

52 Open Windows

br Dr. R.H. Bremmer

- Translation of "52 OPEN VENSTERS", published by Boekhandel Dijksterhuis 1991 2nd edition.
- Translated and kindly but informally shared with a few individuals by Mr. Ralph Winkel


Rev P.Aasman
R.R. 2.
Grand Valley,
Ont. LON 1G0

March 15,1996.

Dear Rev Aasman.

I asked your brother if you could be interested in some translated sermons of the late Dr Bremmer. I like translating,however the translation may not be up to par for publishing,for me that does not really matter. Richard told me that he could sense that the translation was from the dutch language. He also told me that your dutch could use some help and with that in mind I add your name to my very short list of translated sermon receivers. That last sentence sounds stilted. But in case of translating sermons I rather have them stilted then me changing the meaning of the sermon itself. That just would not be right. As you may know Dr.Bremmer past away last September.On the cardI received from his wife were the words:
Christue alleen Christus volkomen.
Beautiful,and having known Bremmer,typical him.

Sincerely yours,
Ralph Winkel.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ralph Winkel', is written over a large, light-colored oval scribble. The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.



Van de Kamp's muziekhuys **De ORGELPIJP**

specifiek in klassiek

Klassieke orgels o.a. Johannus - Eminent
Domus en Content - Piano's - Kleine instrumenten
bladmuziek - gewijde CD's MC's
Kadoartikelen met notenopdruk.

Reading OT. ISAIAH 40:
1-11

Romans 8: 31-39

PS 99: 1, 2

after the law HYMN 7: 9

after the creed PS 99: 6

PS 108: 2, 6, 7

PS 31: 12

PS 48: 3, 4

LUKSDAY I

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Lords Day 1.

The hymn of praise on the Only Comfort.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.
How did we get the Catechism ? Well that is a fascinating story.
About 1560 Frederik the Third, the Elector of the Palts, an area in central Germany, wanted for its population, a booklet in which the reformed religion was explained in a clear and explicit manner. A booklet that every one could understand.
It had to be not only for the scholars, but also for the simple people; not only for the grownups, but also for the young people. It had to be useful for young and old.
He charged two theologians, Casper Olevianus and Zacharias Ursinus to make this booklet. For both of these men: this was a major undertaking: One was only 26 and the other 28 years old. They tackled the task and devoted all their energies to it. They assumed that everyone had to know the three main outlines of the christian faith.
In the first place: What you have to believe: That is in the 12 Articles of faith, in the Apostolic Creed. In the second place every one must know how he had to serve God as stated in the ten commandments. In the third place: every one had to know how he had to pray to God. That Christ taught us in the prayer: Our Father. Then these two men had a marvelous idea, they set these three essential points up in a beautiful outline, that of the knowledge of your misery, that of your salvation and of your thankfulness.
They took this outline from Paul's letter to the Romans. That letter also consists out of three parts. In the chapters 1 to 3 the apostle writes about our sins and misery, in the chapters 4 to 11 he describes our salvation through Christ and from Romans 12 to the end he shows the thankfulness we owe God. So this booklet was printed and distributed and it has to be said, it conquered many hearts. It did not take long for it to reach the Netherlands. Especially when many had fled to the Palts to escape from the Spanish general Alva's army, but later returned to the Netherlands after 1572 when the liberation of Spain began. On top of that Datheen had included it in his churchbook and that those returning exiles took back with them in their baggage. So in this manner the Heidelberg Catechism became the property of the Dutch Reformed Churches and still is so today. Now this afternoon (morning) we are we are confronted with the first Sunday for Ursinus and Olevianus had divided their booklet into 52 Sundays. They believed that the complete contents of their booklet should be preached in the church in one year. These two men had another clever idea.
They set this outline of misery, salvation and thankfulness in the context of the knowledge of our only comfort in life and death. This only comfort encircles the whole booklet.
I get to learn about this comfort through the three pieces of misery, salvation and thankfulness. And they were so filled with the solidity of that comfort, they made of that first Lord's Day, in which they encompassed the only comfort,

a complete hymn of praise. To that we will now listen.
Hear now, we speak this afternoon (morning) about:

THE HYMN OF PRAISE ON THE ONLY COMFORT

It embraces three points:

- 1 Christ bought me;
- 2 Christ preserves me;
- 3 Christ gives me eternal life.

