

THE *February 1, 2002* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

In This Issue:

MEDITATION

Rev. Ronald J. VanOverloop

Confidence in the Lord about You 194

EDITORIAL

Prof. David J. Engelsma

Herman Hoeksema's Romans Sermons (3) 196

ALL AROUND US

Rev. Gise VanBaren

198

A WORD FITLY SPOKEN

Rev. Dale H. Kuiper

Face 201

WHEN THOU SITTEST IN THINE HOUSE

Mrs. MaryBeth Lubbers

For Children: The One-Eyed Monster 202

DAY OF SHADOWS

George M. Ophoff

The Types of Scripture (5) 203

MARKING THE BULWARKS OF ZION

Prof. Herman C. Hanko

Desiderius Erasmus and Humanism (2) 206

GO YE INTO ALL THE WORLD

Rev. Steven R. Key

For the Cause of Missions 210

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

Rev. Bernard Woudenberg

The Inability of the Law to Save 212

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

215

"Confidence in the Lord about You"

"And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you. And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ."

II Thessalonians 3:4, 5

Sometimes the obvious must be stated: God's Word is powerfully instructive.

It is a special joy to discover a large, golden nugget of instruction where you would not first look. Our text is in a transition portion of Paul's epistle. It is between his instruction concerning Christ's return and the instruction concerning Christian discipline. Right in the middle of this transition we find a beautiful and powerful instruction concerning a pastor's approach to and attitude toward the people over whom God has set him.

Paul is declaring to the members of the Christian church in Thessalonica that he is confident they will do what he has com-

manded and will be commanding them to do. He expects them to obey, and he is telling them this. Paul's confidence about their obedience instructs ministers, elders, and deacons (as well as parents and Christian school teachers). They are shown what attitude they are to have toward those they are leading and teaching.

How ought a pastor to approach a congregation? With what attitude should he pastor them as he teaches them to observe all the things Christ commanded?

First, officebearers are to remember that the professing believers (whose profession is accompanied by a life regulated by their profession) are "beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ." They are the flock of Christ, purchased with His own precious blood.

Also, officebearers are to remember that they are not the real shepherds, but only undershepherds. The flock over which God has made them overseers is Christ's (Acts 20:28). They are only caretakers or stewards of that which is really the Lord's. The fact that the flock is the Lord's, bought and saved by His blood and preserved by the power of His grace and

mercy, determines the attitude and approach of every pastor when working with the flock. He must remember that his responsibility is not to save or to preserve them. He cannot. Nor does he have the ability to make them obedient. His responsibility is to set before them, accurately and clearly, the demand of the gospel and the commandments which flow from it. No undershepherd can make the flock obey. No undershepherd can touch or change a heart. No undershepherd can make the Word of God effective. Only the Spirit can do that. So all the pastor needs to do is bring the Word, preach the gospel with its command to repent and to believe and to do all that God commands them to do.

The Confidence: What

When the preacher of the gospel brings God's Word to the church of Christ, he may do so with a great degree of confidence. On the one hand, his approach and attitude as he preaches and teaches are not that of unconcern and indifference, as if he does not care how or whether the flock responds. On the other hand, he is not nervous in his approach and attitude, as if he has to make

Rev. VanOverloop is pastor of Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692) is a semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc., 4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the Standard Bearer, P.O. Box 603, Grandville, MI 49468-0603.

REPRINT POLICY

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting of articles in our magazine by other publications, provided: a) that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; b) that proper acknowledgment is made; c) that a copy of the periodical in which such reprint appears is sent to our editorial office.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions for The Reader Asks department are welcome. Contributions will be limited to approximately 300 words and must be signed.

EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prof. David J. Engelsma
4949 Ivanrest
Grandville, MI 49418
(e-mail: engelsma@prca.org)

BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
Don Doezeema
P.O. Box 603
Grandville, MI
49468-0603
PH: (616) 531-1490
(616) 538-1778
FAX: (616) 531-3033
(e-mail: doezema@prca.org)

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger
6597 40th Ave.
Hudsonville, MI 49426
(e-mail: benjwig@juno.com)

NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
c/o B. VanHerik
66 Fraser St.
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Sean Courtney
78 Millfield, Grove Rd.
Ballymena, Co. Antrim
BT43 6PD Northern Ireland
(e-mail: avcourtney@hotmail.com)

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

\$17.00 per year in the U.S., US\$20.00 elsewhere.

ADVERTISING POLICY

The Standard Bearer does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. These should be sent to the Business Office and should be accompanied by the \$10.00 fee. Deadline for announcements is at least one month prior to publication date.

16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm and 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms International.

Website for RPPA: www.rppa.org
Website for PRC: www.prca.org

the flock listen and obey. Instead, the pastor works with God's sheep with a confidence. His confidence is not in the church members, but in their Lord. The apostle Paul was confident that God would make the Thessalonian believers active in doing what they were supposed to do.

Apart from confidence in the Lord, there is no confidence. When a shepherd deals with the sheep, he has no reason for confidence if his confidence is only in the sheep. We never know what mere man is going to do. But because of the union which exists between believers and the Lord, there can be confidence. The confidence is in the fact that the Lord is at work. He knows that when God begins a work, He will bring it to perfection (Gal. 5:10; Phil. 1:6). Consequently, Paul can have a confidence in the Thessalonians. He sees them in Christ, one with the Lord.

Specifically, the apostle's confidence is that the Thessalonians are doing and will do the things he has commanded them to do, as well as the things he is about to command them to do. They were told, in Paul's first epistle, to "do [their] own business and to work with [their] own hands" (I Thess. 4:11). And he will tell them again to do this (II Thess. 3:6-15). Remember that some of the Thessalonians were very shaken up by errant views of the return of Christ (I Thess. 4:13-5:6; II Thess. 2:1-12). Some of the saints at Thessalonica were so confused that they quit their day jobs and just waited around for Christ to return. This waiting was not good for them, and it got some of them into trouble. So Paul admonished them to get back to work.

Now, Paul's approach to the Thessalonians is not only that he is confident that they will do what he has told them to do, but also that he *tells them so*. Paul is inspired to write this way. In writing this to them, the apostle is encouraging them to obey God's commandments. What kindness on the part

of the apostle! What wisdom! There may have been many reasons for them not to obey, but Paul presents them with a good reason to obey anyway. It is one thing to give someone a command, it is another thing to give them reason to obey the command, encouraging them. He is confident they will do what they are supposed to do. This makes them want to obey. Paul's confidence in the Lord concerning them makes them much more ready to obey than if he had just given the command, or if he had threatened them if they dared to disobey. God's commands do not come across harshly when they are prefaced with an expression of confidence that they will be obeyed. Paul is careful to let them know that his confidence is not in them, but in God. But the fact that Paul's confidence is in God makes the encouragement even greater!

The Confidence: How

Paul's confidence in the Lord that the Thessalonian believers will obey arises from his prayers. It is possible to have a confidence in the Lord that He will work obedience in a believer. But it is something else — something much greater — to have this confidence in the way of our praying to the Lord. Over and over Paul writes of his prayers for the saints. Here, too, he is praying. And he tells the Christians at Thessalonica what he is praying. No wonder he is so confident! He is looking to the only one who is able to bring about obedience.

Paul is praying two things. First, he prays that "the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God."

It is only by the grace of God that any descendant of Adam will be disposed to keep any commandment God sets before him. It is only by having our minds directed to consider God and His love that we will want to obey.

To "direct" is to make straight, in the sense of removing all obstacles out of the way. In his first

letter, Paul asked that God and Jesus direct his way to the Thessalonians (3:11). The idea is that a path be opened so there is no hindrance in attaining the desired object. The devil puts forth every effort to distract every believer from the knowledge of the love of God. He would love to have every Christian church filled with those who doubt or are fearful about God's love for them. He places every obstacle he can in the way of the assurance of God's love. So Paul prays that Christ will remove every obstacle, and make clear the path between the believer and God's love.

Paul prays that Christ will open the way for the inner, spiritual life of the saints. His solemn wish concerns their hearts and the focus of their hearts. Paul knows that he cannot touch another's heart. Only God can do that. So Paul prays to Him who alone is able. Paul's concern is for their heart because out of it are all the issues of life. If the heart is correctly focused, then the mind, the will, the emotions, and the members of the body will be more inclined to do that which is right. When the heart is rightly focused, then the saints will be rightly motivated to obey. Paul's concern is not for mere outward conduct. He desires that they obey because they want to do so. So He prays that God will direct their hearts.

That on which Paul desires their hearts to be focused is the love of God. This is not their love for God, but His love for them. It is the great love which God has for the believers in Thessalonica. It is a love which God has shed abroad in their hearts (Rom. 5:5). It is God's love in Christ, from which nothing can separate the believer. God's love is strong, sovereign, and unconditional. God's love is never ending and beyond all human comprehension (Eph. 3:17-19).

When God's great love for us becomes the motivating force in our lives, then we will do and will

continue to do whatever God demands of us. When the human heart is directed to the love of God for us, then obedience results. God's love is not only a divine attribute, nor only a favorable attitude. It is both, but it is also a dynamic force within. It is a principle of life in our inmost being which becomes evidenced in our external walk. There is no more powerful motivation to obey than to be filled with the consciousness of God's great love in Christ. Knowledge of God's love, which lay behind the manger and the cross, will guide the believer to do that which he must do. It will motivate the Thessalonians to get back to work and to stop meddling in each other's affairs. It will motivate children to obey their parents. It will motivate believers to love one another, to walk antithetically in this world, to forgive as they have been forgiven.

What a beautiful and powerful instruction! There are definitely times when bare commands and demands are sufficient. But let anyone who has the responsibility to lead others (parents, teachers, elders, pastors) learn from the inspired apostle's example. In this, too, Paul would have us to "be followers of me" (I Cor. 11:1). Let us have a confidence in God that those to whom we give commands will obey. And let us pray for them that they will obey. Let us pray

specifically for their hearts to be filled with the consciousness of God's love for them. With every command let us present God's love for His people in Christ.

"And the Lord direct your hearts ... into the patient waiting for Christ." This is the second of the two things Paul asks of the Lord.


There are many, many things in the lives of believers which make us grow weary of obeying our God. Our flesh is easily sidetracked. Our flesh is also easily frustrated and impatient. And the devil uses the world to throw all sorts of temptations before us. In the face of the great temptation to be impatient, Paul tells the Thessalonian believers that he is asking the Lord to give them patience. One of the things God's people realize they always need to learn is patience. That is why the Scriptures frequently admonish God's people to trust in the Lord, rest upon Him, wait on Him, and such like.

The "patient waiting" Paul asks God to give to the Thessalonians is an endurance or perseverance. It is the grace to bear up when all things seem to be against us. It is the grace to be steadfast no matter the cost. It is the characteristic of one who does not swerve from his purpose in spite of the greatest trials and suffering. The apostle uses this word often when he speaks of the hostility which is directed

against Christ and His followers. This hostility Jesus and we must endure.

