A Prayer For Divine Examination

“Search me, o God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Psalm 139:23, 24.

This Psalm sings of God’s omniscience and omnipresence. And from it the poet infers two things: the overthrow of the wicked, and his own salvation.

The close of the Psalm seems superfluous, redundant. Verse 1 stated: “O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me.” And we are tempted to ask, why then the “Search me, o God, and know my heart.”

The answer is easy: the first is basis for the last: the poet desires God to examine him with the expressed purpose that he also may know himself, and be cured of all his ills. It is a very humble prayer.

This is a very tremendous prayer, I would almost say: a terrible prayer. I am tempted to warn you and myself: be careful with this Word of God. If you or I should pray this petition, God might hear you and answer you and give you your petition. Be sure when you pray this prayer that you really want God to do as you ask: examine you. Yes, and let you know what ails you. You may in such a case find out a lot of horrible things about yourself.

Search me!

A peculiar and expressive term. In the Holland language the term is translated: “Doorgrondt mij!” And that is the primary idea of this word. The primary idea lies in boring and digging. It is used in Scripture for mining and examining the interior of the earth.

So here the inspired poet petitions the Lord to dig into his inmost heart, and to bring to the surface all that resides there, to bring it all to open view. Literally: Lord, dig deep into my heart and know me!

The heart is the center of man’s ethical nature. That is what wise men have said. And I can well believe it. The Bible tells us that out of the heart of man are the issues of his life. It is no doubt the deepest in man. So deep that you may say without danger of being contradicted: as the heart of a man is so is he.

As such, the heart is the source, the fountain of man’s desires, affections, will, longings, thoughts, meditations, and of all his imaginations. And here the poet prays that God may dig down into that workshop of my life, and bring it all to the surface of my consciousness. It implies that I do not know my heart. And that is a Scriptural thought. Was it not Jeremiah who complained: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” But immediately following those words we read: “I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.”

Search me, o God, and know my heart!

Tremendous prayer, for all my innate wickedness springs from that heart, and to invite God to dig to the nethermost depths of it for the purpose of acquainting me with the horrible contents is going to be a terrible knowledge indeed. Again: be sure you want that when you are praying this prayer. If God hears and answers your prayer, He will show you a veritable catalog of crimes, some of which you may not have seen before.

O, we are such strangers to our own hearts!

Try me and know my thoughts!

That is a step nearer my consciousness. The heart has depths which even man himself cannot fathom. Reason why all men are to some extent strangers to themselves. The children of the devil came upon that truth in their studies of the heart of man. It is the wicked world that also tells us of the truth which is old as the hills that man is deeper than his consciousness. Go to then, you psychiatrists! After you find the filth
of the moral Augean stables in your patients, do you advise them to turn to Psalm 139? Do you advise them to pray to God for the gift of His herculean Son, so that the better river of Alpheus may clean them principally in one day?

But the thoughts are nearer my consciousness. The heart is the fountain; the thoughts are produced in it. The thoughts are of the heart. And this man desires the Lord to arrest his thoughts and to shackle them as prisoners so that they may be brought to the bar of God's holiness. And there they shall be tried. No, but he himself will be tried for his thoughts. The thoughts are but the expression, the manifestation of sinner himself. Thy me, and know my thoughts!

Terrible! God may hear it! And He may do as you suggest, nay, as you pray. And if he does, you will become acquainted with yourselves as never before. You will see them all, and then in the light of the judgment of God's holiness, righteousness and truth. The latter will make them black as hell.

Let us see. You may become acquainted with a dirty miser, a worldliminded man, a pleasure-mad fool, a selfish and hard brute, an indiffertent, callous soul. It may chance that you will meet yourself as a cruel and malignant sore, or as a filthy immoral beast. Do you turn up the nose? Are you ever so sweet and lovely? Are you the unspotted saint you think you were?

Pray this prayer. Pray it from the heart. Say: O God! I desire truly and sincerely to become acquainted with my inmost self. I have read Thy Word and I begin to see and believe that a man is a stranger to his real self. Psalm 139 leads me to this prayer. Wilt Thou in Thy mercy show me the exact state of my heart? Wilt Thou place me before the bar of Thy wondrous virtues and show me an introduction to my thoughts? Wilt Thou shed abroad the glorious light of Thy good conduct and set all my thoughts in clear array? I would know myself, o God!

Do that, and you will be surprised, astounded, horrified at the results.

Search me and know me, o God!

Try me, and know my thoughts!

You are able to taste the very seriousness and integrity of the worshipper. Do you not note the sincerity of the sweet singer of Israel? You can just feel that he means his prayer. It is first a confession that he doubts his own knowledge of self. Second, a confession that God knows it. And, third, that he desires to be thoroughly informed about himself. He wants to know the worst. And that is wisdom. But it is not enough.

No, it is not enough, but if you are this far, you will go farther. It is good to receive correct diagnosis. This text is really an adequate answer to the question: how much shall we tell our loved ones that are stricken with an incurable disease? There are some deluded souls which out of a misplaced mercy keep the true condition from their loved ones. Deluded and mistaken, for it is really cruel, and stems from a mistaken idea. If the Bible leads us to come to a thorough diagnosis of our moral leprosy, should God then approve of ignorance as to our bodily ills. Moreover, how can our loved one appreciate the serious message of the Almighty which is in every incurable disease?

But no, it is not enough to know your corruption. Schopenhauer went far in the diagnosis of corrupt humanity. But as far as we know, he did not go farther. And he did not go on, because his first impetus was not from above. It stemmed from a bitter heart which hated God and man.

That is the next step.

But if you have gone this far because of the Word of God and the urge of the Holy Ghost, you will go farther.

If Thou, o Lord, would behold a way of wickedness in me, make me to see it and arrest me on that filthy way!

That is the next step.

Do you see the progress? From out of the dark heart, through the corridors of wicked thoughts to a wicked way. The way of a man is his life from the heart. And thereby hangs a sad tale. There are three things in a way of a man. It has direction, progress and an end. And all three are dolorous, heart-rending, as we are by nature. The moment the course of our life is set in motion, its direction is toward the outer darkness, the place that is reserved and prepared for devils.

And the progress is a progress in wickedness. I am much more able to sin at present than when I was a child. Even then I was evil, but now? O God have mercy on us! There is progress in the way of a man. From baby to child, to boy, to young man, to man, to the aged, and then? But there is progress. You become more and more adept in sin and wickedness.

And the end is eternal damnation. Everyone is on the way to hell. That is, if the Author of eternal miracles does nothing about our deplorable estate. If he allows us to walk in our way, we are definitely bound for hell. With all our smiles, with all our expressed determinations of good, of nobility, of good, lovely conduct. We are all, by nature, on the way to hell, with all our hypocritical nonsense that speaks of improvement, education, enlightening civilization, and whatever drivel the sin-sick heart and brain of man may imagine.

The direction of the way of a man is toward outer darkness. And David knows it.
O God, if Thou beholdest in me a way of wickedness, a way of grief and sorrow of death, take me from it, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Arrest me on my way!
How simple are these words and how few!
But let it happen to you and you will find out how severe is God’s arresting hand. They have told us what shocking and embarrassing experience it is to feel the hand of the secret police on your shoulder: Come along, you are wanted at headquarters. The third degree! They tell me that the victim is placed under and before blinding lights. Ah me! What comparison shall you make between these pigmies of the third degree and the light, the blinding light of God’s omniscience? How shall you ever compare the correctness of police-officials and the light of God’s virtue which finds out all our filth? And the subsequent embarrassment and shame before God’s face. Oh, that judgment day!

How easy to sing and pray Psalm 139 with a sleepy, lazy soul. How terrible is this prayer when you mean it. How severely practical: O God! weed out all my corruption! That is going to hurt.

The Lord will place you under the blinding rays of virtue and He will perhaps say to you: You are a dirty miser! You have stolen from the poor and destitute, from my church and kingdom causes, from Me! You are guilty! What have you to say to all this?

He may say to you or me: You are a fool. You seek and hunger and lust after the world and its thrills. Repent of your worldliness.

He may say: You are filthy. You have a nice face for those that look and consequently know no more than your face. But I see your heart, and you desired me to tell you: Well, you are a filthy adulterer. Repent and wash your detestable robes in the blood of My Son, and convert yourself and walk in cleanliness and virtue.

He may say: You are malignant, cruel and full of hatred against Me and your brethren. You always think evil and practice evil. Repent, and learn of Jesus that He is tender-hearted, lowliminded and sweet.

Ah me, He may say so much. Much more than we thought He would find.

Try it, dear reader, and you will be surprised.

And remember that the purpose you asked for His arresting hand on your heart, thoughts and way was that you might be led away from all that darkness. If you do not want that, do not pray this prayer.

It takes self-denial to pray this way, and to have the effect of this prayer take place in your life. You will suffer the mortification of the old man. And it is so sweet to follow the corrupt promptings of that old man. Even though the sweetness of it turns to gall and wormwood. But only later, later, sometimes, much later!

But it is sanctifying nevertheless. Let it hurt. It is better to be operated by God than to rot away in filth and sin! It is sweet to be arrested in wicked ways. Wicked ways are, according to the original Hebrew word, sorrowful ways, painful ways, grievous ways. And the world in its agonizing suffering for sixty centuries has written its doleful commentary. The sad vale of tears!

But it is sweet to be arrested by God, now, at this side of Jordan, this side the great and dreadful Day of the Lord, the judgment Day!

Kiss the Son while He is still on the way!
E’r His wrath is kindled but a little!

And this arrest is accomplished by God through His Word and Spirit. No, we do not laugh as uproariously in the catechism, the society rooms, the church on Sunday, as the places where the world gathers. They have their wit and laughter, they have the thrill, the sweet thrill, but there is the fang, laden with the poison of adders in it. But the Holy Spirit tells us that the Word of God is sweeter than honey and the honey-comb.

And the end is wondrous.
And lead me in the way everlasting!
The end is again heaven, and that is correct. That’s the way it is. We always end in heaven, and that is the way it is.

The way everlasting is first the way on which all the saints have trod. It is characterized by the light of the love of God. The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day, and the perfect day is the new heavens and the new earth.

It is the everlasting way for it issues from the heart of the eternal God. Its source are the thoughts of eternal peace.

It is also the eternal way, the way everlasting for it leads to eternal happiness before God’s face.

And it is essentially Jesus Christ, the Lord. He said it: I am the way.

He founded it in His heart’s blood. Through His Word and Pentecostal Spirit He leads His own to the House of the Father.

Yes, you will have to die. But even then you will say: Even though I have to go through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.

O God, search me and lead me to Thy heart!