The Catechisme is written in question and answer form. Have you ever thought about that? Why did Ursinus and Oliveanus arrange this booklet in this way? Simply, because here a grownup in the church speaks to a child. He bends over the child and asks the questions. The child in the church answers but sometimes also asks questions. You could put it this way: by asking and answering the grownup guides the child in the church.

He leads it into the world of God and his service. That is the fascinating part of the ask and question method. It is a real beautiful way to intimate the child in the church into the breathtaking world of God. Your confession does this immediately in the first question and answer.

The grownup talks to the child and suddenly asks what is your only comfort in life and death?

Should this first question only touch the child in the church?

Does not the confession also speak to you and me in a direct confrontation with the only comfort? Don't we all have the need to be spoken to about the promise and the treasures of the Kingdom of heaven? Who does not receive the Kingdom of God as a child, shall surely not enter, Jesus said this in Marc 10 :

15. Your confession leads the child into a world of aweinspiring realities. Let the first sentence influence you congregation. There you declare, that you with body and soul, in life and in death, are not owned by yourself but by your faithful Savior Jesus Christ. one by one these are essential matters so that you as a person in this world have to be touched to the core of your soul. Here you are spoken too as a human in this world at this time. I am, you say here, with body and soul, the property of my Savior. My only comfort does not only touch me as a human here down in this world, as a human being, who eats and drinks and holidays and enjoys life on this earth under the sun. No, that is only one side of a person. There is also another side, I, as a human being am a living soul, I have a soul. This reaches far above my bodily being. Life does not only consist out of eating, drinking, sleeping, marrying and getting children. There is something in life that goes far beyond that. All men realize this fact.

Now in that way am I addressed. As a human, in the totality of my existense, as body and soul. Yes and then your confession immediately mentions life and death. We grownups, we know that. Death goes with us, throughout all our life. This is not something that comes later, that last bitter moment of really dying. Death goes with us as something that permanently threatens us.

There are children whose parents already died and have been confronted with death at an early age. We grownups know that suddenly you can get a sickness for which there is no cure. Or you get involved in an accident. Also you can be snatched away from this life through an heartattack. Your confession leads you into this world of life and death. There is a faithful Savior. He takes your hand. He holds unto you in life and death. That the first question also shows you. The catechisme speaks about this and also in the following 51 Lordsdays. This first answer of your Savior talks about wonderful things. This first answer says: He is your faithful Savior. He was that already when born in Bethелеhem in a stable. He was that already when Maria wrapped Him in cloths and laid Him in themanger. Then an angel declared, that today was born the Savior, Christ the Lord, in the city of David. Does that not belong to the aweinspiring matters to which the catechisme points, when it speaks of Jesus Christ, your faithful Savior? There was a child in the manger who is the Son of God and therefore the angels were singing praises to God in the fields of Efratah. That is only the beginning of what can be reported about this faithful Savior. By questioning and answering your confession reveals that this faithful Savior has us bought with his precious blood. Not only Bethlehem comes here in sight, also Golgatha.

There are sins, says this first answer, there are sins, but these sins have been paid for. Paid for with no less than with the precious blood of that Savior.

Sins. My sins, says answer one. But we may immediately add that those sins were not always there. That is also a reality about which the catechisme will speak in the following Lords Days. There was a paradise full of joy for men. These sins did not belong to the original creation. That was the clean pure world of God in paradise, where men was without sin and perfectly happy. About that we can tell our children and also: how our sins, my personal sins says the catechisme, lost that paradise. It is stated here in a few words: He, the Savior, has paid for all my sins in full. We read over these words. They do not have much meaning. But each word has a real meaning. All my sins says answer one. It is not about one sin. No, what happened in paradise had an effect for my whole life. Children know about sin, grownups know a lot more. The older you get the more you know about it. The more you see the depth of sin, of filthiness, of depravity you carry with you in your life. Knowledge of sin puts you into debt before God.

Now all these sins have been fully paid for. That is what you confess here. It is paid for with Jesus precious blood. Your confession takes children and grownups by the hand and leads them from Betlehem to Golgatha, to Christ's suffering and death. There the Savior hung on the cross between heaven and earth. There He toiled under the wrath of God. The angels were silent on Golgatha. They, in a manner of speaking, held their breath. There, even God was silent. His hand moved across the sky and pulled a dark curtain before his Son. There on Golgatha, only one spoke: the Son of God.

He called out: My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?
You do not hear the angels on Golgatha. You can only hear the dripping of Jesus blood.