The way positively to grow in patient waiting is to think on God's promises concerning His future blessings. Jesus did this. Jesus endured the cross and despised the shame while He looked ahead to the joy of heaven. God wants the Thessalonians and us to run the same race, despising the crosses we must take up and the difficulties of every affliction and tribulation, keeping our eyes fixed on Christ and the joy He has promised to give us (Heb. 12:2-4).

With patient waiting for Christ to return (and bring the promised glory) we will persist in the callings God has given to us, and not forsake them. The Thessalonians stopped working because they were carried away with a fanaticism concerning Christ's return. We are to pray for the grace to endure. Jesus persevered. He did not resort to idleness or loafing. He adhered to the task the Father appointed to Him to the very end. His Spirit is within us! His Spirit is the power within us to do the things commanded of us.

As we face a new year, let us be resolved to pray fervently that the Lord will direct our hearts into God's love for us and that He will work in us the strength of endurance as we await the coming of our Savior and Lord. 

Editorial

Herman Hoeksema's Romans Sermons (3)

Consider the following instances of Herman Hoeksema's faithful, penetrating, and even bold explanation of the doctrine in the book of Romans in his forthcoming commentary, *Righ-*

teous by Faith Alone: A Devotional Commentary on Romans.

Justification by Faith Alone

In the series of sermons on the book of Romans that is now being

published as a commentary, Hoeksema had much to say about the truth of justification by faith alone. He saw this doctrine as the main theme of the entire epistle, and said so repeatedly. What this doc-

trine expresses is that God imputes the righteousness of Christ to the elect sinner apart from any work of his own. The doctrine also teaches that faith is only the *means* of justification. Faith is not the basis of justification. Sermon nineteen in the series was on Romans 3:27: "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay: but by the law of faith." Hoeksema titled the sermon, "Boasting Excluded." In it, he destroyed the popular heresy that the sinner may, after all, boast of his *faith*. Having declared that we can add nothing by all our own doing to the finished righteousness of God in Jesus Christ, Hoeksema imagined the all-too-real objection: "Yes ... but I must believe." Hoeksema responded:

Well, let us see. Perhaps there is still an element of boasting.... But this is not true. Your faith does not add to your righteousness. You do not become righteous on account of your faith.... Faith is the gift of God. If God gives me faith, if my last word is that I am ungodly, if God lays in my heart the faculty of faith and brings to that heart the gospel, and if then that heart receives righteousness, where is boasting? It is excluded.

Hoeksema went a step further. He insisted that justification is eternal. He affirmed this because he was zealous for the glory of God in His sovereignty. But he affirmed this on exegetical grounds. In sermon seventeen, Hoeksema was struck by the word "manifested" in Romans 3:21, 22: "But now the righteousness of God without the law is *manifested*."

The righteousness of God ... is "manifested." Do not overlook this word. That righteousness is manifested means, in the first place, that this righteousness always was. By "always" I mean that it is eternal. Where? In God's mind, that is to say, in God's counsel. This righteousness was eternally in God's mind. It is essential that we maintain this. There is no change in

God. It is not so, that in God, in God's heart, in God's mind, His people appear as sinners, so that God hates them and damns them, and then that God changes His attitude toward them and justifies them. This is impossible. In God's mind, in His counsel, God's people are righteous from everlasting to everlasting.

Closely related to his affirmation of eternal justification was Hoeksema's rejection of the popular notion that God once hated His people, but now loves them. A variation of this notion maintains that God both loves and hates His people—loves them as chosen in Christ and hates them as sinners. The notion is used as an argument to defend the error that God both hates and loves the reprobate wicked. When one objects to the teaching of God's love for the reprobate wicked on the ground that this contradicts the biblical doctrine of God's hatred toward the reprobate, the response is given that God both hates and loves the reprobate wicked and that this is in harmony with His loving and hating the elect. Hoeksema treated this issue in sermon thirty on Romans 5:10: "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."

God is never our enemy. Hatred and love do not exist in God at the same time and with a view to the same objects. Love and wrath may exist together, but not love and hatred—not with a view to the same objects. This is impossible. Especially is this impossible in the verse. Hence, the statement there does not mean that we were reconciled when *God* was our enemy. Instead, the meaning is that we were reconciled when *we* were the enemies of God. God tells us that He loved His enemies. He loved them to the extent that He died for them. When we were enemies, we creatures rising up in rebellion against the living God, He died for us. This is the Scripture.

The Costly Cross

The sole basis of the justification of the ungodly sinner is the death of Jesus Christ. *Righteous by Faith Alone* contains remarkable explanation of the death of Christ. Hoeksema's exposition of the cross in his comment on Romans 8:31, 32 is among the most moving, and risky, that I have read. The passage reads: "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

That God delivered Him up refers, of course, to the cross. God actually gave that Son up, actually delivered Him up. We must not think of it by imagining that the First Person of the Trinity delivered up the Second Person. No, the triune God delivered up the only begotten Son of the Father in the human flesh. This is of dogmatic interest, but, again, this is not the purpose of the text. The purpose is to reveal something that I tremble to say. The purpose of the text is—I say it with all reverence—to point to the tragedy of God's own suffering when He delivered up His Son to the cross. If the text does not mean this, it means nothing. Don't you see that the text teaches that it cost God something to be for us? . . . How this is I do not know. God gave something. He gave His own son. He spared Him not. Rather than to let His children go to hell, He let His Son go there. In this sense, we can speak of the divine tragedy of the cross.

In sermon eighteen on Romans 3:25, 26, Hoeksema taught that the propitiation of the cross is eternal in God. Calling attention particularly to the statement in verse 25, "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation," he explained:

Since the expression "set forth" means to demonstrate publicly, it also implies that propitiation did not have its origin in time. It did

not have its beginning in the cross. The cross is the setting forth of that propitiation. Propitiation was with God eternally. God's sentiment with relation to His people never changed. Propitiation was eternally with God. This is why we read of the Lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world [Rev. 13:8]. But this propitiation God has publicly shown. God revealed that which caused His wrath to be swallowed up. He sent Christ out of His counsel. He sent Him to the cross. In the cross God demonstrated that there was propitiation eternally with God.

A Glory Greater Than Adam's

Zealous as he was for God's glory in the divine sovereignty, Hoeksema did not hesitate to say that it is the wisdom of God to give the elect church greater bliss through Adam's fall than they could have enjoyed had Adam remained unfallen. He developed this thought in his commentary on Romans 5:15: "But not as the offense, so also is the free gift. For if through the offense of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many."

When we shall have received the fullness that there is in Christ, what will be the result? Shall we have returned to the same place where Adam stood? This would indeed be the result if the gift were like the offense. Then sin brought death, and Christ removed it. God would have done a repair job. This is not the case. The grace of God does not bring

us back where we were. If this were the case, salvation would be a foolish piece of work. God would be the loser. In this case, all the suffering, pain, sorrow, and death of this present time would be for nothing.... On the contrary, the result of the abounding gift is that God brings us to a glory that is as far above the original glory in paradise as Christ is above Adam.... When we shall have reached this glory, we will say, I would rather pass through a thousand death-houses than to miss this glory.

A Trinitarian Theology

One difficult, and even controversial, aspect of Hoeksema's theology that the Romans sermons go far toward clearing up is his teaching that all of God's attributes apply first of all to God Himself. In his *Reformed Dogmatics*, concerning the divine attribute of grace Hoeksema wrote, "He is gracious in Himself, apart from any relation to the creature" (p. 111). He said the same of the mercy of God: "Even of mercy it must be said that it is an attribute of God in the absolute sense of the word. God is rich in mercy, not because of or through any relation to us, but absolutely and in Himself" (p. 115). For applying grace and mercy to the being of God Himself, Hoeksema was severely criticized by James Daane in an article in the *Reformed Journal* shortly after Hoeksema's death.


Hoeksema's commentary on Romans explains this application of such attributes of God as grace and mercy to the being of God in a

trinitarian way. This was indicated already in the *Reformed Dogmatics*. But the Romans commentary spells it out. Commenting on the phrase in Romans 5:15, "the grace of God," Hoeksema asserted that God is gracious "in Himself, apart from any relation to His creature.... Even if there were no people to be the object of that grace, God would still be gracious." Then he explained:

When we say that God is gracious in this sense, the meaning is that God, in His divine essence, is beautiful. God is pleasant. And God knows Himself as a pleasant God. God beholds Himself as pleasant. God is a living God. He sees Himself in all the beauty of His divine grace in His Son. In the Son, who is the express image of His being, God beholds His own beauty. And He loves His beauty as He beholds it in His Son.

This is good doctrine. It expresses the traditional Reformed and Christian conviction that whatever God may be to the creature is rooted in what He is in Himself. It does justice to the fundamental place in all theology of the Trinity. It avoids a divine narcissism, and warns against infatuation with our own beauty, in whatever sense, in our lives. And, in its emphasis on the beauty of God, in connection with the root-meaning of the biblical word "grace," it suggests that we do more with beauty in our theology than is usual, as it accounts for beauty, and our appreciation of beauty, in creation.

—DJE

(to be concluded) 

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

Possible Church Mergers

The *Christian Renewal*, November 26, 2001, reports on several synodical meetings of the smaller

Reformed denominations. These involved discussions concerning possible mergers between the denominations. One of these possible mergers is that of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches (OCRC) with the United Reformed Churches (URC). The URC had in-

vited the smaller OCRC (ten churches) to become part of their denomination. The proposal seemed reasonable, especially because both of these denominations came out of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). One would think that, since both have the same

Rev. VanBaren is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

creeds, both have their traditions from the CRC, both left the CRC because of the liberal tendencies in the CRC (especially women serving in the offices), there would be no reason for them to remain distinct and separate denominations. Still, the OCRC synod expressed some grave reservations about unity under current circumstances. Much of the concerns centered in the issue of the creation week. The OCRC has taken a strong stand in favor of a literal interpretation of Genesis 1-3 and a creation week consisting of regular, 24-hour days. The URC, however, seems to be "straddling the fence" on this issue. The OCRC first issued a vote of "non-confidence in relation to Westminster Theological Seminary in California" on this matter. The *Christian Renewal* report states:

At its synod held in Everson, Washington, November 1 and 2, delegates voted unanimously to remove Westminster (West) from the federation's list of recommended seminaries, a decision that parallels a decision of the synod of the Reformed Church in the United States done in 1999. Both denominations officially hold expressly to a strict interpretation of the creation account as occurring in six, 24 hour days.

The sticking point for the church which proposed the overture and the other nine churches represented at synod is the allowance of what is called the "framework interpretation" of the creation account, a theory that the Genesis 1-2 account was written as a literary framework for teaching certain principles about God, but it was not intended to serve as a literal account of the manner or amount of time God used to create. The interpretation was popularized by now retired Westminster professor Dr. Meredith Kline, and has been embraced by other professors at the seminary.

