be performed with dignity and propriety, as well as to the profit of those who join in it; and that he may not disgrace that important service by mean, irregular, or extravagant effusions.

minds of all out of harmony with the divine truths which are about to be discussed in the sermon. Above all, the help of the Holy Ghost and the inestimable advantage of Christian intercession are forfeited. Thus the purposes of God in ordaining public prayer are disappointed, and this means of edification is turned into a deadening form. How great is the guilt

of him who, appointed to be an ensample to the flock, obstructs their access to the throne of grace! The pastor is under sacred obligations, then, to cultivate upon his knees the spirit of prayer. This possessed, the gift of prayer will be taught him by the same principles of taste and propriety which direct his preaching.

... to be concluded 

Book Reviews



Evangelical Eloquence: A Course of Lectures on Preaching, by Robert L. Dabney. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999. 361pp. \$8.99 (paper). [Reviewed by the editor.]

More than 20 years ago, a friend gave me the old book of which this is a reprint. The original title was *Sacred Rhetoric; or a Course of Lectures on Preaching*. I regarded it then as one of the finest, most helpful books on making sermons and preaching that I had ever read. I regard it so still today.

No seminarian should enter the ministry without having read it carefully and having taken its instruction and warnings to heart. He should re-read it periodically thereafter. Ministers who have not read it should make up the lack as quickly as possible, regardless of their age and experience.

The book is the teaching of preaching by a preacher to would-be preachers. Beginning with what preaching is, it takes the student through all the aspects of making and delivering a sermon: choosing and working with the text; arranging the material in the sermon; "style," or delivery, including voice and gesture; and more.

Valuable as the book is as a solid work on the formal aspects of homiletics, it is invaluable because of its spiritual and practical instruction and warning from beginning to end.

Above all, the preacher must be a godly man. This theme, passionately urged and developed, runs through the work like a refrain: "Only the eminent Christian can be an eminent preacher of the gospel"; "The prime qualification for the pulpit orator is eminent piety"; "What can give this glow [of the zeal of heavenly love] except the indwelling of the Holy Ghost? You are thus led again to that great, ever-recurring deduction, the first qualification of the sacred orator, the grace of Christ"; "You must be men of faith and prayer; you must live near the cross and feel 'the powers of the world to come.' We thus learn again the great truth that it is divine grace which makes the true minister"; "The pastor's character speaks more loudly than his tongue."

Every preacher must work hard at his sermons: "Whatever may be your method, excellence can only be the result of strenuous effort. He who labours most on each sermon is usually the best preacher.... To preach a sermon is a great and awful task. Woe to that man, who slights it with a perfunctory preparation and a careless heart!"

Proper preparation means writing the sermons out and then going over the manuscript with painstaking care. Indeed, Dabney exhorts preachers to be writers:

The first upon which I insist is careful writing. The abundant and painstaking use of the pen is necessary to give you correctness, perspicuity and elegance of lan-

guage, and to make these easy to you. No man ever learns to compose a sermon at his desk in rhetorical language save by speaking *extempore* under the rhetorical impulse; so no man ever learns to speak well *extempore* save by learning to write well.

But the preacher may not read his sermon. "Reading a manuscript to the people can never, with any justice, be termed preaching.... Mere reading, then, should be sternly banished from the pulpit." Having interpreted the text, having written the sermon out in the right form, which includes a logical flow, and having gone over the sermon in his study so that the Word of God in the text is also in his soul, the minister must, and can, preach it in what Dabney calls "*extempore*" fashion.

Dabney warns against all political preaching (especially powerful, coming as this warning does from Stonewall Jackson's chaplain during the war between the states); eulogistic funeral addresses (always a temptation, also in the Protestant Reformed Churches); needless criticism of the KJV; failure carefully to prepare the sermon's conclusion; not following one line in the sermon, "lest [the] sermon will be a

crude bundle of little sermons"; and announcing the main divisions of the sermon at the outset.


The last chapter is excellent instruction of the minister concerning public prayer. This chapter is reprinted elsewhere in this issue of the *Standard Bearer*.

Robert L. Dabney was one of the outstanding southern Presbyterian theologians of the nineteenth century. The contents of the book are the lectures he gave on preaching at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia. Whatever one may think of the change of the original title, Dabney himself suggested it (see pp. 30ff.).

The one criticism that must be made is that Dabney does not sufficiently make plain that true preaching is the living voice of Christ Himself and that, in the final analysis, this is its power. This is, no doubt, assumed and implied, but without the mention of this, and stress upon it, the reader can go away with the impression that the power of preaching is the preacher's own preparation, piety, and eloquence.