Congregation: it is so easy to read the words: He has with his precious blood fully paid for all my sins. But consider time and again what it means for you and pass it on to your children. And still your confession has not said it all. Answer 1 goes on and upon the one magnificence of Christ's security follows another. The answer continues: He has delivered me from all the power of the devil. In the beginning of this answer your confession places all three close together. Me myself with my sins, my faithful Savior and as third there is the devil, satan, God's black servant. Through him, paradise about which we spoke about, was lost, through that murderer of the beginning, as Christ Himself called him. John 8 : 44. But he, in turn was conquered by Christ. You have been liberated from all, yes from all the power of the devil. All this your confession now clinches with the only comfort. That is your only comfort.

Comfort is a true biblical word. You find it in many places of the Holy Scripture. You may think about the words of Isaiah 40 and other places in his prophesy. Those chapters 40 and the following ones are called Isaiah's comfort book. Hear that powerful beginning, the one we just read. Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. That theme of God's comfort for his people Isaiah shows again and again. As one who comforts his mother, so will I comfort you, yes, in Jerusalem you shall be comforted, so says the prophet in chapter 66 : 13.

You do understand what Isaiah means with this comfort? It is this: Jerusalem lay in ruins, the temple was destroyed. Israel was exiled to Babel. So to see there was only misery. Now God gives, through Isaiah, his promise of return from Babel to Jerusalem. Isaiah is now allowed, even looking at that destroyed city and ruined temple, to proclaim that God will liberate his people and let them return. Was that not a rich comfort? Hear what the Lord says through Isaiah :

I, I am the one, who comforts you. Comfort through God's firm promises. Congregation, also in the New Testament you may find that comfort theme. When Paul writes his second letter to the Corinthians, he starts with praising God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercy and the God of complete consolation, who comforts us in all our oppressions.

Again and again Paul returns to that consolation of God's mercy. God, who comforts the humble, writes the apostle in 2 Corinthians 7 : 6,7. has comforted us through the arrival of Titus.

It is the same comfort theme as in Isaiah. Before Paul's eyes there is nothing but misery and oppression. But he also knows that God is with him, who through the coming of Titus makes this visible and tangible. Every time God steps in with His comfort. As in the Old and New Testament this word comfort has a rich contents. We are unable to describe it better than Ursinus

did in his explanation of the catechisme.
He says there in his "Treasurebook" : Comfort is the consideration of the mind, through which we place a certain good against a certain bad. Is that not an eloquent definition? Isaiah comforted Israel by placing the good , the power of God's promises over against the evil of the exile. Paul placed the coming of Titus, who came to help him, over against the difficulties he was surrounded with in Corinthe. So also today the Lord comforts you as you contemplate which mighty promises God presents to you through Christ. That you may place that over against the evil and temptations of this life. The Lord says: Look how I place over against your sins and your guilt the finished work of My dear Son.

Congregation : Place them all in a row. On the one side : all your sins; the dominion of the devil; the power of death over your life. Paul summarizes this in Romans 8; 18 in the eloquent expression: the sufferings of this present time. They are the dark shadows that fall over our lives. And now the comfort which God gives you, Christ has paid for all my sins. He has liberated me from the power of the devil. He has conquered death and the grave. In faith I may place all this over against the evil that confronts me by my fall into sin. That comfort is that I am owned by Him, my faithful Savior. I am not my own, says this first answer. I am Christ's. That is the reality of this unique comfort. He has claimed me for His own. I am His , who sits at the right hand of the Father and intercedes for me. With my baptism He already put His hand on me. Now I may put my hand in his for He has paid for me and bought me. Paul says in Romans 8: 39 Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of Christ. Now here I am in this world with the only comfort of Lords Day 1 in my hands. By now you have understood it congregation. Comfort here is not an emotional matter. Think about the consideration of the intellect of Ursinus. This does not mean that it is an intellectual matter. But your intellect definitely is involved. You consider, very calm and very emphatic, in faith, what God gives to you in your Savior. And of course, you cannot remain impassive. You , yourself are totally involved with your whole being. You are of your Savior or you are not. You are saved in Christ for eternity or you will be lost without Him. there is no other choice. Think about the ending of the first letter to the Corinthians : If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Maranatha. This means : The Lord is coming.

2. Christ bought me, that was the first point from this hymn of praise on the only comfort. Now this beautiful hymn continues. He preserves me too. That was the second point of this litany. For now this hymn of praise draws the consequence, the conclusion that we are bought by Christ. Listen. He preserves me so , that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head, yea , that all things must be subservient to my salvation. He bought me, that was one. He preserves me and that is now two. That preserving is part of that being bought and tied to being liberated from the dominion of the devil.