As justification for the overture written by the Nobleton OCRC in southern Ontario, the grounds state:

1. Professors at Westminster

(West) Theological Seminary hold to the "Framework Hypothesis" interpretation of Genesis, which allows for evolutionary views of creation;

2. To continue recommending Westminster (West) Theological Seminary is not consistent with the decision of Synod in October 1999, where our federation expressed our concern about the "Framework Hypothesis" and other such views, and thus did not join with the URCNA.

Responding to the OCRC synod's decision president of Westminster, Dr. W. Robert Godfrey, expressed his disappointment. "We regret the decision of the OCRC synod because we are very eager as a seminary to be of service to all confessionally Reformed churches." In response to the first ground adopted by the OCRC, Godfrey challenged its validity. "We also regret the continuing misrepresentation of the Framework Interpretation as stated in the first ground of the synod's decision. The Framework Interpretation does not allow evolutionary views of creation. All the faculty members here who hold to the Framework Interpretation also clearly teach that Adam was not the product of an evolutionary process, but was made directly by God from the dust of the earth."

In response to Dr. Godfrey's remarks, Rev. Maurice Luimes, pastor of the Nobleton OCRC, referred to an article written by Dr. Meredith Kline in 1996 ("Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony") in which Kline, in a footnote at the end of the article, states that the framework interpretation allows for an evolutionary view of origins. Writes Kline:

"In this article I have advocated an interpretation of biblical cosmogony according to which *Scripture is open to the current scientific view of a very old universe and, in that respect, does not discountenance the theory of the evolutionary origin of man.* (Emphasis added.) But while I regard the widespread insistence on a young earth to be a deplorable disservice to the cause of biblical truth, I at the same time deem commitment to the authority of scriptural teaching to in-

volve the acceptance of Adam as an historical individual, the covenantal head and ancestral fount of the rest of mankind, and the recognition that it was the one and same divine act that constituted him the first man, Adam the son of God (Luke 3:38), that also imparted to him life (Gen. 2:7)."

According to Luimes, Kline's statement leaves the door wide open, despite Godfrey's comments to the contrary. "On the one hand he (Kline) admits his exegesis does open up Scripture to the idea of the theory of evolution," said Luimes. "Yet he makes a caveat statement that the creation of Adam was a divine act." Luimes said that Kline's statement "does not go far enough to distance himself from (French theologian) Henri Bloche," for example, who is sympathetic to the framework hypothesis and who holds to a pre-Adamic form of man, as well as death before the Fall of man. Luimes said that although none of the Westminster professors may hold to the position Bloche advocates, the framework interpretation by its nature, does allow for such views. "The framework hypothesis allows for an evolutionary view, but it doesn't require it. That's all we're saying in our overture. To say that this is a misrepresentation verges on silliness."

The issue of the creation week also entered into the decision by the OCRC to recognize that "a significant roadblock to a merger was the OCRC's position on six-day creation and the URC's lack of a unified voice and formal position on the issue. The OCRCs requested clarity on the subject."

The *Christian Renewal* report continues:

At the URC synod of 2001 held in Escondido, California delegates addressed the matter. Instead of taking a definitive stand in line with that taken by the OCRCs, the synod responded by affirming what the confessions teach concerning creation, and reiterating its commitment to discipline those who teach contrary to the confes-

sions. Arguably the most significant statement the synod made touching the creation days was the following: "God created all things good in six days defined as evenings and mornings (Genesis 1 and 2 and Exodus 20:11). This means that we reject any evolutionary teaching, including theistic evolution, concerning the origin of the earth and all creatures (L.D. IX)."

This constituted the URC's answer to the OCRCs. The question for delegates to the OCRCs was whether ecumenical relations could advance based on this response.

Nobleton's answer was the one the synod chose. The consistory wrote: "That the statement...made at the URCNA 2001 Synod fails to address the Framework Hypothesis as publicly expressed by certain members of the URCNA." Secondly, it added, "In view of our expressed desire and goal of federative unity the URCNA, and OCR Churches need an explicit statement from the URCNA of affirmation of six consecutive literal days of creation and rejection of the Framework Hypothesis."

To facilitate further discussion of the matter, the OCRC synod did vote to move into "Corresponding Relations," with the URCs, and also with the Reformed Churches in the United States, and with the Free Reformed Churches. It requested the Nobleton consistory to form a committee of Ecumenical Relations to pursue this course with these denominations.

The same issue of the *Christian Renewal* contains interesting views on the URC's entering "Phase Two" of a move towards union of the URC and the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC). "Phase One" represented the actions of the churches in both denominations to get to know each other better. "Phase Two" represents the "engagement" of the denominations, which presumably would be followed by denominational unity. Rev. Christo Heiberg, a pastor in the URC, expresses some of his concerns:

Regarding the issue of whether or not to enter into "Phase Two" of the Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity with the Canadian and American Reformed Churches, I want to argue for a careful "Not Yet."

I know full well that I am a bit late on the scene, after arriving in North America only seven months ago, but since I have one advantage above most of my fellow colleagues in the URCNA, namely of knowing both the churches of the Liberation of 1944 and the URCNA from the "outside" and the "inside," I regard it as my sacred duty to voice some concerns.

The basic problem is about the interpretation and application of John 17. We heard strong pleas at Synod Escondido that we (the URCNA) ought to move forward towards federative unity with the CanRC in order to give concrete expression to our obedience of John 17. Although some would like to argue that such a structural unity isn't really the aim of our Lord's prayer, I would concede that it must at least be an eventual goal between like-minded believers in the same geographical sphere, sharing the same language....

...Any reformed endeavor for unity must always honour at least two simple principles: not to compromise truth and not to sacrifice the edification of God's people in their faith and worship for the sake of such unity. If we violate these principles, then our drive for unity stems from another source than from the Word and the Spirit.

Some would like to argue though, that Phase Two will sort these kinds of problems out. To be honest, I also thought so initially. But then I studied the "Guidelines." Debate and dialogue about possible concerns or differences should have taken place under Phase One already. Phase Two is a steep slope towards "complete unity," as CERCU's mandate puts it. I have talked to many people and have read everything within reach, but certainly no public dialogue of any real significance has got off the ground. I don't foresee that

CERCU would start such a dialogue either, because you simply don't start to bicker with your fiancée once you are engaged. I therefore ask: is this a case of ignorance about possible differences, a fear for addressing them or perhaps hoping that they will never surface? Can we then still claim to be busy with obeying John 17? Where is the openness that should be the hallmark of Christians dealing with one another? Trying to forge structural unity without the necessary basis of spiritual unity will prove to be disastrous. Church history should teach us that....

The writer makes a very interesting point. If these two denominations become "engaged," how will they deal with clear differences in doctrinal positions? Or do individual churches hold to whatever doctrine best suits them?

There are obvious differences between the denominations—or have they already been resolved? There is the question of the literal creation account in Genesis. Is there agreement? Agreement, too, that there is room for a "Framework Hypothesis"? Are they agreed on the issue of "common grace"? The Liberated at one time generally rejected this, while the URC carry on the tradition of the CRC (with possible exceptions within their midst). Then, of course, there is the issue of the covenant. There is, one would think, deep differences within the denominations concerning the proper understanding of this important issue.

It will prove interesting to see how these questions are resolved (or ignored?). One can indeed pray for the unity of John 17—also organic unity—but this ought not be done by compromising one's convictions concerning the truths of God's Word. ☸

Face

The original words for face, both in the Hebrew and in the Greek, show the same derivation: first, to turn towards, to face; then, the part that turns, the face or appearance; then, one's presence; and, finally, one's person itself. The word countenance is closely related to the idea of face, presence, and person.


The face reveals what is in the heart of a man (and of God); it shows the attitude of someone, the stance he has toward another. The face can show *humility*. Abram fell on his face before God when God spoke covenant promises to him (Gen. 17:3), and Joshua fell on his face before the Captain of the Lord's hosts (Josh. 5:14). But Jesus warns us that there is a false disfiguring of the face, a wearing of a sad countenance, that God sees and detests (Matt. 6:16). The face can show *resolution*. When it was time for Jesus to be received up, "He stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:15). God reveals His *anger* and *displeasure* by hiding His face (Ps. 13:1), and by setting His face against a man (Ps. 34:16). Man's face can show *opposition* to God's word, for the prophet Jeremiah was told by God repeatedly not to be "afraid of their faces, for I am with thee" (Jer. 1:8).

Covenant intimacy is described in the expression "face to face." "The Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend" (Ex. 33:11). All the elect are destined to see God face to face, i.e., fully and perfectly revealed in Jesus Christ, for "now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face." Although no man can ever see God Himself, all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily. The Word made flesh reveals the fullness of God's glory. When we see face to face, and know as we are known, the glory of God shall be revealed to us, in us, and through us, so that our faces will shine with heavenly light as did the face of Moses (Ex. 34:30), and of Stephen (Acts 6:15), and of Jesus Christ Himself

(Matt. 17:2). It was because of the joy set before Jesus on the mount of transfiguration that Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, "endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2). Because we are joint heirs of Christ by faith, we "reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

God calls us to seek His face (Ps. 27:8). We understand the face of God to stand for God Himself, as the God of all beauty, the God whose tabernacle is with men, the God whom we desire above everything earthly, the God whose countenance is lifted up upon His people. Because the experience of faith is so rich and so meaningful already now in the land of the living, we wait on the Lord, are of good courage, and say, "Thy face Lord, will I seek." When that seeking people appear before God in his house each Sabbath, the preacher assures them that the countenance of Jehovah is lifted up upon them.

When someone's countenance is fallen, or drawn downward, as Cain's was in regard to God and Abel when God did not have respect to his sacrifice (Gen. 4:5), and as Laban's was in regard to Jacob, whom God made rich with cattle (Gen. 31:50), we are to think of all the lines of the face drawn downward in a frown and with severity. But when the countenance is lifted up, and we speak now of God's countenance, we may think of the lines of His face drawn upward, in a shining smile, with holy delight, showing paternal pleasure, revealing thoughts of blessing and determination to save!

That was the blessing God commanded Aaron to bestow upon true Israel. "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace" (Num 6:24-26). 

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

For Children: The One-Eyed Monster

"Give me the single eye, Thy Name to glorify."

Psalter Number 236

In Greek mythology we learn of a monstrous creature called the Cyclops. At first, there were only three of these hideous giants, but they quickly multiplied. Although the Cyclops were a rude and savage folk, they were nevertheless highly skilled artisans. Some would interpret this to mean that they were evidently able to do some good, and even enjoyed a degree of social redeeming value. For legend has it that the Cyclops learned to hammer and shape metal as intricately as lace. They fashioned lovely jewels of gold, diamonds, rubies, and sapphires. They were good workers and creative craftsmen. In this respect, they resembled the sons of Tubalcain, recorded for us in Genesis 4.