G. Vos.
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EDITORIALS

Questions and Reflections

The Rev. Daane still makes an attempt to discuss
and make plain to his readers my view and position
on "common grace". As I said before, I can only
appreciate and welcome such a discussion. But in
order to conduct a fruitful and intelligent discussion,
it is certainly essential that we understand each other's
position, and present it truly and fairly to our readers.
Up to the present time I have as yet nothing positive
to offer to our readers about the position and stand of
the Rev. Daane on the question of common grace.
This, I suppose, will come later. For the present,
however, the Rev. Daane merely attempts to offer a
critical presentation of my conception of so-called
common grace.

Hence, when I write that for a fruitful and intelli­
gent discussion it is necessary that we understand and
present each other's view correctly and fairly, I refer
especially to the Rev. Daane's understanding and pre­
sentation of my conception.

This, I am sorry to say, he fails to do.
Instead, he really presents and works with his own
notions, and tries to shove them down my throat,—
notions such as timeless logic, lack of proper historical
sense, individualism, etc. If he continues along this
track, I must needs let him go alone. I cannot and
will not follow him in that case. Only, if he continues
the discussion along the same track and on the same
basis, I must kindly ask him to substitute "X" or
"N.N." for my name. For he certainly is not discuss­
ing the problem of common grace with me, but with
some other, abstract personality.

But perhaps the situation can still be saved, and
the matter be remedied, so that we can continue our
discussion. And therefore, I propose to ask the Rev.
Daane a few questions on the basis of his latest con­
tribution on the question of common grace in the
Reformed Journal (No. 3). And at the same time I
wish to point out some inaccuracies in his writings.

The Rev. Daane writes: "This Declaration is an
interpretation of the covenant on the basis of a denial
of Common Grace." My question is: will the Rev.
Daane please prove this statement? I deny this. I
maintain that the Declaration is simply an expression
of the basic principles as found in our Confessions,
especially concerning the promise of God. It is not
interpretation of the covenant, and especially not a
specific interpretation of that doctrine on the basis
of the denial of common grace. I suppose that this
statement by the Rev. Daane is supposed to be proved
by the following sentence: "The Declaration teaches
that there are no ‘conditions’ within the Covenant because God realizes His Covenant unconditionally.” But does not the Rev. Daane know that many Reformed theologians, even though they professed to believe in the theory of common grace, maintain that the covenant and the promise of God are unconditional? Why then should my conception of the covenant be based on a denial of common grace? Will Daane please account for this?

The Rev. Daane further writes: “This denial that God ever uses this method in dealing with men means that in Hoeksema’s definition of God’s method of dealing with men, God’s successive responses and actions are never conditioned by what man does. In his thought, God’s responses and actions are eternally decided out of all relationship to what man does in time. At this point it already becomes clear that in Hoeksema’s theology eternity remains aloof from time, that God’s works never seriously recognize, enter, and become involved in the temporal-historical process.” My question is: will the Rev. Daane please quote from whatever I wrote to prove these statements? And will he at the same time explain them? To me this is simply nonsense. I refer especially to the statement that “God’s responses and actions are eternally decided out of all relationship to what man does in time,” and also to the statement that in my theology “eternity remains aloof from time,” and again to that statement “that God’s works never seriously recognize, enter, and become involved in the temporal-historical process.” How would that be possible?

Will the Rev. Daane please explain also the following paragraph: “Even the most ardent Supra, however, cannot completely avoid recognition of conditions. The sin-situation within time is surely a condition produced by man. Thus, even in working Redemption, God must reckon with conditions.

To insist at this point that God’s method of working with men is always unconditional, would lead to the absurd position that God could redeem even if there were no sin-condition to redeem. If in the initiation of salvation God recognizes and works with the sin-condition, why object to God’s recognition and operation with conditions in the salvation process of the elect individual?” Will the Rev. Daane please explain what he means by the term condition in this paragraph? Does he use the term in the sense of prerequisite, or does he rather use it in the sense of a state or quality? If he uses it in the former sense, the paragraph becomes nonsense, because in that case a condition is not a prerequisite imposed by God upon man, but on the contrary, a prerequisite imposed by man upon God; and this, of course, is pure nonsense. So I ask: will the Rev. Daane please define the meaning of his term in this paragraph?

Again, I would like to ask him to explain the following paragraph: “Again, even the most ardent Supra admits that God does not damn the reprobate exclusively on the basis of his decree to do so, but on the basis of the reprobate’s sins. Even Hoeksema does not place election and reprobation on the same level. But if sin is the condition for the reprobate’s condemnation, why object to the idea that God operates conditionally with the reprobate in the historical process. If at any point God’s responses are conditioned by man’s action in history, the construction of an unconditional theology would seem to be a dubious venture.”

Here the Rev. Daane interchanges the terms “basis” and “condition”. And, when he does, he makes the statement: “But if sin is the condition for the reprobate’s condemnation,” etc. But is that possible at all? I too teach that the damnation of the reprobate is certainly not exclusively based on the decree of God, but is judicially based on the sin of the reprobate. But does that mean that sin is the condition for the reprobate’s condemnation? Again, in my terminology that would mean that the sin of the reprobate is a prerequisite on the part of God for his condemnation. And that, of course, is nonsense. It is not only nonsense, but it implies a very serious error. For it would imply that God demands that the reprobate sin, in order to be able to condemn him. But let the Rev. Daane explain his own statements, please.

And now I must quote a rather lengthy passage from the article by Daane, in order to do him justice, and in order to ask him to explain his statements: “It should be carefully noted that the Covenant is defined in terms of its eternal essence. The fact that God establishes it in time and history, thereby giving it an historical structure means nothing. A definition of the Covenant should give its meaning. In Hoeksema’s definition of the Covenant the historical aspect of the Covenant does not enter into the definition. The historical aspect of the Covenant means nothing.

“It would seem that a definition of the Covenant exclusively in terms of its eternal essence, out of all reference to its temporal-historical aspect, is rendering the temporal-historical less than its due. If the essence of the Covenant is so eternal that the historical aspect is incidental, then the historical interaction between God and man within the Covenant is also incidental. And if the history that transpires within the Covenant is incidental, how much more the history that transpires outside the Covenant!

“Hoeksema writes, ‘An everlasting covenant, therefore, is not a way or a means, but is the destination, In this definition the word ‘everlasting’ is curiously the end itself’ (Standard Bearer, Nov. 15, 1949), equated with ‘eternity’ to the exclusion of the temporal. It seems to have escaped notice that the Covenant as ‘everlasting’ does not mean that it is only eternal. It is also temporal.
“It is only when the Covenant is defined as something eternal without reference to the temporal, that the Covenant can be only a ‘destination’ and not a ‘way’ to that destination. When the Covenant is defined as ‘the end itself’, then of course no temporal-historical means are required to reach the ‘end’. If the ‘end’ is given at the beginning then no temporal process is needed as a method of arriving at the end. If it is insisted that the essence of the Covenant is eternal, then time can make no essential difference to it nor possess any serious validity for it.”

This passage from Daane’s article involves a piece of sophistry. It is based on the well-known sophistical syllogism: 1) Is this your dog? 2) Is that dog a mother? 3) Then that dog is your mother. The same is true of the reasoning in the above passage by Daane. It is based on the syllogism: 1) The Covenant is eternal. 2) Eternity is not time. 3) The Covenant therefore has no historical realization.

But let me set the Rev. Daane straight. In the first place, I would like to have him criticize the following definition of the Covenant, which is mine: The covenant is that living relationship of most intimate fellowship of friendship which is a reflection of His own Triune life, according to which God makes Himself known and blesses His people, and they know Him and find their delight in His fellowship and service. How Daane can eliminate from this definition the historical realization of that same covenant is a mystery to me. But let him explain. In the second place, I want to call his attention to the fact that my contention that the covenant is everlasting, and therefore can not be a means to an end, but is the end of all things itself, is based upon Scripture and upon our Confessions, especially the Baptism Form. I refer to Is. 55:3: “I will make an everlasting covenant with you;” Is. 61:8, “I will make an everlasting covenant with them;” Jer. 32:40, “I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them.” And in the Baptism Form we read: “For when we are baptized in the name of the Father, God the Father witnesseth and sealeth unto us, that he doth make an eternal covenant of grace with us.” Will the Rev. Daane explain how on the basis of Scripture and the Baptism Form he can deny me the right to speak of an everlasting and eternal covenant of grace?

Moreover, I plainly state that the covenant is not a means or way in itself, but is the end or destination. Does not Daane understand that the terms “end” and “destination” presuppose a way to that destination, and that therefore, although I maintain that the covenant is itself not the way, there is nevertheless the historical process that leads to that final destination? Will Daane answer the question how he can maintain that the idea of end and destination excludes any historical process? I am afraid that Daane throughout works with his own false notion of timeless logic, and that he does not understand that I maintain that history is the unfolding of the everlasting counsel of the Most High.

Again, the Rev. Daane writes: “As is well known, Hoeksema denies the doctrine of the Covenant of Works. The reason is as follows: In the generally accepted formulation of the Covenant of Works, God deals with man conditionally. God says to Adam, If you fulfill the condition of obedience, I will give you eternal life. Because God’s method of dealing with Adam here rests on a condition, Hoeksema rejects the Covenant of Works.”

This is a very gross misrepresentation of my conception of the relation of God to Adam and Adam to God in the state of rectitude. My objection to the theory of the Covenant of Works does not hinge upon that term condition, although I deny that there was such a covenant between God and Adam according to which he could merit eternal life on condition of perfect obedience, as is the story. My main objections against this Covenant of Works are twofold: 1) That man can never merit anything with God. And, 2) that it was impossible for Adam ever to reach the state of eternal life, which can be had only in Jesus Christ our Lord. If the Rev. Daane wants to know my objections to the theory of the Covenant of Works, he can find them in the first volume of my work on the Heidelberg Catechism, “In the Midst of Death”. And I challenge him to meet those arguments which I there present.

Again, Daane writes: “Since the Covenant is in essence fellowship, and since its temporal nature is no essential part of it, the reprobates (although born under it) are not, in Hoeksema’s view, in the Covenant. Therefore, the reprobate and the elect have nothing in the Covenant in common, and consequently there is no Common Grace. There is no room for Common Grace in a theology that defines the Covenant in terms of eternity and places the historical reprobate outside the eternal Covenant.”

Now, in the first place, I like to ask Daane the question whether, according to him, the reprobate as well as the elect are in the covenant. He must know that many Reformed theologians, also those that maintain the theory of common grace, maintain that the covenant is established only with the elect. And therefore, according to him it must follow that also those Reformed theologians have no room for the theory of common grace, because also they define the covenant in terms of eternity and place the historical reprobate outside of the eternal covenant. And in the second place, I want to remark that the statement of Daane that “the reprobate and the elect have nothing in the Covenant in common, and consequently there is no
Common Grace,” is certainly incorrect. Such is not my view. On the contrary, in my opinion the elect and reprobate have all things in common, except grace. In the historical dispensation of the covenant, reprobate and elect have in common that both are circumcised and baptized. Both therefore receive the outward sign and seal of the righteousness which is by faith. Both elect and reprobate hear the preaching of the gospel, are instructed and admonished, and receive all the means of grace. All things they have in common. But grace is not common, but according to Scripture and the Confessions is always particular. Now will Daane criticize that view, and not the distortion of my conception which he presents in his article?