Because of that, through that, Christ has broken the power of the murderer of the beginning, I am no longer his prey. Religion is not only a matter of your heart. The service of God touches your whole being. My whole being, not only my soul but also my body has been annexed. I may and I have to serve God with all what I have and in all what I do. Hence that the confession now says that Christ preserves so well, that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head. Your confession here refers to Matthew 10 and to Luke 21.

Matthew 10, that is the sending out speech to the 12 apostles. You know that, when the 12 apostles were sent out to preach the gospel in the towns and villages of Israel, The Savior said that there would be many dangers. When they persecute you in one city, he said, flee to another. The disciples should not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Then Jesus speaks those wellknown words: Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one will fall to the ground without your Father's will. Also the hairs on your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows.

Jesus speaks these words in connection with persecution, with misery and enmity of the world. The same is the case in Luke 21. There the Savior uses this word in his great eschatological speech, also in connection with persecution. The Savior is saying: Do not be scared. I am here and the Father is here. You are unassailable and safe, you will never fall out of my hand.

The hymn of praise of this second part of answer 1 climbs still higher. Yes, it continues, everything has to be subservient to my salvation. Again the striking close connection to the Scriptures. Did not Paul say that in that same Romans 8,

We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Again the apostle speaks these words in connection with persecution and distress. In those days dangers were everywhere. Confessors of Christ could be jailed without reason. Was that any different in the time of your confession when Lord's Day 1 brought comfort compared to those in Paul's time? Ursinus and Olivianus and the men and women of the church of those days knew what was going on. And in the midst of that dreadful reality your confession bears witness: it does not matter what happens. We are safe, we are unassailable, for the dominion of the devil has been broken. No, we are not invulnerable. That those men and women understood. But we are secure from assault. Nobody can jerk us out of God's Fatherhand.

Is that really your only comfort? Do you live believing: that without the will of the Father not a hair will fall from our head? Do we believe that the rudder of our life is not in our own hands, but in the hands of Christ? Do you let Him preserve you, whatever happens to you? Do you surrender yourself to Him, with body and soul, in life and death?

We saw that the confession recognizes with these words the times of persecution and distress. Today it is not like that. But again there is so much fear in this world. Fear about war, we fear the terrible weapons we hear about. We fear for a world disaster worse than we ever have experienced. Also the fear of sickness

and death.

The prosperity of today has made our lives more comfortable than in the past. On the other side of the coin our hurried way of life increases the army of patients with physical and psychological problems. Restlessness prevails in many lives.

Do you know the rest of this unique comfort? Again: without the will of the Father not a hair will fall from our head.

All things have to serve to my salvation. We may pray:

Let the hymn of praise not only consist out of words for us, but let it be a real thing for us. Let your Holy Spirit teach us to sing this hymn of praise in faith.

3. We have come to the final point. I am Christ's. He bought me with his blood. That was one. He preserves me in distress. That was two. Now comes the last stanza. He also gives me through his Holy Spirit the security of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready to live for Him.

Your confession, congregation, here pushes through to the future. Up till now it spoke about the past: the sins we have committed. And also today about the salvation in Christ.

Now it pushes open the window to the future. Now it gives us an outlook far beyond the horizon of this temporary life.

Christ assures me through the Holy Spirit of eternal life.

Children among us know all about it. Grandma, who recently passed away, is in heaven. The children know: she is with the Lord.

Children often have a real concrete and at the same time an emotional image of heaven. Sometimes they are ahead of us, older people. We try to think about solutions in regard to difficult questions about heaven. Children put it very specific: those and those are with the Lord.

Yes, Christ gives me through his Holy Spirit assurance of eternal life. The old text of the Catechism (which you still have in your book of Praise) is more direct. It declared:

Christ assures me through His Holy Spirit of eternal life.

He assures me, that is the present. He does it. Through the Holy Spirit He ties our hearts to his promises of eternal life.

He seals in our heart the belief, that the last word is not given to death but to the God of life.

The last book in the Bible; the Revelations to John speaks divinely about this.

Delightful scenes are revealed to us. Congregation

do think about the singers at the glassy sea, about the hundred and forty four thousand sealed, about the great multitude, which no man could number; about the new Jerusalem with its golden streets and gates of pearl. Christ assures me of all that.