According to the Greeks, the Cyclops worked deep within the earth and forged the powerful thunderbolts which Zeus hurled with such accuracy. But anyone who has heard anything at all about the Cyclops knows that their most distinguishing feature was the one repulsive eye which was set right in the middle of their

foreheads. This ugly but arresting feature set them apart from all the other bizarre imaginations of the Greek mind. Curiously, the many individual single eyes of the Cyclops added up to a singular vision. Collectively, this vision was greed, violence, destruction, evil-speaking, disobedience, uncivilized language, and all manner of sexual impurities. Such was their devastating influence and power.

Nor did these folk improve their mindset or manners over a period of time. They never evolved into more refined, civilized creatures. Edith Hamilton tells us in *Mythology* that "Their fierceness and savage temper did not grow less; they had no laws or courts of justice, but each one did as he pleased. It was not a good country for strangers."

It was not a good country for strangers. That was true. All the narratives of the Cyclops warn us of this. Who then, being thus warned, would risk entering a country inhabited by these lawless creatures who answered to no one? Who then would willingly cross a border to visit an endangered land where, if molested, he could not appeal to a court or judge to mediate? Certainly none of us would! But, all unwittingly, into this dangerous country wandered Ulysses and his men on their way home from their hard-won battles fought in Troy. Heady with victory and believing himself to be invincible,

Ulysses became most vulnerable. In fact, he was as a child before the destructive power of the giant, one-eyed Cyclops.

The Cyclops lured Ulysses and his men into an enormous cave and then rolled a stone to secure the entrance. The Greek myths tell us that an especially mean spirited Cyclops hurled Ulysses' men—who seemed as but children to him—against the side of the cave and "dashed out their brains." Four of Ulysses' men were completely eaten up by the Cyclops.

The brave and extremely clever Ulysses (tiny as a child compared with the Cyclops) determined to reach his own country again and reunite with his dear wife. It didn't take him long to figure out that he was truly a stranger, and even a pilgrim in this hostile land, but now he was trapped. While the Cyclops lay napping, having just dined on Ulysses' men, Ulysses crudely sharpened a long pole, which he then held in a searing hot fire. With a mighty thrust he stabbed the red-hot poker into the enormous eye of the Cyclops. In a triumphant voice he yelled, "Hear, Cyclops! If any man ask who blinded thee, say that it was the warrior Ulysses."

How the crafty Ulysses and his remaining men escaped from the cave by hanging to the underside of the sheep which the Cyclops let out of the cave to graze on the

Mrs. Lubbers is a wife and mother in the Protestant Reformed Church of South Holland, Illinois.

mountainside...well, that's the stuff myths are made of. In great vexation, and pain, too, I might add, the Cyclops called out to Ulysses, who was escaping now in his ship: "I looked for a great man and a strong, who should subdue me by force, and now a weakling has done the deed."

A weakling—one with mere childlike strength—had put out the eye of the Cyclops.




The Cyclops are myth. Their story begins with the familiar, "Once upon a time." Such an in-

troduction usually signals a fairy tale. Most of us have never seen a monster-like Cyclops...or have we? Perhaps a short review about the Cyclops will help us answer this question.

- ◆ There were only a few at first.
- ◆ They were craftsmen of the first order; we might say they were excellent choreographers and imagers.
- ◆ They were gifted, but profane men.
- ◆ Their message was focused and violent.
- ◆ Their power was devastating.

- ◆ Each did as he pleased.
- ◆ Pretending to befriend their enemies, they dashed out their brains instead.
- ◆ To enter their domain was to invite death.
- ◆ They were instantly recognizable by their one great eye in the center of the room—I mean, forehead.
- ◆ Since so many of us adults seem not to have mortally wounded these hideous creatures, perhaps it will take a thoughtful child to put out the horrible eye of the Cyclops.

Boys and girls, have you ever seen the one-eyed Cyclops? 

The Types of Scripture (5)

In our previous article we were dwelling upon the *function* of the shadows of the old covenant. We asserted, among other things, that the shadows exhibited to the believers of the old dispensation the fundamental truths of the economy of redemption. We pointed out that, for this reason, the sum total of the shadows was the schoolmaster bringing the believers of that epoch to Christ. The law led the disquieted soul to Christ because, so we explained, the gifts and sacrifices could not make him that did the service perfect as pertain-

ing to the conscience. The believer, bowed down by the weight of his sin, would turn to the sacrifice for relief but found none. Having scrupulously attended to the prescriptions of the law, the troubled one would discover that he was as ill at ease as ever. In his sorrow and anguish he would then cast himself upon the mercy of Jehovah. The peace which he would experience, thereupon, indicated that his sin had been pardoned. He had learned that the blood of a beast cannot atone for sin, that faith in an animal brings no relief to a troubled soul.

Yet, the rite of expiatory sacrifice taught him that sin somehow must be atoned for. The shadows impressed upon his soul that the mercy with which Jehovah feeds him is permeated with justice. In a word, the believer of the old cov-

enant was taught and empowered to lay hold on what constitutes the very heart and core of the economy of redemption, viz., Jehovah and blood. Having passed through the course of training insisted upon by Jehovah, the believer learned that Jehovah saves in conjunction with blood. His troubled soul, together with his knowledge of the fact that sin must be atoned for, were responsible for it that devout sinners entrusted themselves to Jehovah to be fed by His mercy. We ended our last article, then, with the assertion that Christ is God and blood, the latter representing the Savior's human nature, in which He atoned for the sin of His own.

Old Testament believers' comprehension of the types

The shadows, then, were, first of all, exhibitions of such truths

George Ophoff was Professor of Old Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Seminary in its early days. Reprinted here, in edited form, are articles which Ophoff wrote at that time for the Standard Bearer.

which the believer needed to know to be saved. They were more than that. We pointed out that the shadows, according to the testimony of Scripture, were also prefigurations or prophetic symbols of objects and events of a coming day. The question is now in order whether the believers of the old covenant were able to lay hold of the matters prefigured. Did the shadows speak to them of better things to come? That is to say, did the believer recognize the shadows as prefigurations of future events and objects, or did he merely possess them as symbols of the fundamental principles of redemption? Fairbairn insists that it must not be supposed that the shadows spoke to the believer of the old covenant of things belonging to a higher and more spiritual dispensation yet to come. We quote the following:

It was comparatively an easy thing for the Jewish worshiper to understand how, from time to time, he stood related to a visible sanctuary and an earthly inheritance, or to go through the process of an appointed purification by means of water and the blood of slain victims applied externally to the body — much more easy than for the Christian to apprehend distinctly his relation to a heavenly sanctuary, and realize the cleansing of his conscience from all guilt by the inward application of the sacrifice of Christ and the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit. But for the Jewish worshiper to do both his own and the Christian part — both to read the meaning of the symbol as expressive of what was already laid open to his view, and to descry its concealed reference to the yet undiscovered realities of a better dispensation — would have required a reach of discernment and a strength of faith far beyond what is now needed in the Christian. For this had been, not like him to discern the heavenly, when the heavenly had come, but to do it amid the obscurities and imperfections of the earthly; not simply to look with open eye into the deeper

mysteries of God's kingdom when these mysteries are fully disclosed, but to do so while they were still buried amid the thick folds of a cumbrous and overshadowing drapery (*The Typology of Scripture*, vol. 1, p. 58).

We also quote the following:

Such defects and imperfections inhering in the very nature of ancient sacrifice, it could not possibly have been introduced or sanctioned by God as a satisfactory and ultimate arrangement. Nor could He have adopted it as a temporary one, so far as to warrant the Israelitish worshiper to look for pardon and acceptance by complying with its enactments, unless there had already been provided His eternal counsels, to be in due time manifested in the world, a real and adequate sacrifice for human guilt. Such a sacrifice, we need scarcely add, is found in Christ; who is therefore called emphatically "the Lamb of God" ... "foreordained before the foundation of the world" — and, of whose precious blood it is written, that "it cleanseth from all sin."

How far, however, the Jewish worshippers themselves were alive to the necessity of this alone adequate provision and realized the certainty of its future exhibition, can only be a matter of probable conjecture or reasonable inference. As the light of the church, generally, differed at different times and in different individuals, so undoubtedly would the apprehension of this portion of divine truth have its diversities of comparative clearness and obscurity in the Jewish mind. If there were faith only to the extent of embracing and acting upon the existing arrangements — faith to present the appointed sacrifices for sin, and to believe in humble confidence, that imperfect and defective as these manifestly were, they would still be accepted as an atonement, and that God Himself would know how to supply what His own provision needed to complete its efficacy — if only such faith existed, we have no reason to say it was insufficient for salvation; it might

be faith very much in the dark, but still it was faith in a revealed word of God, implicitly following the path which that word prescribed (*The Typology of Scripture*, vol. 2, p. 268).

In the first of the above selections the author asserts, be it indirectly, that God adopted the ancient sacrifice as a temporary arrangement to warrant the Israelitish worshiper to look for pardon and acceptance by complying with its enactments. Further, that this ancient sacrifice was sufficient for salvation if the one presenting it possessed faith to the extent of embracing the existing arrangement. In other words, the view that comes to the surface in the above selection is that faith in the ancient sacrifice was the extent of the requirements. In the first of the above quotations it is maintained that the worshiper could not be expected to read the concealed reference of the shadows to yet undiscovered realities of a future dispensation. In other words, it is the view of the author that the ancient worshiper need not look beyond the lamb to secure pardon and acceptance. Further, that the shadows did not necessarily direct him to objects and realities which were due to appear in the fullness of time.

These views go well together. If it be true that the worshiper could do no more than embrace the existing arrangement, it must follow that he failed to discern in them any reference whatever to realities of a future epoch. If, on the other hand, the ancient believer was taught and empowered to look beyond the sacrificial victim to Jehovah, it would follow that the shadows did speak to him of matters of a coming day.

Now, it is according to the testimony of Scripture that the believer found no relief until he, looking away from the lamb, had cast himself upon the mercy of his God (see former article [#4]). The gifts

and sacrifices could not make him performing the service perfect as pertaining to the conscience. Jehovah could not permit the worshiper to rest in the sacrificial victim. The ancient sacrifice brought him no peace. The blood of an animal could not atone for sin. Neither did Jehovah inaugurate this rite for that purpose. What was His purpose? A twofold one: first, the rite of expiatory sacrifice was instituted for the purpose of demonstrating to the believer of the old covenant that there can be no forgiveness of sin without the shedding of blood, or, speaking in general, the shadows were made to appear for the purpose of exhibiting to the believers the great truths of redemption. In the second place, the shadows were made to appear for the purpose of exhibiting to the believers matters of a future day.