Finally, I must call attention to the following passage in the article of Daane: “The same contention that God never deals with men in terms of conditions, necessitates Hoeksema’s denial of the ‘offer of salvation’. Hoeksema denies not only a general offer of salvation; he also denies that God offers salvation to the elect. God never offers salvation; He himself works salvation. God alone fulfills the Covenant. ‘It is difficult to see how any Protestant Reformed minister can plead for the recognition of conditions within the Covenant since they stand committed to the Protestant Reformed position that God never offers salvation, not even to the elect.’

Also in these paragraphs my conception is not presented correctly. In the first place, I have no objection to the word offer in the original sense of the Latin offerre. For in this sense it simply means to present. And in this sense it is used even in our Confessions. For in Canons III, IV, 9 we read: “Quod multi per ministerium evangelii vocati, non veniunt et non convertuntur, huius culpa non est in evangelio, nec in Christo per evangelium oblato;” which is translated in our English version of the Canons: “It is not the fault of the gospel, nor of Christ, offered therein, that those who are called by the ministry of the word, refuse to come, and be converted.” Now the term oblato occurring in this passage is, as Daane very well knows, the past participle of obferro or offerre, which simply means “to present”. In that sense I have no objection to the word offer. But the Rev. Daane does not present me correctly when he writes that I simply deny the general offer of salvation, not only to the elect but also the reprobate. My objection in this connection, as Daane ought to know, is against the First Point in connection with the proof from the Confessions that is offered to substantiate the First Point by the Synod of 1924. And taking this into consideration, Daane ought to have written not that I object to a general offer, but that I object to the view that God on His part offers salvation well-meaningly to the reprobate. That is the point. And as far as the sentence is concerned in the above paragraph, “God never offers salvation; He Himself works salvation,” to this I still subscribe, and I hope that also Daane subscribes to this. For in that sentence the offer of salvation is contrasted to the work of God in salvation. And that contrast cannot be maintained in Reformed theology.

Once more, I still hope that the Rev. Daane will continue his discussion on common grace, and also clearly present his own view. But again I state that in order to have a fruitful and intelligent discussion, we must know and present each other’s conception correctly and fairly. And this the Rev. Daane certainly did not do in the article from which I quoted.

H. H.

THE TRIPLE KNOWLEDGE

An Exposition Of The Heidelberg Catechism

PART TWO

Of Man’s Redemption

LORD’S DAY XXX.

1.

An Accursed Idolatry. (cont.)

From the same Canons and Decree of the Council of Trent it is also very evident that the mass is represented as a continual sacrifice of Christ. For we read in the Twenty-second Session, Chapter I: “Forasmuch as under the former testament, according to the testimony of the apostle Paul, there was no perfection, because of the weakness of the Levitical priesthood; there was need, God, the Father of mercies so ordaining, that another priest should rise, according to the order of Melchisedec, our Lord Jesus Christ who might consummate, and lead to what is perfect, as many as were to be sanctified. He, therefore, our God and Lord, though he was about to offer himself once on the altar of the cross unto God the Father by means of his death, there to operate an eternal redemption; nevertheless, because that his priesthood was not to be extinguished by his death, in the last supper, in the night in which he was betrayed,—that he might leave, to his own beloved spouse, the church, a visible sacrifice such as the nature of man requires, whereby that bloody sacrifice, once to be accomplished on the cross, might be represented, and the memory thereof remain even unto the end of the world and its salutary virtue
be applied to the remission of those sins which we daily commit,—declaring himself constituted a priest forever, according to the order of Melchesidec, he offered up to God the Father his own body and blood under the species of bread and wine; and, under the symbols of those same things, he delivered his own body and blood to be received by his apostles, whom he then constituted priests of the new testament; and by those words, Do this in commemoration of me, he commanded them and their successors in the priesthood to offer them; even as the Catholic Church has always understood and taught. For, having celebrated the ancient passover, which the multitude of the children of Israel immolated in memory of their going out of Egypt, he instituted the new passover, to wit, himself to be immolated, under visible signs, by the church through the ministry of priests, in memory of his own passage from this world unto the Father, when by the effusion of his own blood he redeemed us, and delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into his kingdom. And this is indeed that clean oblation, which cannot be defiled by any unworthiness, or by malice of those that offer it; which the Lord foretold by Malachias was to be offered in every place, clean to his name, which was to be great amongst the Gentiles; and which the apostle Paul, writing to the Corinthians, has not obscurely indicated, when he says that they who are defiled by the participation of the table of devils, cannot be partakers of the table of the Lord; by the table, meaning in both places the altar. This, in fine, is that oblation which was prefigured by various types of sacrifices during the period of nature, and of the law; inasmuch as it comprises all the good things signified by these sacrifices, as being the consummation and perfection of them all."

That the Roman Catholics indeed teach that in the mass Christ through the priests is offered as a continual sacrifice is plainer yet from the next chapter, that is Chapter II of the Twenty-second Session. There we read: “And forasmuch as, in this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the mass, that same Christ is contained and immolated in an unbloody manner who once offered himself in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross; the holy synod teaches, that this sacrifice is truly propitiatory, and that by means thereof this is effected, that we obtain mercy, and find grace in seasonable aid, if we draw nigh unto God, contrite and penitent with a sincere heart and upright faith, with fear and reverence. For the Lord, appeased by the oblation thereof, and granting the grace and gift of penitence, forgives even heinous crimes and sins. For the victim is one and the same, the same now offering by the ministry of priests, who then offered himself on the cross, the manner alone of offering being different. The fruits indeed of which oblation of that bloody one, to wit, are received most plentifully through this unboydy one; so far is this latter from derogating in any way from that former oblation. Wherefore not only for the sins, punishments, satisfactions, and other necessities of the faithful who are living, but also for those who are departed in Christ and who are not as yet fully purified, it is rightly offered, agreeably to the tradition of the apostles.”

Hence, it is very evident that according to the Romish Church the mass is represented as a continual and oft-repeated sacrifice of Christ, offered up by the priests, and that this repeated sacrifice is indeed necessary for the forgiveness of sins, both of those that are living on the earth and of the departed souls that are still in purgatory. According to Roman Catholics, the mass has all the essential elements of a true sacrifice. It is offered by a priest, Jesus Christ, through the ministry of His earthly representative, the Roman Catholic priest. It has its victim, again Jesus Christ, as He is really present under the appearance of bread and wine. And it is offered up as a real sacrifice through the mystic rite of consecration. In the mass there is, therefore, a continuation of the bloody sacrifice of Christ on the cross in an unbloody manner. And the Romish Church does indeed maintain that this sacrifice of the mass is necessary, and they deny that it is quite sufficient that Christ once for all and forever shed His blood for the blotting out of all the sins of His people.

It is difficult to conceive, indeed, how it were possible that a simple and beautiful rite as the sacrament of the Lord's Supper could be so corrupted that it is hardly recognizable, as it is done in the Romish mass.

That this idea of a repeated and continued sacrifice of Christ through the Romish priest in the mass is in direct conflict with all that Scripture teaches concerning the sacrifice of Christ and its application to His people is not difficult to show.

In its deepest sense it is, of course, a denial of the truth of election. If this fundamental truth of Scripture were maintained, the idea of a repeated and continued sacrifice of Christ for His people would have no place whatever in the system of the truth. Believers are chosen in Christ. And according to that eternal election they are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. Eph. 1:3, 4. According to this eternal election Christ shed His lifeblood on the accursed tree for all that are chosen; and, of course, He shed that blood once for all. On the cross He died as the representative of the elect. They were in Him in His death. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. Their sins are blotted out. That is simply a historic fact. Hence, according to this same truth of election in Christ, the objective justification of all the elect took place, first of all, in eternity; they are justified.
and glorified from before the foundation of the world. Moreover he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.” In the counsel of God the elect are justified and are glorified. This is true of all the elect, both of the old and of the new dispensation. Hence, Christ is called the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. In God’s decree Christ stands eternally as the slain Lamb, and the elect stand before God as eternally covered by His blood, and thereby justified. How a repetition of that one sacrifice on the cross that was offered for all the elect from all eternity, in which all the elect are justified, would ever be necessary is impossible to see. Moreover, also in time, in the historic moment of the cross the same elect are justified in and through Christ. This, too, was objectively perfect for all that believe in Christ. The saints of the old, as well as of the new dispensation, were justified, not because of the repeated sacrifice of bulls and goats. Still less are they now justified or receive the forgiveness of sins because of any repeated sacrifice by a priest in the mass. Not even because of their faith, though it is through faith as a means that the elect receive hold of that justification, but only because of the one sacrifice of Christ that was offered on the cross more than nineteen centuries ago, are they justified. Hence, the sacrifice of Christ in the mass, which is supposedly necessary for the forgiveness of sins, is really a denial of the truth that Christ died once for all and that all the elect are forever justified in Him.

Besides, the truth that Christ died once for all and that it is forever finished, so that the sacrifice of Christ cannot be and need not be repeated, is abundantly testified by Holy Writ. All the Scriptures emphatically that in the one sacrifice of Christ all the elect are forever justified, and that this one sacrifice need not and cannot be repeated in any way or manner.

This is evident already from passages like John 10:11, 15, 27, 28: “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. . . . As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. . . . My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” On the cross Christ shed His lifeblood for His sheep. And those sheep are they whom the Father had given Him from all eternity. Hence, when He died on the cross, the elect were in Christ; and they died in and with Him. This is also evident from passages like Romans 6:3-7: “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin.” Also from this passage it is evident that all the believers, and therefore, all the elect, died in Christ when He shed His lifeblood on the accursed tree, and that therefore they are forever free from sin. To the passage of Eph. 1:3, 4 we already called your attention. But we must remind you of this passage in connection with the seventh verse of the same chapter. In verses 3 and 4 we are told that all the elect are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places according as they are chosen in Him. And in verse 7 we read: “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sin, according to the riches of his grace.” In other words, redemption through the blood of Christ and the forgiveness of sins belong to the spiritual blessings in heavenly places which the elect have in Christ Jesus. And therefore, a repeated sacrifice for their forgiveness is certainly totally unnecessary. The same truth is emphasized in Col. 1:20-22: “And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight.”