In all those images He shows us the durability and intensity of eternal life, later after Christ's return, in the new heaven and the new earth.

That perspective puts you also to work. That unique comfort does not make us passive. No way. Christ makes us now heartily willing to live for Him, concludes answer one.

The comfort of Lords Day 1 is not a soother in regard to

dying. Your confession says: Get to work and where tasks are,

to do them. There is so much work on all kinds of terrain but only if you are looking for it.

Your confession lays the second question of this first Lords Day before you. How many things are necessary for you to know, that you in this comfort may live and die happily?

The answer is the three pieces, the three parts in which the only comfort will come to you in the coming Sundays.

There are only three of them. It is so simple and at the same time so unspeakable wonderful. In the first place: how great my sins and misery are. In the coming Sundays you will be confronted with that and the second point : how I am delivered from all my sins and misery. Who shall explain how great the length and the width and the height and the depth are of the redemptive love of Christ? And as conclusion: how I am to be thankful to God for such deliverance. How we feel our shortcomings about that.

Confession
How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.

Amen.

Lords Day 2.

Sermon
by the late Dr. R.H. Bremmer
Enschede,
The Netherlands

Translated by
R. Winkel
Edmonton, Alberta

Reading Psalm 130
Text: Lords Day 2.
Psalm 143 : 1, 2, 5
After the law : Psalm 119 : ~~55~~ 64
After the creed : Psalm 144 : 1
Psalm 138 : 1, 2, 4, 10
Psalm 145 : 5
Hymn ~~24~~ ~~UNKN~~ ~~OWN~~

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

To a great piece of music belongs: an overture, an opening, an introduction. In that the fundamental theme the whole composition can be touched. Music connoisseurs hear that immediately: O, this will be the theme which will ring throughout the whole piece.

The same goes for the catechism. Is it not a beautiful composed piece of 52 Lords Days? Everything within everything is connected. And through all the Lords Days rings the theme of that opening piece: that powerful confession of our only comfort in life and death, the main theme of the catechism.

Does that also apply to Lords Day 2? Is this Lords Day really about the only comfort? Is Lords Day 2 really about preaching the gospel? You just heard it, when this Lords Day was read. Here the confession touches upon the theme of misery. Through that you are discovered by the law of God. Are we now, right after the comfort of Lords Day 1, struck down by the law of Sinai? Are we now told off by the damnation of the law? Yes, in this way, this Lords Day is explained here in this country. but unjustly. Also in Lords Day 2 the catechism touches upon the central theme of only comfort. It does that in a real special way, as it befits our misery. It shows us this afternoon/morning:

I AM A SINNER.

1. In that Gods Law discovers me.
2. Christ emphasizes this.
3. And I assent to it.

1. Question and answer 3 are very well known. If you have attended catechism classes, then you will never forget them. From where do you know your misery? That's how this Lords Day begins. The answer is even shorter and more powerful, from the law of God. Once you have learned this, you will never forget it. And read this first question of this Lords Day in the you form, as it is meant for catechism students. From which do you know your misery? That sounds even more penetrating. Yet this short and powerful question and answer gives rise to some questions. Do we have to put this question in front of the youth of the church? Or for that matter: in front of all of us? There is enough misery in this world and it intrudes into our lives.

Do the young people on purpose have to be confronted with misery in the church? Don't they hear enough from the media? And don't we all see more than enough like hunger, war and terror all over the world? In South Africa, in Middle America and in the Third world. In our own surroundings misery touches many: marriage misery, drug enslavement, you name it. Does not this pressing of the catechism about misery knowledge increase the damnation thinking that threatens our church youth from all sides? Because of that damnation you can hear today's youth say: I have no solution. Yes, and how emphatic are they spoken too. From where do you know your misery, not those from someone else. Yours. Why does the confession do this? Well, congregation think about what we said a while ago: about that overture, that opening piece. Lords Day 2 follows immediately upon Lords Day 1. There in the first Lords Day, right at the beginning of the catechism, the theme of misery was heard. Do you remember the second question and answer of that previous Lords Day? You haven't forgotten have you? What - of how many parts do you need to know in order to live and die in the joy of this comfort? That only comfort embraces three parts: how great my sins and misery are. And then: how I am delivered from all my sins and misery and right after that: how I am to be thankful to God for such a deliverance. Right there in the first Lords Day our misery is interwoven with our only comfort. The second Lords Day immediately ties onto that and we should examine something else in this short and question number three. Today that word misery sounds kind of flat. It has been used too often. We think about all the sorrow and grief in today's world. We say to each other there is so much misery and distress. But in the past this word meant exile. People that have been chased out of their country can tell you what that means. Their passports are withdrawn. They can never go back to their own country, they have lost it. All they have left are precious remembrances. On the television you can hear them tell about the small village or town where they used to live and which they will never see again. That originally was in that word misery. But here it is not about being chased out of your country, no, the catechism here thinks about something else. It is about being chased out of the land of God, out of God's paradise. Those first powerful chapters of the Bible talk about that. There, in that paradise, men was at home with God. There he lived in God's covenant. That must have been beautiful. God had created men after his image. He had given him the garden of Eden to keep and develop. There was that beautiful garden, a pleasure grove in men's eyes. And it was his. Of most importance was that he communed daily with his God, his Father, who had given him a beautiful promise. If he, in obedience to his Creator and Father, lived and cared for that garden, God would give him eternal life. Then he would be in a still more beautiful world always with his God to glorify and praise Him. God associated with man as with a friend. Every day the Lord came by to see man. Adam could hear Him in the rustling of the trees in the garden and then they spoke about God Himself and the world. God had given Adam - man means this word - his law, his degrees. It was such a beautiful mandate: To