*Jehovah
could not permit
the worshiper
to rest
in the sacrificial
victim.*

Necessity of the Word

It is on the latter of these two purposes that we desire to focus our attention. How and why did Jehovah accomplish this purpose with this particular rite? The answer is ready: by bringing the believer under the conviction of sin and by refusing to grant him relief until the worshiper had learned to expect nothing from the ancient sacrifice and absolutely all from Jehovah (see former article [#4]). But this alone was not sufficient to cause the believer to turn again to this particular rite and to the shadows in general and to discern in them a reference to future and higher objects. Something more was needed to accomplish this, namely the word. It is a fact that a symbol, or a rite, without the word, will never function as a vehicle of instruction. The poet informs us that the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth His handiwork; that day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto

night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard (Ps. 19). However, if it were not for the word, that is to say, if it were not for the fact that God calls our attention to these things and teaches man that day unto day uttereth speech, man would never hear the declaration of the heavens. The symbol and the type need the word. Two elements of nature, bread and wine, signify the flesh and blood of our Lord. We know they do because our Savior told us so. "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:26-28).

Now, the question is in order whether the shadows of the old covenant were accompanied by the word explaining their function. Fact is, that this word was there. Let us quote Scripture. "For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul" (Lev. 17:11). If this particular Scripture is interpreted to mean that the blood of the ancient sacrifice atoned for sin, it is in flagrant contradiction with a certain passage in the epistle to the Hebrews (chapter 9:9), which asserts that the sacrifices could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience. One must never, however, place Scripture in conflict with itself. Hence, either of the two passages shall have to be interpreted in the light of the other. Fairbairn would remove the apparent conflict by making the passage in Hebrews apply only to the believer of the new covenant.

Thus it is said by Paul, "that by Christ all who believe are justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:39). And still more strongly and expressly in Hebrews, it is declared that the gifts and sacrifices of the law "could not make him that did the service perfect as pertaining to the conscience" (9:9); that it was "not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats could take away sins" (10:4); and that such blood, as the ashes also of the heifer sprinkling the unclean, could but avail to the purifying of the flesh, while the blood of Christ and this alone can purge the conscience from dead works to serve the living God (9:13, 14). If such passages were to be taken absolutely, they would certainly deny any spiritual benefit whatever to the Old Testament worshiper from his legal sacrifices.... But in all the passages the apostle is speaking of what, in the proper sense, and in the estimation of God, or of a soul fully enlightened by His truth, can afford a real and valid satisfaction for the guilt of sin, and not what might or might not provide for it a present and accepted though inadequate atonement (*The Typology of Scripture*, vol. 2, p. 290).

Fairbairn, it appears, deprives the New Testament Scriptures of their absolute character. His view compels him to do that. The author avers that the blood of the ancient sacrificial victim was accepted by Jehovah as a covering for the sin of the worshiper. It is his view that the blood of the animal, to a degree at least, cleansed the conscience. This view of his again comes to the surface in the following selections.

And the sprinkling of the blood of the atonement, whether upon the horns of the altar (as in the private sin offerings), or on the mercyseat (as in the day of atonement), could not have properly met his case, if it had not furnished him with a present deliverance from any burden of guilt under which he groaned. ...to a certain extent, at least, conscience


had been aggrieved by what was done, and must have been purged by the atonement presented (*The Typology of Scripture*, vol. 2, pp. 290, 291).

Fairbairn, let it be said, is controverting the view of the higher critics who maintain that the offering covered such acts which violated the code of external jurisprudence. This view places God on a level with an earthly judge. When a subject is found guilty by the state, he is made to serve time or pay a fine. This having been accomplished, the offender is set free. Whether the culprit repented is a matter with which the state does not concern itself. Spenser reduced the rite of expiatory sacrifice to the

level of a fine paid or a sentence served. The culprit, having attended to the prescription of the law, was permitted to resume his place in life.

Such a view of the shadows must be denounced. I think we do well to permit God Himself to instruct us as to the nature and character of the rite of expiatory sacrifice. He says that the shadows were symbols, images, *parabolee* (Heb. 9:9). The passage in Leviticus must be explained in the light of this piece of information. The blood of the sacrificial animal was but an image, a symbol. It could not cover sin nor cleanse the conscience. God Himself compels

the student of Scripture to insert in the passage from the book of Leviticus the term symbol. "For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an (symbolical) atonement for your souls." And I repeat, Jehovah prevented the believer from taking the blood as a covering for his soul, in that he refused to grant the worshiper peace until he had learned to expect all from Jehovah.

Leviticus 17:11 is one of the words explaining to the devout believers of the old covenant the purpose and function of the shadows. There are more such words. We shall single them out in our next article. 

Marking the Bulwarks of Zion

Prof. Herman Hanko

Desiderius Erasmus and Humanism (2)

Introduction

Desiderius Erasmus played an important part in the history of the Reformation of the sixteenth century, particularly the Lutheran Reformation. This was not because Erasmus was himself a reformer who cooperated with the reformers in the important work God had given them to do. He was a Humanist, basically an enemy of the gospel. He was a member of the Roman Catholic Church, born and raised within it, a member of it all

his life, and one who was in full agreement with its doctrine.

It is true that Erasmus had a great deal of criticism of the church of which he was a member, and he could give words to his criticism in ways which brought shame to guilty clergy and laughter to the common people. But, though his criticism was sharp and biting, it was never aimed at the church's doctrines. Though he was a critic of the church, he was a loyal member of it and refused to part ways with it. He came to hate the Reformation and everything for which it stood. Yet, God used him in a remarkable way. He served to bring the Lutheran Reformation to a critical crossroads and he forced Luther himself to make his choice

between the differing roads, a choice which would determine the character of the Reformation on the most crucial article of the Christian faith: Is salvation the work of sovereign and efficacious grace? Or does it depend in part on man's free will?

Luther chose the former road, and the Reformation was, by God's grace, a genuine return to the Word of God.

It is my desire to convey to our readers something of the drama of this too-often-forgotten event in the Reformation.

The Influence of Erasmus in Europe

In my first article I spoke of the high reputation in which Erasmus was held throughout most of Eu-

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

rope. He was, beyond doubt, the most highly educated man in Europe; he was Europe's greatest scholar, bar none; his gifts for writing in elegant and effective Latin surpassed the gifts of any other man who took pen to paper. He was the counselor and advisor of Europe's mighty in church and state. The professors and teachers in the universities listened to his words and read his works with awe. He was urbane, witty, serious, forceful, erudite — in short, a true Renaissance man. He was showered with honors and money until he became wealthy. Let me quote Schaff.

The humanists were loudest in his praise, and almost worshiped him. Eoban Hesse, the prince of Latin poets of the time, called him a "divine being," and made a pilgrimage on foot from Erfurt to Holland to see him face to face.... Zwingli visited him in Basel, and before going to sleep used to read some pages of his writing. To receive a letter from him was a good fortune, and to have a personal interview with him was an event.

We might mention here a couple of his more popular books. Perhaps the best known is *The Praise of Folly*, in which he took dead aim at the terrible evils in monasticism, ruthlessly exposed these evils, and criticized the institution for fostering them. He was particularly opposed to the follies of monks and friars and mocked them with biting sarcasm. With this book he made the world laugh.

A more sober and constructive book was his *Handbook of a Christian Soldier*, in which he laid out the pattern for the life of one who wanted to live faithful to Christ.

Erasmus edited and published many of the church fathers, but, tellingly, did not like Augustine. Augustine was too sharp a defender of God's sovereign and free grace.

Perhaps his greatest accomplishment was the first publication

of a critical edition of the Greek New Testament. He gave scholars the New Testament in its original language, instead of the Vulgate, a Latin translation by Jerome. He hurried to get this published because he wanted to get his edition on the market before the Spanish cardinal Ximenes, who was also known to be working on such an edition. God uses the work of wicked men for His purpose as well as the labors of the faithful. With the Greek New Testament in their hands, the Reformers could work with the original and prepare accurate translations for God's people. They could work with the original languages in their preaching, teaching, and writing. It was a great gift to the church. It came one year before Luther's reformatory work began: 1516.

In all his writings, he opposed formalism, traditionalism, and the moral evils of the church, which in his judgment obscured the teaching of Christ.

We ought to be aware of the tremendous influence Erasmus had on Europe, because it plays a major role in the drama that unfolded.

Erasmus' Early Sympathy for the Reformation and Later Hesitation

Erasmus wanted reformation in the church. There can be no question about that. He was dismayed at the many evils prevalent in the church.

When Erasmus saw that Luther was bent on bringing reformation to the church, Erasmus was delighted. His correspondence with Luther began early, and he was very sympathetic with Luther's aims. On his part, Luther wanted Erasmus to join with him in his quest for reformation in the church. At least in the early days of Luther's work, Luther was prepared to do almost anything to persuade Erasmus to join him.

It would, of course, have meant a great deal if Erasmus had taken a stand with Luther. Erasmus, with his enormous prestige, could have

brought many of Europe's universities and scholars to the side of the Reformation, and he could have made the Reformation a credible and powerful force in the social, political, and ecclesiastical life of Europe. The pressure on the church to reform itself would have been far, far greater than any pressure exerted by an obscure monk in the dirty little town of Wittenberg. Paris, Cologne, London, Cambridge, Rotterdam — who knows what great forces would be unleashed to bring reformation to Europe, if only Erasmus would join the movement. One can see today's insipid ecclesiastics piously talking about all the good they are able to do when selling their birthright for a mess of ecumenical potage.

Yet, it did not happen. When Luther expressed admiration for Erasmus' work and urged Erasmus to join the Reformation, Erasmus equivocated and finally demurred. He decided not to go that way. He was sympathetic to Luther's work, but only to a point. When Frederick the Wise asked Erasmus for his opinion of Luther, Erasmus acted as if he hadn't heard the question. But when Frederick pressed him, he paused thoughtfully and could finally come up with nothing better than, "Luther has committed two sins — he has touched the pope on the crown and the monks on the belly."

There were reasons for this reluctance on the part of Erasmus.

Erasmus saw the need for reformation, but he insisted that it had to take place *within the church*, not by separation from it. He was like so many today who remain within a corrupt and apostate church, always hoping for change, and, meanwhile, becoming weakened by the downward slide of the church they hope to save.

Erasmus basically took an entirely different view of reform than Luther. Erasmus was in full agreement with the church's doctrine; he wanted reformation of morals only.

Granted that moral reformation was necessary, such reformation had been attempted for over 200 years by others, more concerned even than Erasmus, and all without success. Moral decay arises out of doctrinal error, and moral reformation is born from doctrinal renewal. It does not work to try to bring about reformation in a church by calling attention to errors of the church in practical matters of life without insisting on a return to the truth of Scripture.

But Erasmus was totally offended by Luther's sharp, angry, condemnatory language and his insistence on telling things as they were. Anyone who has read even a smattering of Luther knows the Luther of violent language and sharp invective. Erasmus was the scholar. Witty, polished, polite, learned — he had no time for Luther's crudities. He thought them irresponsible, uncultured, unscholarly, unkind. Someone once asked Erasmus whether he had not laid the egg that Luther hatched. His reply was that perhaps this was true, but he had expected a different kind of a bird.