Dabney closes his treatment of preaching this way:

Let me impress you with the high

responsibility of ascending the pulpit, and beseech you to form a lofty ideal. He who proposes to sway the souls of a multitude, to be their teacher, to lay his hands upon their heart-strings, to imbue them with his passion and will, makes an audacious attempt. But nothing less than this is true preaching. It behooves the man who attempts this high emprise to have every power of his soul trained and braced like an athlete, and to perfect his equipment at every point, with the painful care of the commander who is about to join battle with a powerful enemy. He begins the adventure with a solemn awe, an anxious diffidence, whose palpitations nothing but a heroic will controls. The great Athenian statesman, Pericles, the model upon which Demosthenes formed himself, was wont to say, that so solemn did he deem the act of speaking, he could not ascend the *bema* without an anxious invocation to the immortal gods for their assistance. Surely, the minister of a divine Redeemer should mount his pulpit with a more holy dread, by as much as he discusses a more sacred theme and more everlasting destinies. To preach a sermon is a great and awful task. Woe to that man, who slights it with a perfunctory preparation and a careless heart! 

Report of Classis West

March 7-9, 2001
at Doon, Iowa

The March meeting of Classis West was held at Doon Protestant Reformed Church in Doon, Iowa from Wednesday, March 7 through Friday, March 9.

An officebearers' conference was held on Tuesday, the day before Classis. The theme of the conference was "The Minister As the Man of God." Rev. Steven Key gave the keynote address, which was entitled, "Men Before God: Servants for Jesus' Sake." Several ministers also presented papers relating to the general theme of the conference. The conference was attended not only by the

delegates to Classis, but also by several members of our Doon, Hull, and Edgerton congregations, and a few visitors. The conference served as a reminder and encouragement, not only to the ministers, but to all who attended, concerning the work of the ministry of the Word.

Classis began its work on Wednesday morning, with Rev. Garrett Eriks chairing the meeting of Classis.

Classis treated a lengthy and weighty agenda, which included two overtures, four protests, and one appeal.

The first overture Classis treated deals with two matters,

both relating to the labors of a missionary on the mission field. First, the overture asks Synod to declare that missionaries may administer both the sacraments, but specifically the Lord's Supper, subject to the approval of the calling church and concurrence of the respective mission committees, in instituted churches which are the regular objects of our preaching and mission work and which are laboring with us and our missionaries toward denominational federation. Secondly, the overture asks Synod to declare that missionaries may pronounce the votum, salutation, and benediction on the mission field, with the

approval of the calling church and concurrence of the respective mission committees, in either an unorganized group or instituted church, where such pronouncement is in conjunction with the regular administration of the Word in an established object of mission work. This overture was forwarded to Synod 2001 with Classis West's approval of all points in the overture.

The second overture was asking Synod to set up proper, official, denominational oversight and funding of the prca.org website. After much discussion, this overture was declared illegally before Classis on the ground that the ownership of the website was not clearly known.

Classis dealt with various matters in closed session, all of which were declared legally before Classis.

The four protests were against prior decisions and actions of Classis. All four protests dealt with the same case. The protests were rejected, and the previous decisions and actions of Classis sustained. However, Classis labored patiently and at length with these protests in order to help the protestants, as much as possible, with their questions and concerns.

In the appeal Classis treated, the appellant was asking Classis to declare that the charges of sin brought against him by his consistory were improper. After careful consideration of the case, and particularly

of the appellant's own writings, the consistory was upheld in all points of its actions of discipline.

Classis also dealt with the request of the consistory of our Pella congregation for the advice of Classis regarding the future viability of the congregation. In response to this request Classis appointed a special committee to assist the consistory of Pella in considering the question of their future viability. The committee, and Pella's consistory, are to report to Classis in September.

In other business, Classis approved subsidy requests from five of our churches and forwarded these requests to Synod.

Classical appointments were granted to two vacant churches, Lynden and Randolph.

The schedule adopted for Lynden PRC is as follows: Rev. G. Eriks (April 22 and 29), Rev. A. Brummel (May 20 and 27), Rev. W. Bekkering (June 17 and 24), Rev. A. denHartog (July 15 and 22), Rev. S. Key (August 12 and 19), Rev. D. Kleyn (September 9 and 16).

The schedule adopted for Randolph PRC is as follows: Rev. S. Houck (April 15 and 22), Rev. S. Key (May 13 and 20), Rev. R. Smit (June 3 and 10), Rev. R. Miersma (July 8 and 15), Rev. C. Haak (August 5), Rev. M. DeVries (August 19 and 26), Rev. C. Haak (September 9), Rev. W. Bekkering (September 23 and 30).