But it is especially the epistle to the Hebrews that emphasizes the truth that Christ died for all His people once forever, and that therefore that sacrifice can never be repeated. This is evident from Heb. 7:23-27: “And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.” The emphasis in this passage is plainly that, while the priests and the sacrifices of the old dispensation were necessarily many, the one sacrifice of Christ is offered once for
all His people, and can never be repeated. The same truth is expressed in Heb. 9:11, 12: “But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.” The redemption by the one sacrifice of Christ with which He entered into the holy place is therefore eternal and irrevocable. Again, in the same chapter, verses 24-26, we read: “For Christ is not entered into the holy place made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then he must often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” And to quote no more, in Heb. 10:11-14 we read: “And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.”

We conclude, therefore, that the doctrine of the popish mass may indeed be said to be an accursed idolatry and a denial of the one and all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ. And we maintain that this one sacrifice of our Savior did blot out forever the sins of all the elect. Moreover, we maintain that Christ Himself applies the merits of this one sacrifice of us by His Spirit, that we receive the forgiveness of sins through the justifying faith, and that this faith is wrought and strengthened by the Spirit through the means of the preaching of the Word and the proper use of the sacraments.

H. H.

* * * *

Of Books


Dr. John Gill was an English divine of the eighteenth century. He is known to many of us because of his pronounced views on predestination and the sovereignty of God.

In his Body of Divinity he offers us a complete system. It is divided into two parts: 1. A Body of doctrinal Divinity; 2. A Body of Practical Divinity. In the first part he treats five loci of dogmatics: theology, anthroplogy, christology, soteriology, and eschatology. The doctrine of the church and the means of grace is not treated under the first, but under the second part. We cannot discover a reason for this order.

On the whole, I gladly recommend this work of Dr. Gill, not only to our ministers, but to all who are interested in sound doctrine and who do not hesitate to put on their thinking-cap. The work is rather scholarly yet not so that it is beyond the reach of the average reader. It is comparable to the work of Brakel, well-known to our older Dutch readers.

The work is doctrinally sound. But this statement must be made with certain restrictions.

1. Under the attributes of God, Dr. Gill speaks of common grace. p. 82 ff.

2. As a pronounced Baptist he vehemently opposes infant baptism, which he considers “a part and pillar of popery.” Cf. pp. 856, 896 ff.

3. He offers a very peculiar view of the “milenium”, which, according to him, is a personal reign of Christ with all His saints on the new earth, before the resurrection of the wicked and the final judgment. p. 643 ff.

With these restrictions, I heartily recommend the book to the discerning reader.

H. H.

HOPE

There is a quietness and calm
For those who rest with God;
A peace and happiness of soul
That gloriously guards.

We do not see the way which leads
Unto the throne of God;
The path which winds up to His home
Is not at all times clear.

Our eyes must close, our lives ebb out,
E're we that place shall find;
God, though our hearts have failed before,
Thy mercy never ends.

Look to the morn, where softly comes
The subtle shining sun;
For in the day of grace, we trust,
Shall come a brighter one.

Once More . . . The Promise

As I stated in my previous article, according to our Confessions and the Scriptures, the promise of God as to the form of its words is not an “if” clause sentence. Hence, such a sentence as, “if you believe, you will be saved,” is not the promise. But the promise is simply, “I, the Lord, will save you my people.”

According to our Confessions, the promise of God is not such an “if” clause sentence. This was proved by quotations from the Confession (Canons, chap. 11, art. 5).

According to the Scriptures, the promise of God is not such an “if” clause sentence. This was proved by several quotations from the Scriptures. We first took notice of the promise as first proclaimed by the Lord Himself by His own voice immediately after the fall, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; and it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise its heel.”

This, so it was remarked, is a simple sentence. It is all promise. It is not pivoted on some such “if” clause as, “If thou believest.”

It bears repeating that this promise, known as the protevangel, is the seed of all the promises spoken thereafter. As was stated, what must follow from this is, that nowhere in the Scriptures is the promise of God an “if” clause sentence. I quoted several Scripture passages to prove this point. Quoted was the promise as it was proclaimed first to Noah, then to Abraham, next to Jacob, again to the church of the days of Isaiah, and finally to the church of the New Dispensation.

I want to quote one more Scripture passage to drive home this point. Let us yet attend to the promise as it came to the church by the voice of Ezekiel as recorded in the 36th chapter of his discourse. Reminding the prophet of how He, the Lord, had poured His fury upon the house of Israel for the blood that they had shed upon the land, and for their idols wherewith they had polluted it; and of how He had scattered them among the heathen, and dispersed them through the countries (verses 16-20), the Lord continues as follows, “But I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned, because this house believed. And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, if the house of Israel will believe. And the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes, if you believe. Then I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean, if you believe. From all your uncleanness, and all your abominations, I will cleanse you, if you believe. And a new spirit will I put within you, a spirit of flesh and will give you an heart of flesh, which the house of Israel had profaned, because this house believed. And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, if the house of Israel will believe. And the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes, if you believe. Then I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean, if you believe. From all your uncleanness, and all your abominations, I will cleanse you, if you believe. And a new spirit will I put within you, if you believe. And a new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, if you believe. And I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and will give you an heart of flesh, if you believe. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, if you believe.

What comfort could a man, brought under the conviction of sin and thus having come to know himself as a sinner by nature totally depraved, guilty and damnable in the sight of God and thus lost and undone,—I ask, what comfort could such a man derive from the above communication, had it come to the church as pivoted on an “if” clause? Absolutely no comfort whatever.

For let us consider that such a man stands out in his own mind as in need of all things—thus in need of a new heart and a new spirit, in need of faith and
pardon, and grace and always more grace to forsake sin and put on Christ and to fight the good fight as seeking the things of Christ’s heavenly kingdom. “My soul cleaveth to the dust,” so prayed the psalmist, “quicken thou me according to thy word. Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight. Turn away mine eyes from vanity; and quicken thou me in the way. Let thy mercies come unto me, o Lord, even thy salvation according to thy word. Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee; and let thy judgments help me.” Ps. 119.

But what would such a petitioner have to plead on and to live by—on and by what real promise—were it true that in the Scriptures the promises of God, including the promise of faith, came to the church as pivoted on an “if” clause such as, “if thou believest,” so that all that God were saying to that petitioner is, “I will give thee a new heart, quicken thee in the way, help thee in thy unbelief, cause my mercies to come unto thee, give thee understanding, remove thee from lying, if thou believest.” That petitioner would have no promise to plead on and to live by. For promises pivoted on “if” clauses are not promises. Such a declaration as “if you believe you will be saved,” is not a promise.

But if a new heart and a new spirit are not promised; if contrition of heart and repentance are not promised, if faith is not promised, if Christ’s return and the renewal of all things are not promised; if, on a word, nothing at all is really promised, how could a man thirsting for these things, pray for them? He could not and he might not. For there would be to him no promise bequeathing upon him the right to these things and thereby encouraging him to seek these things in prayer.

Let us see how the psalmist David prayed. Psalm 31 is one of those prayers in which he craved God’s help in the following language, “Let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness. Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for a house of defence to save me. Pull me out of the net that they have laid for me. Have mercy upon me, o Lord, for I am in trouble: my eye is consumed with grief, yea, my soul and my belly, and so on through the end of the psalm.

On what was this saint basing his petitions for God’s help? Certainly on a word, a testimony of God spoken by the Spirit in his heart. What was that word? What was its content? Was it this: I, the Lord, will save thee out of all thy troubles, if thou believest? Not that. We must consult the Psalm for the answer, taking notice of the following expressions of faith occurring in it, “In thee, o Lord, do I put my trust (verse 1). For thou art my rock and my fortress (verse 3). For thou art my strength (verse 4). Thou hast redeemed me, o Lord God of truth (verse 6). I have hated them that regard lying vanities: but I trust in the Lord (verse 6). But I have trusted in thee, o Lord: I said, Thou art my God.”

What are these expressions of faith of this petitioner but the echo of God’s very own unconditional testimony in his heart that the Lord is His God, the Savior of his life, the God of his salvation. How could the heart of the petitioner have said, “Thou art my God,” except by the Spirit, that is, without the Spirit first having spoken this profession in his heart?

This is revelation to be sure. But revelation in this sense did not cease certainly with the closing of the canon of the Scriptures by the death of the last apostle. If believers are to know that they are God’s sons and that He is their God, God must tell them. And God does tell them as certainly as He told Abraham, the father of the faithful, when He spake in his heart the Word, “I am thy God. Walk before my face and be upright.” And this witness of God in the hearts of His people is not pivoted on an “if” clause. It thus completely closes for them the question whether they are saved. With this testimony in their hearts—a testimony the contents of which the Spirit derives from the Scriptures—they know.

Once more then, the promises of God in the Scriptures do not come to the elect as pivoted on an “if” clause. The promises of God are “if-less” indeed and therefore unconditional. They are truly promises—declarations of God that He by His Spirit speaks in the hearts of His elect—promises, therefore by which His people live and die and on which they build for time and eternity.

In the light of these observation it ought to be clear that the view according to which the promises of God come to the elect as pivoted on an “if” clause is a serious error—an error that really loses the believers God’s very gospel. And nothing is here retrieved by saying that the promise is conditional in the sense that God fulfills the condition. For were the promise conditional even in this sense, it still would needs be pivoted on some such “if” clause as “if you believe”. But once more, to pivot the promise on an “if” clause is to destroy it as as promise. Such a statement as, “if you believe, you will be saved,” is not what the Scriptures mean by promise. And the reason is obvious. Being what it is, an “if-clause” sentence, in the soul of every one to whom it is addressed, it leaves unanswered the question whether he is saved. It is obvious, certainly, that to say to a man that, if he believes, he is saved, is not to say to him that he is actually saved. If this is true, how could God assure his people that they are actually saved by some such an “if-clause” declaration? Impossible.
This requires an “if-less, unconditional promise. Let us by all means insist then, that the promises of God are indeed “if-less” and therefore unconditional. Let us realize what is at stake here. Nothing less than this, namely, whether there is such a thing as a Gospel of God, and if so, whether that Gospel is to be or not to be in our circles.

However, as I remarked in my previous article on this subject, this is not denying that such statements as, “If you believe, you will be saved,” occur in the Scriptures. Fact is that both the Old and New Testament Bible are replete with such statements. They occur rather frequently in the epistles. And it raises the question whether sentences of this type, though “if-clause” statements as to the form of their words, must not in certain connections at least be taken as real promises as to the thought conveyed. This seems to be the case, for example, with the “if-clause” sentence in Romans 4:24. Abraham, so the apostle relates in the verses preceding, believed against hope in hope, “that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah’s womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God: and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able to perform. And therefore, it was imputed to him for righteousness.” And then the apostle continues, “Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.”

Must not this “if-clause” statement, by reason of the setting in which it occurs, be taken to mean, “to whom—that is, to us—it shall be imputed indeed, seeing that we do believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead?” Seemingly so and this on the ground of the following consideration. The apostle addresses his discourse to the church of God at Rome, including him in this “our” without the mental reservation, “If he be an elect.”