love God and his neighbour as himself. The promise of eternal life and the law to love God and the neighbour: these two covenants words ruled the life of man in paradise. You know for how short a time this lasted. Man broke the law when he ate from the tree of good and evil. In that one law God had combined his whole law to test, to try him in his obedience to Him. And then when man transgressed Gods law, he alienated himself from God. Therefore God ousted him from paradise. Man was exiled, miserable, forever alienated from his Creator and Father. Today's society likes to use that word alienation. They say the meaning is that man in our western industrialised society departed from joy in his labour and from his real life. But the Bible reaches way deeper. Man is alienated from God and from a life with Him in paradise. An angel guarded the entrance with a flaming sword. But still: One thing the Lord did not do: He did not revoke the law to love Him and the neighbour as himself. Man was ousted from paradise, surely, but the Lord remained the same and his law remained the same. Gods law kept clasping, kept on speaking to us men. I think about the words God spoke to a 99 year old Abraham: I am God almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. (Gen 17:1) And then the Lord established his covenant with Abraham. The old covenant demand from paradise was repeated. This same demand was tied to the hearts of the church patriarchs. You can see that history continues in the Bible. Israel was brought out of Egypt. Under the guidance of Moses it came to the mount Sinai. Watch ; again the Lord emphasizes his law. What was left of the knowledge of Gods law? Was there any knowledge about Gods covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? The Lord God found it necessary to renew his covenant with his people and again emphasize his law. Congregation, the Lord did this very carefully. Through Moses service He impressed the people with the holiness and majesty of his law. You can see the impressive measures Moses takes for that. Exodus 19 does not mince any words about it. For three days the Israelites had to sanctify themselves, so that on the third day they would be ready to meet God. They had to wash their clothes: God did not want to meet an impure, unclean people. Moses had to make a partition around the mountain. Who disregarded this partition would be shot at with an arrow. God went far in his measures. Even the sexual life of his people was subservient for his coming to Israel. Expecting the coming of the Lord they were not to approach their wives. Then on the third day the Lord appears to Israel on the top of mount Sinai. The Bible says : the mount Sinai trembled. The Lord descended in smoke and fire. Lightning flashed around the top of the mountain and God answered Moses, who spoke to Him, with thunderclaps. The sound of a trumpet was heard. You can see how the Lord impressed Israel with his majesty and glory. Again He impressed his people with acuteness of his law. Of course God aimed Himself in the situation of his people. He spoke to them in a manner they understood: through formative happenings which it could see and hear. That belonged to the situation in which Gods people were. It was necessary that it understood: so powerful and so majestic is our God. The law which He will give us is very holy.