Annual elections were also held. Elected as delegates to Synod 2001 were **Ministers:** *Primi:* A. Brummel, A. denHartog, S. Key, D. Kleyn, R. Smit; *Secundi:* W. Bekkering, M. DeVries, G. Eriks, C. Haak, R. Miersma. **Elders:** *Primi:* Al Brummel (Edgerton), Charles De Groot (Randolph), Henry Hoekstra (Hull), Ryan Regnerus (South Holland), Gene VanBemmel (Doon); *Secundi:* Eugene Braaksma (Randolph), Robert Brands (Loveland), Marty DeVries (Randolph), Henry Nieuwenkamp (Edmonton), Philip VanBaren (South Holland).

In other elections: Rev. S. Key was reappointed to the Classical Committee, Rev. C. Haak was elected to a three-year term as a Synodical Deputy of Classis West, with Rev. R. Smit being chosen as the alternate; and Revs. W. Bekkering, A. denHartog, C. Haak, and R. Miersma were elected as church visitors, with Revs. M. DeVries and S. Key as alternates.

Although serious matters had to be dealt with, with thanks to God we can report that Classis was very united in its deliberations and decisions.

Classis decided to hold its next meeting in Hull PRC, Iowa, on September 5, 2001. The March 2002 meeting is scheduled to be held in Loveland PRC.

Rev. Daniel Kleyn
Stated Clerk, Classis West

The Love of Jesus

What is more enormous than
 Mightiest mountains known to man?
 'Tis the love of Jesus.

What is deeper than abyss,
 More profound and bottomless?
 'Tis the love of Jesus.

What is sweeter far than honey,
 Sweetness not procured with money?
 'Tis the love of Jesus.

What's so sure it cannot fail?
 There's no power that can assail –
 'Tis the love of Jesus.

Where is mercy found so great
 That men leave their former state?
 In the love of Jesus.

Jesus takes men steeped in sin,
 Cleanses and renews within –
 That's the love of Jesus!

Thelma Westra

Minister Activities

The Hope PRC in Walker, MI, the calling church for the minister-on-loan to Singapore, called Rev. C. Haak (Bethel, Roselle, IL) to be the next minister to replace Rev. J. Kortering in 2002. Rev. J. Laning, pastor of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI, declined the call he received from the Randolph, WI PRC. Their new trio is Rev. W. Bruinsma (Kalamazoo, MI), Rev. J. Slopsema (First, G.R.), and Rev. R. VanOverloop (Georgetown, Hudsonville). Rev. C. Terpstra, pastor of the First PRC in Holland, MI, declined the call he had been considering to serve as the next pastor of the Lynden, WA PRC. Lynden's new trio consists of the Revs. B. Gritters (Hudsonville, MI), K. Koole (Faith, Jenison, MI), and R. VanOverloop (Georgetown, Hudsonville).

Classis West met in an extended session in early March, beginning Wednesday morning and not adjourning until late Friday afternoon. The length of this meeting made pulpit exchanges in many of our congregations in the west the norm for Sunday, March 11. It almost appeared that no congregation had their own pastor that Sunday. For example, Rev. R. Miersma (A.M.) and Rev. S. Key (P.M.) led the worship service at the Doon, IA PRC. Their pastor, Rev. R. Smit, preached in Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB; Rev. D. Kleyn preached in Loveland, CO; while Rev. G. Eriks preached in Edgerton, MN (A.M.) and Hull, IA (P.M.) and Rev. R. Miersma preached in Edgerton in the evening.

Mission Activities

Rev. R. Moore, our churches' missionary to Ghana, had the

privilege of bringing the Word of God recently to the Morning Star Junior Secondary School. He was able to speak to about sixty-five students between the ages of 15 and 18 on God's sovereignty in salvation and all things, also applying this to the exams they will be taking to determine their placement in secondary schools. We are also happy to let you know that, the Lord willing, on Sunday, March 25, the group in Ghana was able to worship in their new building in Ashaley Botwe for the first time. Plans called for a formal dedication service on the 3rd of April to bring thanks to God.

The first week in March, Elder Ray Ezinga, from the Loveland, CO PRC, the calling church for Rev. T. Miersma, our missionary in Spokane, WA, along with Mr. Gord Terpstra, a member of the Domestic Mission Committee, visited the mission field in Spokane as part of the oversight of our missionary and his work, and also to encourage our missionary, his family, and the group there.