I am on Luther's side on this question. It not only took such language as Luther spoke to shake the citadel of Rome to its foundation, but it was, though brutal and forthright, honest in every respect. Luther described things as they were. This wakes up sleepy and sleeping people of God and demonstrates the seriousness of church struggles. It takes the controversy out of the ivory tower of scholarly research and dignified disagreement and puts

the struggle on the battlefield where, in fact, it belongs. The

church does not need learned scholars (although Luther was such) and nice people who discuss with mutual respect for each other various differing viewpoints in quiet and hushed voices — such are to the detriment of the church and the truth of God, for they deal with God's truth itself as if it is nothing but an interesting theological question. The church, in times of apostasy, needs trumpet blasts, sharp unambiguous language, men willing to "say it as it is," fearless men who love God and His Word above all else.

This was the trouble with Erasmus. To stand with Luther would have ended his high standing in Europe's scholarly circles, in king's courts, in papal palaces. He could not bear the thought of this. It was, at last, a matter of pride, of wanting to be recognized, of coveting the respect of one's peers, of fear of the condemnation of others and of suffering for Christ's sake. Erasmus recognized this latter: he bluntly said that he was not made of the stuff of martyrs. But it takes those willing to suffer for Christ's sake and to stand alone bearing the reproach of Christ to do the work of God.

The nature of the Reformation made it necessary for Europe to choose one side or the other. Erasmus was caught in this, but did not want to take sides on issues not defined by him or in controversies not controlled by him. This is Schaff's evaluation. This is true.

Erasmus' pride! That was finally the thing. And strangely enough, that pride became a matter of theology. I think Luther knew it. He

forced Erasmus to spell out his position on one of the most impor-

tant theological questions of the Reformation: the question of the free will of man. That, finally, brought the break.

Luther wrote Oecolampadius, the Reformer of Basel:

[Erasmus] has done what he was ordained to do: he has introduced the ancient languages ... (A reference to Erasmus' critical edition of the Greek NT). He will probably die like Moses in the land of Moab.... To reveal the good and to lead into the land of promise, is not his business.

The Great Issue

It seems to me that Luther himself forced the issue. He was suspicious of Erasmus from the beginning. As early as 1516, prior to the beginning of the Reformation proper, Luther expressed his fear that Erasmus understood far too little of the grace of God. Luther was concerned that Erasmus was interested more in a demonstration of Romish error than biblical truth, and, as a consequence, had a greater love for peace than for the cross.

With Erasmus' equivocation, Luther grew more impatient. Under prodding from Luther and others, Erasmus made up his mind, broke openly with Luther, and declared all out war against the Reformation. But the issue, strikingly and providentially, was the issue of grace. Erasmus made his public announcement of war against Luther in a book in which he attacked the doctrine of total depravity. The book was *The Freedom of the Will*. In it Erasmus spelled out in detail his views: Total depravity destroyed moral responsibility. To teach such a doctrine made useless the commandments of God, repentance from sin, and reward in heaven. It was a fiery attack against Augustine and against what Erasmus knew was the heart and soul of Luther's position. Man, said Erasmus, has a free will. That enables him to choose for or against God. That makes him morally responsible for his deeds, enables

The church does not need learned scholars and nice people who discuss with mutual respect for each other various differing viewpoints in quiet and hushed voices — such are to the detriment of the church and the truth of God, for they deal with God's truth itself as if it is nothing but an interesting theological question.

him to repent of his sins, and earns for him a reward for his merit.

It is not surprising that Erasmus took this position, if one thinks about it.

He was, first of all, deeply committed to pagan thought and was sure that pagan philosophers spoke truth. How did they do this if they were unregenerated? The possibility lay in their ability to do good, find truth, express it eloquently, and teach it to others. Such possibility of good for these pagans was the grace of God towards them. That grace resulted in something less than total depravity. Luther would make Erasmus give up his darling pagans, a price far too high to pay.

Erasmus was also a proud man. He showed that when he allowed Europe to worship him. He clung to his pride when to go with Luther would mean the loss of the respect of the whole world of scholarship. To join the Reformation would be to take up a cross. Erasmus did not want a cross, he wanted an earthly crown. But his pride led him to exalt his own spiritual powers. Every effort on the part of man to salvage some tattered remains of his own goodness so that he may make his own contribution to salvation and earn merit with God is pride. Pride led Erasmus away from the dark horror of Calvary to bask in the sunshine of the favor and praise of Europe's scholars.

But, finally, Erasmus was from the start, and would always remain, a son of the church. Rome had, centuries earlier, and in the interest of maintaining that precious doctrine of human merit, condemned Augustinianism, killed Gotteschalk, its leading defender, and committed itself to the hellish error of Semi-Pelagianism. Erasmus was content with, and, indeed, believed this gross God-denying heresy.

I am thankful that the issue, under God's providential direction, was this very one of man's free will. There is no defender of free will today (and these defenders number in the millions) who can maintain

his haughty and man-exalting doctrine and claim to be a son or daughter of the Reformation — whether in Calvinistic circles or in the Lutheran tradition.

And, when all is said and done, this is always the issue in the church of Christ. Is salvation from God alone? Is salvation, therefore, without human aid, assistance, or cooperation? Is it by sovereign and particular grace? Or does the Almighty God wait on puny man and remain dependent on Him to save? God or man? Erasmus was for man. Luther stood for God.

Luther waited a year before he answered. This was not because there was any doubt in Luther's own mind. The issues were defined, and Luther had assumed his position much earlier when he found peace with God in the doctrine of justification by faith alone. The issues, however, were so crucial that Luther prepared his answer with care.

Think of the matter from Luther's side. It was, apparently, only a minor point of doctrine. Conceding depravity, Erasmus wanted a bit of good in man. Conceding justification by faith, Erasmus demurred at the word "alone." If Luther had been willing to make that minor concession, Europe would have fallen at his feet. The doors of the universities would have swung open. The numbers following him would have multiplied by the millions. He could have laid aside the cross of persecution and taken on a cardinal's hat. He could have been a force in the church for the moral reform so desperately needed. The bull of excommunication would never have been written. The lonely stand at Worms would never have been necessary. Isolation in the castle at Wartburg to save his life

would have been folly. The pope himself would have placed a crown on his head.


But there was this matter of the glory of God and the truth of His Word. From that, Luther would

not and could not budge. And so he wrote his *Bondage of the Will*, that magnificent and powerful defense of all the doctrines of grace, as strong as or stronger than anything Augustine wrote or Calvin would later write. It was a bold and challenging defense of God's honor and salvation by grace alone. It is the one book which Luther himself said was the most important book he had written. It remains the one book that anyone

who loves the Reformation must read.

It gave direction, right direction, to the entire Reformation. The consequences were the alienation of most of Europe's *intelligentsia*. It meant for Luther a denying of himself and a taking up of the cross of Christ. But through it, Luther was Christ's disciple, and by it he pointed the way, for all those who followed him, of true faithfulness to our Lord.

Erasmus was finally forsaken by friend and foe. That happens sometimes to men who try to sit on the fence. It happened to him. The criticism came from all sides: Pelagians faulted him for his equivocation and sympathy for reform; and the faithful, for whom the gospel of sovereign grace had been opened, despised him for his willingness to sell his soul for a mess of human praise.

It was the parting of the ways between Humanism and Godliness, between the Renaissance and the Reformation, between common and general grace and sovereign and particular grace. It remains the parting of the ways today. 

There is no defender of free will today (and these defenders number in the millions) who can maintain his haughty and man-exalting doctrine and claim to be a son or daughter of the Reformation



For the Cause of Missions

Years ago, prior to my coming to the Protestant Reformed Churches, I heard the charge — later found to be slanderous — that the Protestant Reformed Churches do not do missions. That was related to the other slanderous allegation of “Hyper-Calvinism” often heard leveled at the PRC. Those allegations were of serious concern to me. I investigated them thoroughly before I became a member of the PRC. I found them false, astoundingly false, gross misrepresentations of faithful churches of Jesus Christ.

Of the thirty ministers that currently serve in the active ministry of the PRC — not counting the seminary professors who are also ministers of the Word and sacraments — twelve of them either have served or are currently serving in mission fields of the PRC. That is an amazing forty percent. I doubt there are many denominations that even come close to that.

Though we do not claim expertise in missions, and certainly have no reason for human pride, our denomination has received manifold blessings from our faithful God in our mission work. We have sister churches in two nations, Singapore and Northern Ireland, that are fruits of our mission work, besides numerous congregations in our denomination that find their roots in our domestic mission work.

These blessings can be directly connected to the faithful and promiscuous preaching of the gospel of sovereign and particular grace which defines our mission work. For that preaching is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Rom. 1:16).

In the years since joining the PRC, and particularly in the years of my ministry in these churches, I have had opportunity to serve on both the Domestic Mission Committee and the Foreign Mission Committee (FMC), and serve presently on the FMC and as pastor of the congregation in Hull, Iowa, the council of which has oversight of the mission field in Ghana, West Africa.

All these things have given me to see that as churches we owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to God for the privilege and the blessing He has given us in the work of missions.

Having said these things, however, I would also point out that from a couple perspectives we have urgent needs with respect to the work of missions. I speak of more than the obvious necessity of keeping this work in our prayers, important as that is.

Synod 2001 took a bold step in the area of foreign missions.

Seeing that the blessings of God are manifestly evident in the labors in Ghana, and that the labors there have become too much for one missionary, synod approved the recommendations of

Hull’s council and the FMC to proceed to the calling of a second missionary for that field.

Not knowing how long it would take before God, in His inscrutable wisdom, would provide a second missionary for the field, Hull began the calling process. With the first call, the Lord laid it upon the heart of Rev. Wayne Bekkering to accept the call and to move with his wife and a daughter to that foreign country, and to take up the labors as missionary. He now serves with Rev. Richard Moore and his wife, Jan.

In addition, the FMC for several years, and at synod’s direction, had done investigatory work in the Philippines, to see whether the Lord had given us an open door there for foreign mission work. After several years of sending delegations and establishing contacts in that country, the FMC came to synod with the recommendation that the time was ripe to call a missionary to work in that foreign field.

Although there was much discussion at synod concerning this recommendation, and legitimate concerns were expressed about the financial obligation involved, as well as the current shortage of ministers in the churches, synod decided to approve the recommendation that the Doon, Iowa PRC serve as the calling church and begin the process of calling a missionary, to see whether God in His good pleasure would have us send a man to labor in that country.

Little did the FMC or Doon's council expect that before the end of the year 2001, God would give the churches two new foreign missionaries, one for Ghana and one for the Philippines. After having visited the Philippines as member of a delegation from the FMC, Rev. Audred Spriensma of Grandville, Michigan, announced on December 9, 2001 that he had accepted Doon's call to serve as missionary in Manila, Philippines.