But this argument is invalid for the following reasons. First, it was always the same Christian brotherhood that was being addressed, and this without regard to the fact that all is not Israel that is of Israel. That is to say, the apostle was not classifying the members of the church at Rome into elect and reprobated and addressing in his epistle now the one group and then the other; but from the beginning to the end of his epistle in all that he wrote, he was speaking to the entire congregation as to the whole of its constituency. To every member in the church Paul was saying, “Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.” But I must hasten to add that he was not in his mind singling out the individual member in the church and saying to him, “Christ was delivered for your offences,” and putting the period here. The apostle was not addressing individuals in this sense; he was addressing individuals in their totality. It can also be stated this way. Though to the total of members Paul was saying, “Was delivered for our offences,” he was not in his mind singling out the individual member in the church and including him in this “our” without the mental reservation, “If he be an elect.”

Second. This “if-clause” statement reappears, be it in a somewhat different form, at chap. 8:13. And it reappears at this place in conjunction with a sentence that sets forth what is necessarily implied in such an “if-clause” statement. Here the text reads, “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the flesh, ye shall live.”

We see now what we do to the Scriptures, when we convert this “if-clause” statement into a promise. We involve the Scriptures, definitely this epistle, in the strangest contradiction. For in the places where this “if-clause statement appears, we make the epistle first to say, “For ye, brethren, do live after the flesh; Hence ye shall die; but ye, brethren, do mortify through the Spirit the deeds of the flesh; hence ye shall live.” And so at 4:24, “To us, brethren, it shall be imputed, for we do believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; but to us, brethren, it shall not be imputed, for we do not believe on him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.”

It is plain that the “if-clause” statement at this place cannot be taken as a promise directed solely to the elect. And what is true of this “if-clause” statement at this place is true of all “if-clause” statements in every place of the Bible. They are not promises.
This again brings us to the question: what are these “if-clause” declarations of the type, “if you believe you shall be saved.” To call Scripture-utterances of this type conditional declarations is wrong.

Allow we to remark in passing that the term “condition” because of its large variety of meanings, is one of the most confusing words in the English language. In all my writings, thus also in this present one, I use the term condition in the sense of pre-requisite; Holland, voorwaarde. I think that in our present discussions we had better stick to this meaning of the term, for otherwise we won't know anymore whether we are coming or going in our present dispute. The Liberated use the term in the sense of “voorwaarde”. Van Dalen in his “Groote Woordenboek,” defines the term “voorwaarde” as follows:

1. Beding. 2. Voorwaarden stellen, die eerst ingewilligd, werkelijkheidm oeten worden, voor men zich aan het overeengekomeen heeft; ik sta het U toe, onder voorwaarde, met de bedinging. 3. De rechts- term: toekomstige en onzekere gebeurtenis waarvan eene verbintenis afhankelijk is gesteld: de voorwaarde is vervuld.

All who can read and understand the Holland will see that according to this definition, a condition, voorwaarde, is a prerequisite laid down by the party of the first part of a contract that the party of the second part must of his own will agrees to realize and before the party of the first part will do as he agreed. Further, according to Van Dallen’s definition, whether the condition will be realized is uncertain. It may and it may not be fulfilled, all depending on the will of the party of the second part of the contract. This definition of condition in the sense of “voorwaarde” fully agrees with the definition contained in “The Century Dictionary.”

As was just stated, to call a scripture-declaration of the type, “if you believe, you will be saved,” a conditional, declaration is wrong. It is wrong because such a Scripture-utterance is not a conditional sentence but simply an if-clause sentence. It is certainly necessary to distinguish between the two. For though all conditional sentences are “if-clause” sentences, all “if-clause” sentences are not conditional sentences. Just because they are identical as to form and grammatical structure is no reason for putting them in one class and calling them one and all conditional. For there is a real difference as to meaning.

Let us illustrate. The thought conveyed by such a statement as, “if a child breaks out with a scarlet rash over its body, it has scarlet fever,” is not certainly that a child is taken down with scarlet fever on the condition that it breaks out with scarlet rash. To read such a meaning into the sentence is to reduce it to sheer nonsense. And the reason is obvious. The scarlet rash is not the cause of scarlet fever, but the sign, symptom and indication of it. But now take a sentence like the following. A man says to his neighbor, “If you are on this or that street corner at nine o'clock to morrow morning, I will pick you up in my car.” The clause in italics is expressive of a real condition. It has all the characteristics of a condition, “voorwaarde”. Being on the specified corner at the specified time is a pure pre-requisite that the rider of his own free will agrees to realize and also must realize in order to be picked up by his obliging neighbor. It’s the part of the contract that he must first fulfill, if he is going to be picked up. And whether he will ride or not is wholly dependent on his ability and willingness to realize the condition laid down for him. Also, whether he will do as told is uncertain. He may or may not, depending on many things.

Here then we have to do with a real condition and conditional sentence. There are then such things as “if-clause sentences” expressive of no condition at all and therefore deserving to be known exactly by that name and by none other, namely “if-clause sentences”. Besides, there are also such things as “conditional sentences”. And they deserve to be known by this name, because that is what they are as to their real meaning. There is no objection to putting these two kinds of sentences into one class and calling them all by one name. But let that name be not “conditional sentences”, but “if-clause sentences”, and let the names for each kind of sentences within the class be: “non-conditional if-clause sentences” and “conditional if-clause sentences”.

The Lexicons, of course, do not have this terminology. But that doesn’t matter. The reason I present it, is to compel ourselves to make some very necessary distinctions in our present dispute in order that we may know what we are at.

Now, then, what is such a declaration as, “If you believe, you will be saved.” Is it a “non-conditional if-clause sentence,” or a “conditional if-clause sentence”?

It is not, certainly, a “conditional if-clause sentence”. This ought to be as plain as the sun in the heavens,—plain that the covenant is not a contract in which faith in Christ is an uncertain condition, pre-requisite, “voorwaarde” laid down by God as the party of the first part and that man, as the party of the second part, of his own free will agrees to realize and must realize before God will save him and thereby do what He agreed. In a word, faith is not a condition. Such an “if-clause” sentence as “if you believe you will be saved,” is not a conditional “if-clause” declaration. For the covenant is God’s; faith is His gift, and the believers as saints are His creations, the sheep of His pasture. And therefore we call such a statement as “if you believe, you will be saved,” a non-conditional if-clause declaration. Mark you “declaration”, and
not “promise”, and this with reason. There is not an atom of promise in such a sentence. But more of this in a following article in which will also be taken up the matter of the real function of such non-conditional if-clause sentences as, “if you believe, you will be saved.”

But what then is faith? According to the Scriptures and the Confessions, faith certainly is not a condition “voorwaarde” but the Spirit’s instrument for realizing in the elect the virtues of Christ’s cross, and in the elect faith is a sign, indicating that he has life in himself. Says Christ, “He who believes in the Son hath life in himself abiding, and I will raise him up in the last day.”

G. M. Ophoff.

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Contribution

Also “A Promise” In Both Scripture and Confessions?

During the past year the truth of God relative to His Promise, the Promise of the Gospel, has been brought forcibly to our attention once more. As the readers all know, no doubt, this was occasioned by our contact with the Liberated Churches and the subsequent composition of a “Declaration Of Principles” by our Synod of 1950. As is to be understood, the attention was in large degree focused on the question as to the proper conception of the Promise of the Gospel, both from a Scriptural and from a Reformed-Confessional viewpoint.

Especially the editor of the Standard Bearer, Rev. H. Hoeksema, has repeatedly brought to the foreground the truth of Scripture, that “the Promise of the Gospel is God’s oath that He will infallibly lead His elect to salvation and glory in the way of faith”.

Now this is, indeed, commendable. In so doing he championed what has been, I think, called “the general thrust” of the formulated Declaration.

Now what must we say of this definition of the Promise of the Gospel?

Obviously “Promise” is here understood in the sense of “the Promise”, as this was revealed by God Himself in the gospel, first of all in Paradise, as it was proclaimed by God through patriarchs and prophets, and represented by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law, and last of all was fulfilled by His only begotten Son. (Heid. Cat., Ques. 19; Gen. 3:15; 12:1-5). It is the Promise as it is realized in Christ’s death and resurrection and glorious ascension, and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, in the gathering of the Church, elected unto everlasting life, through the preaching of the Gospel, so that she is called, justified, sanctified and glorified, and set with Christ in the Father’s Kingdom forever, in the heavenly Canaan above! Compare Hebrews 11:9, 13-16, 40. Acts 2:14-42.

What must we say of this presentation of the Promise? There is only one answer possible for faith. It is: I confess with a glad heart! It is the glorious and unrefutable teaching of Scripture warming the cockles of every believing heart. It is the glowing conviction of the undersigned that the preaching of this Promise of the gospel must resound from all of our pulpits! I do not desire to intimate that this is not the case, but I simply am uttering what we should do in obedience to the command: Preach the Word!

However, I do believe that every Reformed man will recognize that both the Scriptures and the Confessions speak of “Promises” and of “a promise”. It is to that element that I wish to call attention here. I believe, that both the Scriptures and the Confessions teach not simply and only the Promise concerning the elect, but that they also teach promises to the elect, as they are concretely confronted with the preaching of the great Promise of the Gospel, as realized in Jesus Christ! These promises live in the battlefront, waging the battle of faith against the flesh, world and Satan. They are, to be sure, preached to all to whom God sends the Gospel in His good-pleasure, but the promise preached is for the elect as they come and believe. Promises they are in the plural, in many forms of speech addressed to the confessing church in this world!

I believe that every Reformed man, who is reformed in faith and heart, will recognize such “promises”, such assurances of the Gospel!

I shall quote briefly from the Confessions that such is the case.

I refer the reader to Canons of Dordt V, art. 14, where we read: “And as it hath pleased God by the preaching of the Gospel, to begin this work of grace in us, so He preserves, continues, and perfects it by the hearing and reading of His Word, by meditation thereon, and by the exhortations, threatenings, and the promises thereof, as well as by the use of the sacraments”. If words have meaning, then our fathers would teach us here, that God perfects our faith and brings it to fruition also by promises which are enjoined with exhortations and threatenings. My point is, that the confessions speak in this instance of promises in the plural, which promises are not indentifiable with the Great Promise! They are not identical with the promise, although they cannot ever be separated from it as would the Arminians, who speaking of God’s work for us and His work of salvation in us, do not rightly divide the Word of truth. For these are promises not merely concerning the believers, but
they are promises to them as outgrowth of the Great Promise concerning them!