School Activities

Approximately 70 members of the choir of Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, MI, along with their director, Mr. Andy Kamper, and several chaperons left school in the early morning hours of March 16 for a brief overnight trip to Wisconsin. They were privileged to give two concerts that afternoon. First for members of a rest home in Randolph and then for the students of Faith Christian School. Following refreshments the choir then drove to a hotel located near the Wisconsin Dells and spent the night at an indoor water park before returning home the next afternoon.

On March 16 an open house was held for students and parents interested in attending the new

high school which will start, the Lord willing, this fall in Lansing, IL. This open house was at First Lansing Church of the Nazarene, 2158 E. 175th Street, Lansing, IL. The event included a dinner of pizza and an opportunity not only to see the facility, but also spend time in the gym enjoying that part of the facility.

Also on March 16, Faith Christian School in Randolph, WI held their annual Hostess Dinner and Program. This event is a fundraiser for a school building which Faith hopes to be able to build in about four or five years.


The Promoters of East Side Christian School in Grand Rapids, MI scheduled an Enrichment Program on March 15. Glen Van Andel, Professor of Physical Education and Recreation at Calvin College, spoke on "Vacations with a Vision, What Christians Should Know." Vacations need to be viewed like the Old Testament Sabbath, a period of time when we restore our relationship with God, others, and His creation.

Congregation Activities

A recent note from the bulletin of the Doon, IA PRC caught our attention. It appears that during the month of February, Doon was able to celebrate four wedding anniversaries of 50 years or more. We rejoice with them and pray that these marriages may continue to be worthy examples and beautiful reflections of Christ and His church.

Food For Thought

"God has set the type of marriage everywhere throughout the creation. Every creature seeks its perfection in another. The very heavens and earth picture it to us."

—Martin Luther 

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

Announcements

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On April 15, 2001

MORRY and ARLENE DE VRIES

celebrate their 35th wedding anniversary. We are thankful to God for the years He has given them together, and for the instruction and guidance they have given us.

Our prayer is that the Lord will continue to uphold them and bless them in the years to come. "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Psalm 103:17).

- * Dave and Amy Regnerus
Jared, Katrina, Alexa
- * Dave and Jody Buiter
Ryan, Drew, Nicole
- * Phil and Pam DeVries
Callie, Courtney
- * Darrell and Joy DeVries

Randolph, Wisconsin

NOTICE!

The board, teachers, parents, and supporters of Covenant Christian School in Lynden, Washington, would like to express their deep gratitude to those who have helped us in our time of need. The money received from churches, schools, societies, and individuals has been so very important for the day-to-day operation of our school. We are thankful to God that we could see evidence of the mutual love and concern fellow members of the body of Christ have for each other (1 Cor. 12:25, 26). Please continue to remember Covenant Christian School in your prayers in this difficult time as we seek, by God's grace, to train up children in the fear of the Lord.

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WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On February 28, 2001, our parents/grandparents,

PETER and WILMINA VAN DEN TOP,

celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary.

We are thankful to our heavenly Father for the years they have had together and for the Christian home and spiritual guidance they have given us. It is our prayer that God may continue to bless them in their lives together.

"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)

- * John and Marlys Huyser
David, Joel
- * Eugene and Karen Van Den Top
Rochelle, Austin, Kyle, Ellen,
Eric, Joni, Paige
- * Floyd and Mary Van Den Top
Richard, Kenneth, Lisa, Maria
Doon, Iowa

NOTICE!!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 9, 2001 at the Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan. Material to be treated at this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk by April 9, 2001.

Jon J. Huiskens,
Stated Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On March 23, 2001, we celebrated with joy the 45th wedding anniversary of our parents and grandparents,

HOWARD and HARLENE KRAKER.

We are thankful for the love, guidance, and godly examples they have provided for us. We are grateful to our heavenly Father for the years He has given them together. It is our prayer that God will keep them in His care and bless their marriage for many years to come.

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him and his righteousness unto children's children" (Psalm 103:17).

- * Dale and Ruth Kraker
Ryan, Lauren, and Lisa
- * David and Sharon Kraker
Jared and Tyler
- * David and Denise Overweg
Danae, Jacob, and Jason
Allendale, Michigan

ADAMS CHRISTIAN SCHOOL 50th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Please mark your calendars and plan to come to Adams Christian School on Saturday, April 28 at 2 P.M. for a celebration of Adams' 50 years of covenantal education. A program of about an hour's duration, with several speakers and special numbers by students, is planned.

Join us in thanksgiving to God for our school, and visit with former friends and teachers.

Refreshments will be served.