God went to renew his paradiscovenant with his people and in that phase belonged this way of revelation. But watch ; also in this moment of his association with his people the Lord does not give the law without his gospel. As in paradise, his law was clasped in his promises, so it is at the Sinai. Listen to the start of the law when God comes to his people. You hear that every Sunday morning when Gods law is placed in front of us. It begins with these delightful words: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Is that not a powerful gospel, that beginning? Congregation let these words continue to make an impression on you. I am, says your God, I am the Lord. His name is imprinted with capital letters. That means : Jahweh I am who I am .Or: I shall be, whom I shall be. It says you can always depend on Me. I am today, here at Sinai, the same God as I was in paradise, the same as I was for Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. And I shall be the same God for you tomorrow and the coming days. You can depend on Me. And then listen congregation to that subtleness your God the Lord adds to that. I have established my covenant with you. You never, for one moment, have to doubt if I am really your God. And then the dating of the law is added with the clear words: who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Yes, that is what Egypt was for Israel: a horrible servitude. Today we would say a concentration camp, a penal institution. There in Egypt they had to toil as slaves under the whip of the Egyptian tyrants. That is what servitude means. It was inhuman service they had to do for Pharaoh and from that the Lord, the God of the covenant, has liberated them only a short three months ago. That is the beginning of Gods holy and majestic law. Let the light of that heading shine for you over all these commandments. Then we are looking at this law in a different manner. How many preachers have not shown the law as one who has to beat us down? With the preaching of the law the thunder of Sinai has to be heard. The lightning of the Sinai has to flash. As if we, Gods congregation of the new covenant , would be still standing at the mount Sinai and have the law impressed on us, as the Lord did to Israel, in that moment of his association with his people. Congregation our God is a great Pedagogue. He knows how to handle his people. Then they needed that manner of speaking. Now the Lord does it different. Now He lets his law being proclaimed through his living Word by the preachers of that Word. It is surely not less impressive. Because also to us the Lord comes with the same beginning of his commandments. Every Sunday again we hear the proclamation that He the Lord our God is, who brought us out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Only as congregation of the new covenant these words have a deeper meaning. We are allowed to hear and read these words against the background of the fulfilled work of our Savior. You are allowed to hear it like this: I am the Lord who became your God in Jesus Christ, in his fulfilled work, when he died for you on Golgatha and now is your intercessor at Gods right hand. Through his suffering and dying on the cross, once and for all, he brought you of

satans house of bondage and sin. Is that not powerful congregation? No, that law of the Lord, which He proclaims in Christ to us, is not a stoneward law which beats us down and scares us. It is a merciful law of a merciful Father. Do you know what God does in His law? He again draws for us the way paradise was and as it will be again in the future, when God again will live with the people. Look, how God reveals Himself in his law in his glory. He is absolutely central: we shall have no other gods before Him. We shall serve Him in no other manner as He has commanded us in his Word. We shall hold his Name high and holy and honor his day. Is He, in those four laws of the first table of the law, not our God? Would our life, if we served Him like that, not be a beautiful life? Does He not reveal Himself in those first four laws to us as a God worthy to be served by us? Congregation also look at the laws that follow on the second table. How would our life be, people, if we, father and mother and all those set above us, honored the way the Lord wants us to? If we loved our neighbour truly and not hated him? In case we desired his wife or man to be ours? As if we not only covet what belongs to our neighbour, instead of honoring him? No, in his law God does not sit as a tyrant on the throne, who scourges us with the whip of his law. A friendly Father shows us his loving law. Again once more: do you want to know what God wants from us in his law? Look then to your Christ, you Savior. Look at Him and at his passage on this earth then you can see what the Lord wants of men. He loved the Father perfectly and He loved his neighbour as Himself. Do you know, what you can teach our Christ, our Savior? How great and how horrible our sin and misery are. The gospel shows us how heavy the punishment is God has put on the transgressing of his law. See how your Savior wrestles at Gethsamene. Hear Him ask if the cup could pass Him by. Behold His suffering on Golgatha. Hear Him call: my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? To such an extent we have violated Gods law, that He, in my place had to drink that cup of suffering. In my place He has hung on the cross. I had earned that through my transgression of Gods holy and merciful law. Once again I look at the first question and answer of this Lords Day: from where do you know your sin and misery? and then that answer: From the law of God. Now I start to understand something of the depth of that question and its answer. It is really not only about a theoretical knowledge, a piece of instruction from the Bible in regard to the misery of men. It belongs to it and it is indispensable. But that: from where do you know? reaches way deeper. So you had to be, says the law, so as the ten commandments paints men, as God wants him to be. So you had to be, says the Gospel, as it shows me Christ the way He has fulfilled the law for me and bore my punishment of that transgression. And so am I, now answers men, who will place himself open and honestly before the mirror of this law. So am I: deep in debt to this law, a violator of the holiness of God in his law. I think about David in Psalm 51 when the prophet Nathan answers his question who robbed that poor man of his sheep? with: you are that man. You, David, adulterer and