The undersigned has no doubt in his mind, that when the Canons speak of “promise” in III, IV, 8b of “Promise” it has in mind the concrete assurance of God to believers that they are acceptable to Him. We there read: “He, moreover, seriously promises eternal life and rest of soul, to as many as come to Him and believe on Him.” This promise of the preaching surely admonishes and assures the believer to wholly rely on the saving mercies of God. This assurance certainly is the Promise worked out by God through the preaching, but it is working it out through the calling of the Word, as this Word is preached and as it is wonderfully accompanied in the believers by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. These promises of the Gospel tell everyone believing that he has everlasting life, to be sure, but they also encourage to more confidence and trust, and quiet the tempest driven soul. They are God’s assurances to us that our anchor holds, sure and stedfast within the vail. Let there be no doubt about that. Thus all is anchored in eternal election.

And as for the Scriptures? Surely the Scriptures teach the same as the Confessions do on this point. Our fathers were speaking the language of the Scriptures when they wrote down in Confessional statement that God continues, preserves and finishes His work in the elect also by the threatenings, exhortations and promises, to be sure.

In James 1:12 the author speaks of a promise that is given to those loving God. We quote: “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he hath been approved, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to them that love Him.”

Now what is our point here?

Is it, that by nature there is a class of men, who by the power of their free-will either love God in actuality or who could possibly thus love God. Not at all. Nor is that the point of James. He is speaking to the brethren, who must be perfected in their faith through suffering. No, God assures such a one, who by grace continues to love Him and be obedient in patience to the very end, that He will crown him with life, joy, happiness, blessedness, and complete contentment. But this is a promise to such a one loving God! It is a blessed assuring Word of God.

Legalism, do I hear someone say? Are we then not saved by grace, without works that we have done. Let’s not be foolish. No, it is the grace of God, that does not make of none effect the law of God, but exactly establishes it. Rom. 3:31. It is the truth that Jesus did not come to destroy the law and the Prophets, but that He came to fulfill them. And so it is the law of the spiritual kingdom of heaven, of the better Covenant not written on tables of stone, but written upon the tables of our heart by the Holy Spirit. It is the glory of the ministry of reconciliation, that we now keep the law from gratitude. And it is exactly unto this that the believer is encouraged, threatened in the preaching. And the promises are directed not to the elect in the abstract, but to the elect-believer as he struggles against sin, and lays hold on the promise to those loving God by God’s grace. Grace establishes the law. And so the promise is preached to all to whom God sends it. However, only those loving God give heed and lay hold on life, ever running the race.

I could quote more instances from Scripture, but I forebear. The point is established, that we must distinguish without separating “the Promise” from “promises”.

It is upon these latter promises that the believing soul feeds, and thus it is saved by faith, and that, too, by virtue of the great Promise as the oath of God to infallibly lead all the elect to salvation and glory! But I cannot feed upon the glory of the Great Promise without feeding upon the promises as above referred to. Personally, I would verily despair of life itself, if I could not lay hold on these very promises and threatenings with which God Himself confronts me, and by which He addresses me in the preaching. I would not have it be a secret, that these expressions of the fathers in the Confessions comfort my poor and wretched soul no end! Thus the faith in me, the mouth and hand of my soul (Belgic Confession, art. 35) has something concrete to take hold of. Through them I become assured that the great Promise is also realized for and in me!

Since also this element of “a promise” is thoroughly Scriptural and Confessional, and since it is important that we be not misunderstood on this matter, nor misrepresented, I beg the coming Synod to give also this element of the Promise its proper due.

Synod will have the responsibility of facing also this element of the Promise when it considers the overture and advice of Classis East in regard to this matter. There are various amendments to the Declaration, and one of them is this matter of the preaching of the Gospel, and God’s concrete promise of life and peace to all who come and believe. Certainly this element is so important, that it should receive more attention than that of a mere foot-note. As of now it will simply be an amendment to the formulation of the Promise of the Gospel, but it receives no further exposition in the reasoning of the Declaration. That will, to my mind, not do.

Why am I insistent in this matter?

I am personally strongly convinced, that it is not clear to all, that the matter of the preaching of the Promise of the Gospel, and the content of the Promise, must not be presented as the “one-side” of the matter.
in contradistinction from the "other-side" of the matter in the way the two-track theology would present the matter. It is in a word not clear, that these promises to the believer are just as wide in scope and as rich in content as the Great Promise is. They are no wider, they promise no more and no less. And this truth should be clearly and unambiguously stated.

By our stating the truth fully and unequivocally, it will surely be easy for others to either agree or disagree. They should not be made to stumble over half-truths. They should stumble, if stumble they must, over the clear presentation of the full counsel of God. Over nothing less and nothing more may they be offended. Then all, who believe as we do, will certainly agree. They should not be made to stumble over half-truths. They should stumble, if stumble they must, over the clear presentation of the full counsel of God. Over nothing less and nothing more may they be offended.

In love to all and malice to none I submit these lines. I will never be responsible for any document that does not state the whole truth, neither will I help others be responsible for it.

Epi Pasin Aletheian: Above everything the truth, as it is in Jesus!

G. Lubbers.

Strange Doings

In the Concordia issue of April 26, 1951, appears another article by brother Van Spronsen of the Netherlands. I wish to quote from this article, also and particularly as it reflects upon recent happenings in Hamilton, Canada. I do not write this because I wish to throw additional oil upon the fire, but only for the sake of the truth and the record.

First, I refer to the following in the brother's article, and I will underscore that to which I wish to call attention, page 6, first column, third paragraph: "Of course it is too bad that it goes that way, and if those people come to visit us we want to receive them cordially, even let them partake of the Lord's Supper, still more, we even like to correspond with them, within certain limits, but by all means keep them apart and separate."—end of quote. Now I do not know whether the brother refers to what may have happened in the Hamilton Protestant Reformed Church. The possibility exists that he may have received information from members of that church. I repeat: this I do not know. One thing is sure, however: the brother must have received some information to this effect. Why should he otherwise write this? And it is a fact that this did happen in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hamilton. I wish to say something about this. At the end of the particular quotation which appears in the brother's article this expression occurs: but by all means keep them apart and separate. Brother Van Spronsen, we permitted people to attend the Lord's Supper before we admitted them into our fellowship for their sake, to gain them, and not to keep them apart and separate. We will at present let the question rest whether it was exactly proper and correct to do what we did (our people will certainly understand our difficult position because of the steady influx of these immigrants), but the fact remains that we did this for the sake of these brothers and sisters in the Lord. I am quite willing, brother, to give an account of our action and explain it, but do not deem it necessary at this time. And what was the result of this action by the Hamilton consistory? What did the immigrants say? This: if we permitted these people to attend the Lord's Supper they would say: they do permit us to attend the Lord's Supper, but we may not become members; and, when we did not immediately accept them into our fellowship they would say: they do not wish to accept us as members but we may come to the Lord's Supper. On the one hand they would criticize us because we permitted them to come to the Lord's Supper, and, on the other hand, we were criticized because we did not accept them as members. If we did not immediately accept them as members they would tell us that we had no right to permit them to attend the sacrament; and if we would not permit them to partake of the sacrament we would be told that we refuse brothers and sisters in the Lord to eat and drink of the body and blood of Christ. But I repeat: we took the action we did for the sake of these brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Another expression in the article of brother Van Spronsen upon which I wish to comment is the following (page 6, third column), and again I underscore: "For I see many misunderstandings. I refuse to accept, e.g., what brother Reitsma writes in that same article, namely, that there are Liberated immigrants in Canada who teach "that God loves all the children who are baptized and would save them all," and that "Christ at least merited the chance of salvation for all." I hold myself recommended to receive the addresses of these Liberated brethren and sisters. They aren't there,"—end of quote.

I wish to comment upon this also. I realize that brother Van Spronsen quotes here a statement of brother Reitsma. And that brother is well able to defend himself. However, the same statement has also been made by the undersigned in previous articles in the Standard Bearer. In fact, the undersigned has asked brother Van Spronsen to comment upon them. Until now he has not done so. I consider this statement of the brother as also an answer to what I have written in the past. And now he has the boldness to declare that this is not true. He refuses to accept what brother Reitsma wrote. He writes boldly that "they aren't there." Brother Van Spronsen, anyone who is acquainted with the things we experienced and
heard in Canada must simply be amazed at what you write in this particular article. You say: "they aren't there." Brother, let me assure you that they are here, and that there are many of them. The undersigned once visited a brother and asked him: Do you believe that God says to each child: I love you and wish to save you, and he answered: That is what I believe. This was said in the presence of two elders of the church of Hamilton. Others were also present. Statements such as: God loves all the children; God wishes to save all the children; God elected and reprobated upon foreseen faith and unbelief; Christ died for everybody (once I spent two hours at a place and the largest part of the time was taken up by a discussion whereby I sought to probe to them that Christ died only for the elect); John 3:16 and Matt. 23:37 quoted in support of a general love of God, were all made in the presence of witnesses. Why should I name the persons individually as brother Van Spronsen requests? Most of them have since then changed their address. Does not Brother Van Spronsen believe me? I am convinced that the members of the Hamilton consistory would not have the courage to deny the truth of the statements which I have attributed to these immigrants. Once, when the statement was made that God would save all the children, and it was remarked that in that case man would be stronger than God, the person answered: Well, yes, if you put it that way. Brother Van Spronsen, these things are true. I heard them repeatedly in the year of 1950. And therefore I call your action in your article: strange doing.

However, for the benefit of brother Van Spronsen I will now be a little more specific. We visited once last year a family in Orangeville, Ontario. I preached there in the house, and after the service we discussed our churches and the truth. The undersigned was asked the question relative the infants who die in their infancy. In the course of the discussion the statement was made that God elected and reprobated upon foreseen faith and unbelief. I showed them from the Canons that this was Arminian. Then the statement was made that God loves all the children. I asked the party whether God loves the same child when, after arrived at the years of discretion, he would reject the word and gospel of the living God. Of course, the answer was in the negative. But they did wish to maintain that the Lord loved him when he was a child. When I asked the question finally how it was possible for God to love a person when he was a babe and later hate the same person after he had become eighteen years of age, the parents hesitated but a boy of some 13 years of age intervened with the remark: that is impossible, because then God would be changeable. Brother Van Spronsen, this is a fact. I am writing this because you asked for it. This was said in the presence of witnesses. In fact, at one of our later visits to the same place one of the older girls remarked that the Bible is full of the general and universal love of God. Why do I write this? Because I would have it clearly understood that I wrote the truth in my previous articles. Brother Van Spronsen, remarks such as I have quoted in this paragraph and in the preceding are not reformed, have never been reformed, but are arminian.

Another thing. The brother writes in his article that he sees many misunderstandings. Now I wish to ask him this question: Will you please show us where we misunderstand you and the view of the Liberated? Brother, do you have any doubts as to what we believe? You know what the Declaration means. I am convinced that Professor Schilder knows what it means. I am also convinced that the immigrants in Ontario, with whom we have been in contact, know what this document means. I am sure that there is no misunderstanding as far as our position is concerned. But, what do you believe? Have we not asked Prof. Veenhof more than once to explain statements which he made in his writings? Why is it that we do not receive an answer? What objection do you have against our doctrine and please give us the grounds for your objection.