We view God's provision of missionaries for these fields as His blessing. After all, He has given us the calling to preach the gospel to all creatures. We view this work as our duty, as well as our sacred privilege.

But this work also has costs.

The cost of this work is not only monetary. It is a cost of manpower. That is very evident in this time when the churches have a shortage of ministers.

In recent years the PRC have not had to endure a shortage of ministers. We have gone for several years now with few vacancies in the churches. But that has changed, largely because of the increase of mission work conducted by our churches. And while one can argue that it is healthy for the churches to have a small number of vacancies, to allow movement among the ministers, there is no denying the fact that the churches are now experiencing a large number of vacancies.

One has to go back thirty years and more to see anything like the number of empty pulpits we presently have in the churches, with five congregations in the process of calling ministers. With several ministers, including Rev. Moore, reaching the end of their active labors in the near future, and only two men graduating from seminary this year, the Lord willing, the shortage that we face presently is going to continue, and even increase.

Even though we have a shortage of pastors, we may not neglect the call Christ gave us to preach

the gospel to all creatures. But there is certainly a need for urgent prayer throughout the churches, that God raise up men to labor in these fields that are white for harvest — both at home and abroad. Parents, as well as ministers and elders, must also encourage young men in whom are seen essential gifts necessary for the ministry, that they consider seriously whether or not God would have them study and prepare for that high calling.

More directly connected with the work of missions, there is also a need for missionary assistants in Ghana. From the beginning of the work, it was seen as necessary to have helpers on the field for our missionary. To this time the Lord has given us those helpers — first in John and Judy Bouma, and presently in Arnold and Charlotte Bleyenbergh. The FMC and Hull's council are extremely grateful for the willingness of these two couples to take a year out of their lives and to serve on the mission field as volunteers.

But the one-year term of service by the Bleyenberghs comes to an end in early April. The FMC continues to seek a replacement for this couple.

This service is without monetary reward. Only expenses are covered by the gifts of God's people in the churches. But this work has proven necessary.

It is especially necessary that we have a *man* who can serve for six months to a year in this capacity. It is beneficial, of course, that a couple serve. That provides not only the labor of a man's assistance to our missionaries, but the companionship also of a woman for the wives of our missionaries. It is even possible for a family to serve, given the right circumstances. But the work of the missionary assistant is such that it relieves the missionaries of much work that otherwise would detract from their essential labors of preaching and teaching.

We ask that men or couples in

the Protestant Reformed Churches who might be able and willing to do this work contact the Secretary of the Foreign Mission Committee, Rev. Richard Smit, P.O. Box 163, Doon, Iowa 51235.

We are thankful to the people of God for their financial support for our missionary assistants. We continue to encourage gifts to be given for that cause. Although initially the plans of the FMC were also to seek missionary assistants for the Philippines, the report of our recent delegation and the advice of those with whom we labor in the Philippines is that such assistants are not needed there. At this time, therefore, the FMC seeks missionary assistants only for Ghana. The situation in the Philippines will be re-evaluated at a later date, after our missionary has moved and settled into the work there, God willing.

But the cost of the work of missions is also monetary. That is true of both our foreign and domestic mission work. Synod 2001 expressed concern about this matter. It is a pressing concern. After approving the labors of the FMC, including the calling of two new missionaries, synod took a decision encouraging liberal gifts to the collections taken for the cause of foreign missions, in order to offset the costs to the synodical budget for our foreign mission work.

This decision was not meant to be buried on page 43 of the *Acts of Synod*. It was meant to be publicized.

The synodical assessments of the Protestant Reformed Churches, which is the amount of money budgeted to cover the expenses of all the labors of the churches in common, took a significant increase for the year 2002. This includes the cost of our mission work, seminary, care of emeriti ministers, provision for needy churches, student aid, contact with other churches, and the expenses of the broader assemblies. This budget for 2002

amounts to \$845 for every family in the PRC.

Bear in mind that this synodical assessment is in addition to the budgets of every local congregation, which adds another \$1,400 - \$2,000 or more to the obligation of every family, just in order to fulfill the needs of the general fund, and in some cases building fund, of each church. Added to that, of course, are the worthy causes for which offerings are taken in all the churches, important causes for the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, causes which also require our hearty support.

And this does not take into account the cost of grade school and high school tuition, which for some of our larger families in Hull now amounts to more than \$20,000 a year! Nor does this take into account the needs of our Protestant Reformed Christian schools, which in many cases are pressing needs.

While it is true that we live in a prosperous society, we must not forget that most of the members of our churches are common laborers, men of the working class, those who have to struggle at times, especially to provide a covenant education for their children.


Synod, sensitive to the needs of our working families, looked at an outlay of nearly \$328,000 for foreign missions in 2002, and another nearly \$300,000 for domestic missions, and expressed concern about how much the average family can handle, without other urgent causes being affected for ill from a financial point of view, including the labors of our local congregations and the precious cause of Protestant Reformed Christian education.

For this reason we urge liberal gifts on the part of those to whom God has given much. We urge liberal gifts for the cause of missions,

both foreign and domestic. Although the same can be said for any other worthy kingdom cause, let us remember, when the offering plate is passed for the cause of missions, the words of II Corinthians 9:7, "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver."

Those who are so inclined can also send gifts designated for either foreign or domestic missions, or any other synodical cause, to the synodical treasurer, Mr. Joel Zandstra, 4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418.

The financial needs throughout the Protestant Reformed churches and schools are many. These are worthy causes. God has blessed us richly. God has also called us to many labors.

But this article is for the cause of missions. 

Contending for the Faith

Rev. Bernard Woudenberg

The Inability of the Law to Save

For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.

Hebrews 7:19

Israel had arrived at Sinai with the firm conviction that they were by reason of their birth-right a people superior to all others and worthy of the special favor and approval of God, and, if given the opportunity, they would be able to demonstrate this excellency to everyone. It was fully within

their ability, they believed, to live as the distinctive people of God. And so it was that, when it was announced to them upon their arrival at Sinai that God was about to give them a definitive statement of how life as God's own people should be lived, they quickly responded, "All that the LORD hath spoken we will do" (Ex. 19:8). And again, even after they had quivered in fear and drew back from hearing of that law as spoken by the very voice of Jehovah, they soon regained their composure and exclaimed again as Moses prepared to ascend the mountain to speak for them to God, "All the words which the LORD hath said will we

do" (Ex. 24:3). But once Moses, who was the mediator between them and Jehovah, was gone from their sight, their lust began to build, until within less than forty days they had broken every one of the commandments, which they had so vehemently promised to keep. And from there on the battle between God's holy law and their sinful flesh was met.

No one was more shocked and dismayed at what had happened than was Moses. Although warned by God of what had happened, once he had descended from the mountain with the engraved tablets of God's law in his hand, and he was able to look down on the orgy of

Rev. Woudenberg is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

heathen debauchery that was taking place in the valley below, Moses in frustrated rage dashed the tablets of law to pieces on the rocks below. It was almost as if he acknowledged that even that law could do nothing to change a people as sinful and unfaithful as were these. What could the law possibly accomplish with a people who, within a few short weeks of having heard the thundering of that law from the very voice of God, had transgressed every one of its precepts they had so ardently promised to keep? In fury he descended from the mountain and gathered about him those who were willing to turn from their way, to slay those who continued in their sinful way, to grind their golden idol to powder and cast it into their drinking water, and to reprimand them all as severely as he could.

Still, Moses loved Israel; and after all was over he promised to ascend the mountain again to plead their cause. Certainly there are few more sadly beautiful scenes in all Scripture than that of Moses' heavy-hearted journey back up into the mountain after ruefully telling his people, "Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the LORD; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin" (Ex. 32:30). He could hope, but deep within his heart he knew it could never be. And still, what could he do but try? With a pained heart and hesitantly, he came to Jehovah and laid out his plea, "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin —" and with that he stopped. In his heart he knew it couldn't be. What Israel had done was not something that could be ignored. Jehovah was a God of justice, and sin such as Israel had committed couldn't simply be passed over, forgiven, and left at that. Sin must be paid for; the whole history of the sacrificial altar, which had been there from the beginning, testified to that. And what sin could compare to

what the children of Israel had just done; what could that sin possibly deserve but eternal dismissal from the presence of God? It was not something that could be passed over, unpunished, and forgotten. It had to be made right.

And so, falteringly, Moses started once again with the only other thing he could conceive of. Falteringly he went on, "— and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written" (Ex. 32:32). Might it be that Jehovah would take his life as a sacrifice, a substitute of the people? Clearly he was touching on that very principle that Jesus later would express so clearly, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Moses, through many years of his own personal loneliness and suffering in the wilderness, was made ready to present himself in just that way. He was in very reality a type of the coming Redeemer, who in the fullness of time would do exactly what Moses was now offering to do. In a very real way this was the peak of his prophetic, priestly office.

But Moses was only a type; and what he typically was offering, and typifying, was not something that he was himself able to bring to reality. He might in his mind think himself ready to stand before the wrath of God against Israel's sin and bear it for them; but he was only a man who had guilt of his own that he would never be able to meet. There simply was no way, therefore, in which he could bear the sin of anyone else. It was more than any mere human could do. And so the voice of Jehovah almost tersely responded, "Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book" (Ex. 32:33). Until a true mediator could be found, each must bear the burden of his own sin. Moses was not sufficient for that.

But that wasn't all. Enigmatically Jehovah added, "Therefore now go, lead the people unto the

place of which I have spoken unto thee: behold, mine Angel shall go before thee: nevertheless in the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them" (Ex. 32:34). For Moses, this presented an incomprehensible dilemma. After this sin that Israel had committed, what hope could there be for them, if God would blot out of his book everyone who had sinned? And, if that was so, what reason should there be for bringing them on to the promised land?

For some time we find Moses struggling with this, back and forth, as though in contention with Jehovah, yet always striving to understand how Jehovah's justice and His promised mercy for Israel could both continue to be — until finally he blurted out, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory" (Ex. 33:18). It wasn't simply a request for a vision, even though in typical form that would be given. Moses' essential request went far beyond this. His request was for an explanation, an understanding, of the way of God with them. How could Jehovah be both merciful and just with a people as sinful as Israel was? It was a bold and presumptuous request. And to it the response of Jehovah was even more remarkable, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (Ex. 33:19). God's answer to Moses was simply — as the apostle Paul brought out with this very text in Romans 9:18 — election. It was the eternal predestination of God alone that would bring from a people as sinful as Israel was, salvation for His people.

But there was also the realization that this was beyond the comprehension of Moses, as it would always be for any mere human. Jehovah went on to explain this too, when He added, "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. ... Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand

upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: and I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen." It was God's way of saying, in dramatic typical fashion, that neither Moses nor any other mere human could ever expect to understand all of the ways of God; for they are always far beyond what the human mind can possibly endure (see Is. 55:8, 9). But God would reveal to him, and to all that follow him, as much as they can stand to see, all that they are able to comprehend. And with that they must be satisfied. They might not be able to grasp the reason for it — they cannot see Jehovah's face and live — but He will reveal His mercy and compassion to whom He will. None of us can ever understand it, how God can be merciful to those who have sinned so greatly, but God will reveal His mercy to some, even if not to all.