Thirdly, I now repeat the question which I have asked before. Presuppose that hundreds of Protestant Reformed immigrants were to descend upon the Netherlands and ask to be admitted into the membership of the Liberated Churches, or organize as a Liberated Church upon the basis that they maintain their own peculiar conception, continue to receive literature out of America, spread their literature through the Netherlands, and try to make the Liberated Churches Protestant Reformed, would your churches permit this? Would you permit Protestant Reformed immigrants to do in the Netherlands what the Liberated immigrants wish to do here? Why has not this question been answered?

Another matter which the undersigned considers strange is in connection with the visit and activities of the Rev. Hettinga here in Ontario and, specifically, around Hamilton. Last summer the consistory of Hamilton wrote an article in the Standard Bearer in connection with these activities. We asked for an appraisal of this action by the Rev. Hettinga by your correspondence committee. Thus far not one word has ever been written in connection with these activities. Is it true that Rev. Hettinga visited members of the Hamilton Protestant Reformed Church, and also of the church at Chatham, and said to them: "You know how you were taught in the Netherlands; there is only one baptism; how can you attend the Lord's Supper in the Protestant Reformed Church?" We repeat: not one word has been written by a writer
of the Netherlands in connection with these activities. Brother Van Spronsen declares that we must not drift apart, must not work to break down. And Prof. Schilder, if I recall, speaks in one of his articles in connection with the Declaration of “verbrokkelend werk in Canada.” Now I ask this question: Do you consider the work of Rev. Hettinga “verbrokkelend”? And we also understand that Rev. Hettinga is a member of the Correspondence Committee of the Liberated Churches. Is this silence in connection with these labors of Rev. Hettinga not strange?

Finally, is it not rather strange that not one word has been written by a writer in the Netherlands in connection with the action by the Hamilton “Protestant Reformed Church” whereby they first suspended and later deposed a Protestant Reformed minister, who, according to the testimony of the entire consistory, never said one word which, in their opinion, was in conflict with Scripture or the Confessions? And, brother, you know the history of this utterly wicked and scandalous deposition. It was therefore with mixed emotions that I read the following statement in your April 26 article: “And it is also because of that they can so easily suspend and depose office bearers.” Brother, we are fighting for the truth. The immigrants themselves here have said that the Liberated and the Protestant Reformed conception cannot exist side by side. We are not fighting for a truth. We are not fighting for the definition of a word, such as the word: covenant. We are not fighting for a personal idea, one or more persons’ opinion or opinions. We are fighting for the truth of God’s eternal and sovereignly particular grace, for the truth that God loves only the elect, would save only the elect, and will save only and surely all the elect. We are no “genadewinkeltjes” but are resolved to keep that which we have. Tell us, please: what do we teach in conflict with Scripture or the Confessions?

H. Veldman.

Call to Synod

The Consistory of the Fourth Protestant Reformed Church, calling church by decision of the last Synod, hereby notifies our churches that Synod will hold its opening session on Wednesday morning, June 6, at 9 o’clock, in our church auditorium.

The regular pre-synodical prayer service will be held on Tuesday evening, June 5, at 7:45 o’clock. Upon request, the Rev. H. Hoeksema will lead us in this divine worship.

Consistory of the Fourth Prot. Ref. Church.

Exposition of Romans 6:1-14

III.

Let it be clearly borne in mind, dear reader, that the apostle is championing the gospel truth in these verses, that where sin abounded grace did much more abound. The truth of the glad-tidings of salvation is that they, who have received much grace of forgiveness of sins, are also thankful for much. We have but to call to mind the woman, who was a sinner, and who comes to anoint Jesus’ feet in the house of Simon, the leper. This woman did not cease to wash Jesus’ feet with her tears of gratitude, to dry His feet with her hair; in the overflowing gratitude she did not cease kissing the feet of Him whose shoe-latchet John the Baptist was not worthy to unloosen. Calling this graphically portrayed incident to mind is sufficient to give us a clear understanding of the grace of God, that is greater than all sin.

Shall we present this contrite and thankful sinner, who is redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus, as reasoning thus: where sin abounds, grace does much more abound; hence, I shall continue in sin, that grace may abound? Would any, who receives forgiveness, will to sin ad infinitum in order that grace might correspondingly abound the more?

God forbid!

Take one fleeting glance at this woman, who was a sinner, and you will be convinced. Nay, take one look of faith at Calvary, and the implication of Christ’s death and resurrection, and you too will cry: God forbid! How shall I, who am dead unto sin, live any longer therein? For as many as we have been baptized through the Holy Spirit into Christ crucified, we have been baptized into His death! And to be baptized into Christ’s death is a singular thing. It is the wonder of grace. It is the way into the life of Christ, which means: to live unto God through the newness of the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit writes God’s law, the keeping of God’s law in our hearts. Thus the oldness of the letter must give way for the newness of the Spirit.

This point is emphatically underscored by the Apostle. Writes he in verse 5: “For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, we shall also (in the likeness) of His resurrection”. The fine point in the Apostle’s reasoning in this quotation is, that where the former is the latter cannot possibly be absent. He who does not have the latter does not possess the former. The two are inseparably connected. Thus they are in Christ; thus they are also in us.
Of course, it should be kept in mind, that what is true in Christ is true for all who have been baptized into Him by a true faith. However, it should not be forgotten, nor should it be overlooked, that what is true in Christ is true for all who have been baptized into Him by a true faith. However, it should not be forgotten. It is this important distinction between the death and resurrection of Christ on the one hand, and the death and resurrection of us on the other hand, that is here maintained and taught in the text. At the same time the holy writer emphasizes the point of similarity between the death and resurrection of Christ and that of us, the believers.

Wherefore the apostle writes: For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection!

We shall not weary ourselves with too detailed an exposition of this passage. It is sufficient for our purpose to point out the following:

In the first place, we should keep in mind, that the apostle argues against all antinomism, the walking in sin that grace may abound, and that he proves conclusively, that walking in newness of life is the order of the day for the Christian; it is the need of the thankful heart of the forgiven sinner. This follows from the very nature of the work of Christ as our Mediator, who died and rose again in our behalf.

Secondly, this needs a bit of explanation. Hence, the "for if we have been united...." This "if" sentence does not mean that the apostle presents it as something doubtful whether the congregation has arisen with Christ subsequent to having died with Him, nor that he presents this as a mere objective possibility, but the "if" sentence is a sentence-construction, which presents the matter as being established reality. In the mind of the apostle the believers have become most intimately united with Christ in His death, and, therefore, they have also most assuredly become united with Christ in His resurrection. If the one is there, then the other is there too.

If such is the case, how can anyone live in sin, that grace may abound? We have died with Christ to live! As He died so we died, and as He lives so we live!

Thirdly, it should be noticed, that this former is true with a restriction. We suggested this already earlier in this essay. It is the restriction of the nature of the death and resurrection in Christ in distinction from the death and resurrection in us. He died as the Son of God, our Goel and Redeemer; we die as those who have been redeemed by Him. And this our death is not simply true of Christ's work for us, but it is, according to the text, most emphatically true in us; it is true in us, who have been ingrafted (united) in Christ by a true faith, and who thus receive all Christ's benefits by such an ingrafting-and-evermore-uniting-faith!

It is true, that commentators are at variance over the meaning of the term employed in the Greek original which is translated by the Staten Vertaling "een plant geworden zijnde", and by others as "being most closely united by faith". The former rendering is then pressed as the correct one by those who favor the idea of "ingrafting", the latter by those who would see in the term the dynamic growth of faith. In favor of the latter rendering is the meaning of the term itself. The term is: sumphotos gegenamen. Sumphotos is derived from the verb: sumphuo: The latter does not mean: ingraft, it means: to grow together. It follows the ingrafting proper, or it may be the process of making the ingrafting a conscious ingrafting under the operation of the Spirit through the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Lord's Supper.

Most intimately and consciously we are united with Christ in His death and resurrection! Here is the mystic tie of faith, relying upon the Promise of the Gospel. This being united with Christ in this manner causes Paul to say: I no more live, but what I now live I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me and delivered Himself in my behalf. Gal. 2:20. And, again, in this faith, in this most intimate fellowship and the longing for closer fellowship, Paul says: "that I might know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His suffering, becoming conformed unto His death; if by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead."

This is the being united, the growing together, the implanting with Christ of which the text speaks. It is not simply an ingrafting into Christ in one moment, but it is the entire conscious experience up to the present moment of the church at Rome. This is indicated by the use of the perfect tense in the Greek. It is a complete action up to the present moment that is indicated by this tense. And in this case it means: united with Christ as a conscious experience by faith; is the glorious reality of the life of Christ in us.

Of course, we have only thus been conformed unto the likeness of Christ's death, and the likeness of His resurrection. The question is: what does this mean?

The text speaks of the likeness of Christ's death. What does it mean to be most closely united with the likeness of Christ's death, and the "likeness" of His resurrection?

The term likeness suggests the strongest affinity
without implying identity. When God says: Let us make man in our image, and according to our likeness, then this "likeness" evidently underscores the strong affinity to God. God is holy, righteous and just. He is the Supreme Ruler over all. Man must be made in His likeness, in true righteousness and holiness, to rule over the earthly creation. He is like God, but He is never God. There is a very strong affinity. Thus too Christ said in Romans 8:3 that "God sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh." His flesh was just like ours, sin excepted. In this likeness we see the strongest possible affinity to our nature, but there is no identifying. Christ's nature was not sinful, His likeness, in true righteousness and holiness, to manifest in this murderer. He died unto sin and its guilt in Christ. As Christ died unto sin, condemning sin in the flesh, so we die unto sin entering into this work of Christ, wherein He condemned sin in the flesh. And as Christ arose in newness of life, so too we arise in faith in newness of life in the power of His resurrection. He is the resurrection and the life. He is its very power. And we rise in His power, and thus are conformed to the likeness of His death!

But if this is true, then surely we must not continue in sin that grace may abound. God forbid! We shall evermore will to come to the resurrection of the dead. We shall not count ourselves to have attained, but we shall keep the goal of the upward calling in Christ before our eyes, running the race lest anyone take our crown of life!

G. Lubbers.
Negatively, we may say, first of all, that our synod may give no heed to the mere fact as such that the majority of our consistories are not in favor of adopting the Declaration of Principles. And we may add: the delegates may give no heed to the position of their respective consistories as such or to the stand of the classis that delegated them. You are not bound in any sense whatever to vote as your consistory voted or as your classis voted on any matter before the Synod. Nor is the synod as a whole bound to vote as the majority of the consistories voted. Synod is no rubber stamp, nor is any delegate a rubber stamp, either of consistories, classes, or the churches at large. If that were the case, the balloting of synod could be done by mail at far less expense and trouble.