It was this that the law would bring out. Already it had become evident that just hearing and knowing the works of Jehovah's law had not, and would not, make Israel a better people. Rather, in some perverse way their reaction would always bring out the opposite. They might promise to keep it, but their natures would always rise up against it, and bring out how sinful they truly were. It would continue to be that way, over and over again. The Ten Commandments that God had spoken from the mountain — and engraved, as though to emphasize their permanence, on tablets of stone — were only the beginning. In the months that followed, God would enlarge upon these ten areas of life, and lay out detailed instructions exactly how Israel would have to live if they were truly to demonstrate themselves to be worthy to be the people of God. He would tell them how they should worship, how they should be governed, and how they should relate to one another.

And the more He would tell them, the more it would come out that they were of themselves completely incapable to be what they thought themselves able and worthy of being. Israel would fall into sin and rebellion over and over again.


The remainder of the wilderness journey to Canaan was indeed a striking confirmation of exactly how true this was. Little was noble about it. God would come and supply Israel its needs, and they would turn against Him in murmuring and rebellion, rejecting the way in which they were led. It was not just a journey from Sinai on to Canaan, because, when they came to the very gate of the promised land, they refused to enter; and so Jehovah turned them back to wander for yet forty more years in the wilderness, until every adult who had come up out of Egypt — save for Joshua and Caleb — had passed away in death. And through it all God dealt with them according to the law. When Israel, even outwardly, did what was right and showed reliance on Him, Jehovah would provide for their needs; and when they strayed He would punish them. That is what the law was; it was an arrangement of conditional response to what the people deserved; and in the end they deserved nothing at all. Through it all God made it perfectly evident that just outward observance was not enough. Unless they did what they did out of the love of their hearts, and unless they reflected that love in dealing with their neighbors, and did this with their whole heart and soul and mind, it could never meet the criterion of righteousness that His law required. On every count, the law brought out the fact that Israel had fallen short.

Nor was the following history of Israel any different. The story of the Old Testament is a strange history. It is certainly the most accurate and responsible history recorded by any of such great age. In fact, it very evidently is more

accurate that any recorded anywhere. It is the history of one people, one line of spiritual thought and life, following from the beginning of time the line, life, and experience of those to whom the Creator God was to come and show His compassion and His mercy. But it comes always under the government of the law. God dealt conditionally with these people, giving them what they deserved. When they walked uprightly, even in only an external way, He would be with them and show to them blessing; and when they sinned and went astray, He would deal with them accordingly.

In the end it always came out that way. The history of the Old Testament is that of a people who were always falling into sin, rebelling against the goodness of their God, and being punished for it. It could only be said of them, as Hebrews 7:19 put it, "the law made nothing perfect." Or, as Paul stated it even more emphatically, "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20). All that the law brought out was that there was no one who could fulfill the conditions of righteousness; or, as Paul had stated just shortly before, and as it had been pointed out already in the Old Testament scriptures long before, "They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:12).



And yet, what God had said to Moses was true: He would have mercy and compassion on whom He willed. And He did. All through that same history, there came to those whom the Lord chose, a revelation of grace. They were called out from under the condemnation of the law and brought into fellowship with God. It is that that the covenant of grace is all about. 

Minister Activities

We express our Christian sympathy to Rev. Steven Houck and his family in the death of their wife and mother, Mrs. Carolyn Houck, whom the Lord called to glory on Wednesday evening, December 26, after a long struggle with cancer. May the family and the congregation of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL, where Rev. Houck is pastor, find comfort in Christ Jesus as Psalm 116:15 testifies, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

At the request of the Domestic Mission Committee, the Grace PRC in Standale, MI has given permission to their pastor, Rev. Mitch Dick, to labor for six months in Fayetteville, NC, beginning January 13.

From their trio of Revs. Wilbur Bruinsma, Daniel Kleyn, and Richard Smit, the congregation of Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ voted to extend a call to Rev. W. Bruinsma to serve as their next pastor.

Rev. Carl Haak declined the call extended to him by the congregation of the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI. Since that decline Trinity has formed a new trio from which they plan to call a pastor, the Lord willing, on January 20. That trio consisted of the Revs. Allen Brummel, Kenneth Koole, and Richard Smit.

The PRC of Lynden, WA called Rev. Ron Cammenga, from a trio that included also Revs. Michael DeVries and James Laning.

The Grandville, MI PRC has extended a call to Rev. Charles Terpstra to serve as their next pastor.

We can only imagine how exciting December must have been for the Brummel family. Their extended family grew with the addition of three children that month, and we use the "News" to pass along our congratulations, first, to Rev. Allen and Crysta Brummel, who rejoiced in the birth of a daughter, Crystal Faye, on December 14. As Rev. Brummel wrote, "she introduced the color pink to our family, being the first daughter after five sons." And then we also extend our congratulations to Rev. Nathan Brummel and his wife, Paula, who finalized the adoption of two children from the Ukraine in early December. Melitta, a cheerful little red-haired girl is 7 years old, and Augustine, a quiet, blond/brown-haired boy, is 5. Both are adjusting well to their life in America and to the English language.

Mission Activities

In news from Ghana we find that plans now call for Rev. Wayne Bekkering to take over the labors in the Bible studies and catechism, while Rev. Richard Moore will be doing the paper work with respect to the labors there and will be working to prepare for the future instruction of pastors and officebearers, as well as investigating some possible new areas for the labors of our missionaries.

Plans called for Rev. Audred Spriensma to preach his farewell sermon to his congregation at the Grandville, MI PRC on Sunday, January 6, and then, D.V., to be installed as missionary to the Philippines on January 18 at the Doon, IA PRC. In the meantime his children will finish their schooling and Rev. Spriensma will become a student himself, taking seminary courses on missions and cross-cultural anthropology.


Congregation Activities

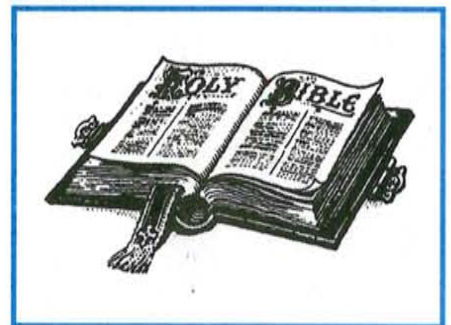
Recent congregational meetings at various of our churches did more than elect elders and deacons and pass annual budgets. The Loveland, CO PRC approved a special proposal to update the sound system of their church auditorium. The congregation of the First PRC in Holland, MI passed a proposal to give their council permission to sell their old parsonage. And the Randolph, WI PRC granted their council permission to proceed with plans to paint their church, as well as to re-roof both their church and parsonage and remove a tree at the parsonage.

The approximate completion date for the addition at the Grace PRC in Standale, MI is projected to be the middle to end of February.

School Activities

This past Christmas season the students of Hope Christian School in Redlands, CA collected donations for an orphanage in Myanmar. The monies collected were to be distributed through the diaconate of our sister churches in Singapore, the ERCS.

Upon the request of interested parents, the school board of the Faith Christian School in Randolph, WI appointed a committee to study the feasibility of adding high school curriculum to their school in the future. 



Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Combined Women's Bible Study of South Holland PRC expresses its Christian sympathy to our Bible leader, Rev. Steven Houck, and to Elizabeth Houck in the death of their wife and mother,

MRS. CAROLYN HOUCK,

whose earthly pilgrimage of this life has now been completed and has now received the crown of eternal life: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also" (John 14:2b, 3).

Mrs. Debra Poortinga, Vice-President
Mrs. Cheryl Dotson, Secretary

NOTICE

The RFPA is considering the publication of a book of the shorter works of Herman Hoeksema. Anyone who has relevant materials (speeches, old pamphlets, notes, etc.) is asked to contact David Kregel, 6244 Ivanrest SW, Byron Center, MI 49315, FAX (616) 531-9241, e-mail dkregel@iserv.net, or phone (616) 532-9076.

NOTICE

The address and phone number of Rev. Dick and family for the next six months will be:

3206 Granville Dr.
Fayetteville, NC 28303
(910) 864-3696

TEACHER(S) NEEDED:

Heritage Christian High School in South Holland, IL is now in its first year of operation, teaching freshmen and sophomores. As we plan for the addition of a junior class for 2002-2003, we see our greatest faculty needs in the areas of math, science, business and technology, and foreign language courses. Interested individuals, please contact our Administrator, Ralph Medema, at (708) 339-1733 [rmedema@earthlink.net] or Education Committee Chairman, Bill DeJong, at (708) 946-6126 [bill@dejongequipment.com].

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With thanksgiving to God we, with our parents,

MR. and MRS. ALVIN DEYOUNG, celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary on February 14, 2002. We are thankful for the years God has given them together and pray that God will bless them in the years to come.

"All the faithful to His covenant shall behold His righteousness; He will be their strength and refuge, and their children's children bless" (Psalter 281:4).

- * Dan and Laura Schipper
Brad, Nick, Erika, Emily
- * Todd and Lisa Groenendyk
Ethan, Meghan

Jenison, Michigan

NOTICE!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will be hosted by the Loveland Protestant Reformed Church in Loveland, Colorado on Wednesday, March 6, 2002 at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All material for the classical agenda should be in the hands of the stated clerk by Monday, February 4, 2002, thirty days before classis convenes. The officebearers' conference that was being planned for Tuesday has been canceled, so there will be no conference at this meeting of classis. Delegates or visitors in need of lodging or of transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Loveland, Mr. Robert Brands, 1417 Arikaree Drive, Loveland, CO 80538. Phone: (970) 669-1265. Email: BPBrands@juno.com

Rev. Daniel Kleyn,
Stated Clerk

NOTICE!!

All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee secretary, Mr. Jeff Kalsbeek (Phone: 616-735-3608). This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, February 11, 2002, D.V.

Student Aid Committee
Jeff Kalsbeek, Secretary

Reformed Witness Hour

Topics for February

Date	Topic	Text
February 3	"Arise, Go, and Cry Against It!"	Jonah 1:1, 2
February 10	"The Prophet Who Ran Away"	Jonah 1:3
February 17	"The God Who Did Not Let Go"	Jonah 1:4-17
February 24	"Prayer From a Fish's Belly"	Jonah 2

WINTER CONFERENCE

First PRC of Holland
February 8, 9, 2002

"God's Creation – The Theater of His Glory"

Friday (7:30 P.M.)

Prof. Hanko

"Creation vs. Evolution"

Saturday (9:00 A.M.)

Gary Lanning

"Man – God's Unique Creation"

Rev. Terpstra

"Creation's Relation to Christ"