Secondly, synod may not and must not worry about the closeness of the vote on any matter. Whether the vote on the Declaration will be 16-0 or 9-7 among the 16 delegates to synod, either way, makes absolutely no principal difference. It may be said, of course, that it would be ideal to have a unanimous vote on any item, since that would be indicative of unanimity of opinion in our churches; but a simple majority is as binding as a unanimous vote. So true is this, that not even a two-third majority is required on any matter in our churches, however important we may consider it. The principle behind this is not a numbers-principle, but the fact that when a majority considers something in harmony with the Word of God, or with the articles of the church order, it must necessarily be binding. For that reason the Synod must pay no heed either to the last decision of Classis West concerning the Declaration, which speaks of the overwhelming documentary evidence against the Declaration, for the simple reason that Classis West never took the time to investigate all that evidence, having read it only once, but simply looked at numbers without deliberation.

Positively, this implies, first of all, that the Synod must deliberate. It must do so with patience, and at length. It must not hasten to go home. It must meet with the intention, not of finishing the business as quickly as possible, but of going home only after the business has been properly treated and finished. Let the delegates, to that end, set no date in their minds for adjournment before they arrive. Let them not look at the calendar. But let them come prepared to meet as long as the matters of God's kingdom require. For that they have been delegated.

It implies, secondly, that their deliberation must be serious. That means, that you must come in a sense with open minds. Deliberation has no value, if you make up your mind how to vote beforehand, and take the attitude: "You can talk all you want to. My mind is made up." It means, too, that you must come with "right" minds, minds that seek truth and justice, that love the Protestant Reformed truth, and that are ready to seek it and support it, regardless of consequences,—and the consequences may be serious. And it means that you must pray constantly: "Search me, o God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Concretely that will mean that as you deliberate and finally vote, you must vote on the basis of unanswerable and irrefutable arguments. As long as there remains an argument on any issue which you cannot refute, you can not honestly take a stand in your vote opposing that argument. If you do, you will not be able to say when you leave, "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us."

In the third place, the fear of the Lord implies that your deliberations shall be based upon Scripture, the Confessions, and the Church Order. You must cleave single-mindedly to that basis. An overwhelming majority of opinion (not of vote) among our people may not even deter you. The majority of our consistories may as such not influence you. If all the consistories rejected the Declaration, and you as delegates should be convinced of its right, you must pass it, being prepared to defend it upon the basis of the Word of God and our doctrinal standards. In that sense the synod must deliberate and vote independently. No, that would not be hierarchy, and the Synod would not be guilty in such a case of foisting something upon our churches. For the way would still be open to anyone, individual, consistory, or classis, to prove any decision contrary to the Word of God or the articles of the church order. And if such procedure should fail to change the majority or the protesting party, there is another way, that of separate existence,—which, may God graciously forbid. But the principle is this: whatever is agreed upon by majority vote upon the basis of the Word of God, the Confessions, and the Church Order is binding. The synod may therefore consider no utilitarian arguments, may not look fearfully to predicted results, may not be allured by visions of grandeur, may not be coerced by other majorities, may not be waylaid by unofficial polls of public opinion, but must single-mindedly act in accord with the fundamental principle mentioned above.

And that implies, in the fourth place, that whatever is agreed upon by majority vote shall be considered settled and binding. The majority, in last instance, does not merely agree. But the Synod agrees by majority vote. To forget that leads to anarchy. Then you will leave the decisions to be executed merely by the majority. You will rebel and make propaganda against a decision, and become guilty of slander against our churches. For unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the articles of the church order, it is settled and binding. That means
that unless you actually make the attempt, officially, by way of protest and appeal, to prove a decision in conflict with the Word of God and the church order, you shall in no sense militate against it, you shall support it, maintain it, and seek to enlighten the churches with regard to it. You cannot be neutral.

Laboring in that fear of the Lord, all will be well. In such an attitude there need be no doubt that brotherly love will abound among brethren. And in such a disposition of mind and heart, the transactions of synod will be to the welfare of God’s church and the glory of His Name.

And therefore, let the synodical delegates scrutinize their hearts and their minds, their thoughts and their words, and their decisions. And to that end let them be mindful constantly of the pledge they make in the “Public Declaration of Agreement with the Forms of Unity”, of the burden placed upon them in their synodical credentials, and Church Order according to which they must act.

And let us all, individuals and consistories and congregations, remember the gathering of synod before the throne of grace. For you and I do not sit on the sidelines in any real sense of the word. But your churches and mine, yea, God’s Church, is gathered there in its broadest gathering.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit abide with that church.

H. C. Hoeksema.

PERISCOPE

Sin in the Roman Catholic Church.

On this subject we quote from the “Wachter” as they in turn take over part of an article appearing in the “Converted Catholic Magazine”.

“According to this church sins must first of all be distinguished as mortal and venial, that is “sins unto death” and those which are forgiveable. Mortal sins are so called because they kill the supernatural life of the soul which is received in baptism, and set a person’s feet on the road to hell if they are not confessed and forgiven. Venial sins are not so serious, do not deprive a person of saving grace, do not have to be confessed to the priest, but will be punished in purgatory unless in this life there is sufficient penitence done through good works.

“You will easily understand that the Roman Catholic is very concerned over the mortal sins because the punishment of hell is connected to them. But it is not easy to determine in which category a certain sin belongs. The matter is indeed “intricate”.

When is a sin Mortal? When it falls under one of the three following conditions: 1) The sin, whether thought, word, work or omission, must be serious in its nature. Whether a certain matter is sufficiently serious must be determined by the theologians. 2) The sinner must be thoroughly conscious of his action. 3) The sinner must be free in his choice and not compelled in any way by another. So if you steal a small sum of money then you have committed a venial or forgiveable sin. This evidently implies that the stealing of a large sum would be a mortal or deadly sin. Should it happen that someone commits unknowingly a great evil then it falls into the category of venial or forgiveable sins. Drunkenness is a mortal sin, but no one has yet been able to determine theologically when a drunkard passes over the line between venial and mortal sins. If someone should commit a grave sin imagining that it was a matter of minor importance then it is reckoned as a forgiveable not a mortal sin. But on the other hand, if anyone commits a minor sin but is convinced in his soul that it was a mortal sin then it is reckoned as such to him.

“But we are not yet finished.

“There have been drawn up long lists of sins that can be committed against the Ten Commandments. Besides this there have been drawn up, since the Middle Ages, long lists of sins that can be committed against the Church. There are especially six commandments of the Church that are particularly important. They come down to this: 1) Faithfully to partake of the mass on Sunday and holy days. 2) To fast upon the proper set times. 3) To confess before the priest at least once per year. 4) To partake of Holy Communion on Easter. 5) To support the church financially. 6) To be obedient to the laws of the church governing marriage.

“Besides these there are still many other laws and rules, altogether about 2,000. To break some of these makes one guilty of mortal sin but in many other instances the guilt is only that of venial sin.

“Whether a sin belongs by the first or the second group depends often on a very small matter. The archbishop of New York could, under certain circumstances for example, suspend or set aside the law that deals with the eating of meat on Friday. However, if the bishop of Manhattan did not go along in this, then to eat meat in his parish would be a mortal sin, while such would not be the case across the Hudson River in Brooklyn.

“When one goes to confession then one must be very careful. For if a person should neglect to reveal
a single sin his guilt would become still greater. In such a case none of his sins that a person confessed would be forgiven. Often the question is raised whether the sinner has a sufficient sorrow over his sin. Fortunately this full sorrow is not necessary if one is only correct in all his confession. . . .

"Much more could be said about this subject. The writer of the article in the Converted Catholic Magazine assures us that volumes could be written concerning the Roman Catholic conception of sin and the method of forgiveness."

Thus it is that sin becomes external also in the Roman Catholic Church. We are already used to this as it comes to manifestation in many "fundamental" and "holiness" groups with their "touch not, taste not, handle not" conceptions, according to which, if you don't drink, smoke and live an otherwise orderly life you are all right.

Overagainst all this we must maintain the essential spiritual character of sin and its ethical perversion not only in outward deed but in motive, thought, intent, ambition, as well as the lack of all these.

Our spiritual life and our salvation will advance no farther than our realization of sin in all its manifestation and the consciousness of our salvation from all of it.

So also our thanksgiving will reach out to every part of our life.

* * *

Signs of the Times?

Wars and Rumors of Wars! Still they continue and grow and the fear of them possesses each one of us.

One World Government! Perhaps not too many of us are acquainted with the organization called "The World Movement for a World Federal Government". Last year its convention was held in Rome, Italy. There is a large chapter in the United States. Its aim for one world government has been echoed by leading political figures in the United States. That this is a sign of the end is certain to anyone who understands the book of Revelation!

How far this movement has penetrated into so-called Reformed circles may also be unknown to most of us. To my surprise I discovered last week that in Central College (Reformed Church in America) Pella, Iowa there is a student organization dedicated to the idea of one world government and the brotherhood of man.

The knowledge of God and His Word. That the missionary movement is widespread we know clearly. That the time is near in which each nation shall have heard the Word of God is also evident. Of this we were again reminded when reading our daily newspaper; we came across the following: "Bible Total Swells Anew—11 Million more sent out in 1950—New York-(U.P.) The American Bible Society reported Friday that it distributed more than 11,000,000 Bibles or portions of the scriptures around the world in 1950."

"The report issued at the society's annual board meeting noted that American contributions to the society last year topped $1,000,000 for the first time in history."

"The 1950 distribution of 11,056,584 volumes raised the society's all-time distribution total to 406,422,004."

"Dr. Robert T. Taylor, general secretary, disclosed the society now has 783,000 Russian scriptures in warehouses ready to be shipped when the iron curtain lifts."

Persecution. Reports continue to come in concerning persecution of Christians from Germany, Columbia, Spain, and China. Perhaps we shall write a bit more about this later.

Natural Disturbances. Just a few days ago a sun-spot so large that it reportedly could be seen without the aid of the telescope was announced. We, here in the middle west, have seen plenty of flooding in this area and now other sections of the country are reporting the same. Some time ago there was a serious earthquake in Central America.

All these things remind us that the end of the ages is upon us.

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Senatorial Religions:

From our daily newspaper we quote the following:

"Methodists have the most senators in the 82nd congress, with Episcopalians and Presbyterians tied for second place."

"Church affiliations of all senators are shown below:

19 Methodist, 11 Presbyterian, 11 Episcopal, 9 Baptist, 9 Roman Catholic, 8 Congregationalist, 5 Disciples, 5 Lutheran, 3 Latter Day Saints, 3 'Protestant', 2 Scientist, 2 Friends (Quakers), 1 Unitarian, 1 Jewish.

J. Howerzyl.