murderer. Then David said: I have sinned against the Lord. The Holy Spirit had discovered him through Nathans: you are that man, to his debt against God and his law. Then David composed Psalm 51 with that emotional moving fourth verse: against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done which is evil in thy sight, so thou are justified in thy sentence and blameless in thy judgment. I think about Paul who called himself the greatest of sinners because he has persecuted Gods congregation and who also knew that he was discovered through Gods law of that debt. He could not make up for it. For no human being will be justified in his sight by the works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20). He repeats it once more in Romans 7:7 Yet if it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin. Is the knowledge of our misery a dark tunnel through which we have get through to get to the light of salvation? No, congregation, here is the man, the woman speaking who in that only comfort knows to be the possession of his and her Lord, and discovers him or herself in guilt over against God through the holy law of God. Because of that the Holy Spirit pushes us hard towards that only comfort. I am a sinner, I confess that in this Lords Day. God the Holy Spirit discovers me in that through his holy law and lets shine for me the glory of the only comfort.

2. And yes, here comes the second part. The catechism is not finished with us talking about the depth of our misery. It puts, in a manner of speaking, the knife in deeper. It sharpens my knowledge of my misery. Now he asks: what does God law demand from us? Observe then how in a masterly way the confession here forms the answer: it says Christ teaches us this. Yes forsure, Christ taught us. What a masterly touch. With the design of the catechism Christ comes into play in Lords Day 6 in the part of deliverance. Already now the confession is ahead and confronts us here in Lords Day 2, in the heart of our misery knowledge, with Christ himself. As an answer to the question: what does Gods law demands from us, the answer could have been: I know that from the ten commandments. Or: out of the sermon on the mount. Or: from the admonitions of the apostles. It does not do that. Suddenly it places the Savior before us, as the gospel of Matthew 22, shows us Christ. You know that there the Pharisees asked and so tempting Him: What is really the great commandment of the law? According to one school of jurists: it had to be the fifth commandment, to honor your father and mother. Another school said: it had to be the fourth commandment, the keeping of the Sabbath. Come on, Rabbi of Nazereth, says the Pharisee, what is your opinion? To which side do you belong? But the Savior would not even consider to indicate one law to be more important than any of the other. He does not let himself to be classified as belonging to a party of the Pharisees. He answers with the: the royal words: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. That is the first and great commandment. Moses already held this before Israel in Deuteronomy 6:5. And then the Savior adds what Moses had said in Leviticus 19:18 : You shall love your

neighbour as yourself. He summarizes both by saying: On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets. These stand or fall with it. Is that not masterly? Does not the Savior here push into the heart of the law? Did not God charge men in paradise to love God and his neighbour? Today there is intense war between what is called vertical and horizontal christianity. The verticals emphasize what God gives us in Christ: the forgiveness of sins and the atonement to justice through the sacrifice of his Son. The horizontals only want to speak about the commandment of neighbourly love. They want a do-christianity. You only meet God in your neighbour.

Our Savior stands way above this dilemma. The one is not without the other. You cannot truly love your neighbour without love to God. I think about the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus. Or the one about the good Samaritan. In both parables Christ shows us clearly how the love to God holds us in our love to my neighbour. How shall I truly love my neighbour if I not answer the love of God, which comes to me in Christ, with my love in return? Someone once said: the only true christian is Christ himself.

I am a sinner, that was the theme of this sermon and God discovers me through the Holy Spirit in the mirror of his law.: that was the first part of this sermon. Now we add a second: Christ sharpens that for me in his double love commandment. How shall I ever give satisfaction to that love commandment? What about justifying my love to God with whole my heart and with whole my soul and with whole my mind? And then that second: to love the neighbour as myself.

If one thing is sure: then it is this: the law does not save me. The law damnes. It condemns me because I do not truly love God nor my neighbour. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. So I find it to be a law: that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. *ROMANS*

7:19&21. Never try to come clean before God through yhe law. You lie than, says the Kohlbrugge so characteristicly, with broken arms and legs. Yes forsure, Christ puts the knife in. Do you really love the Lord? Do you love your neighbour as yourself? Lord I have to say it: I am a sinner, who will notice my strayings? But who can discern his errors? (Psalm 19:13)

Again, where would I take refuge but in Him, in the light of this instruction, my only comfort in life and death, who redeemed me of my **Q**uilt.

3. Now I come to the last point. The confession ends with the question: Can you keep all this perfectly? It is a particular sharp question. The catechisme does not ask if I can keep all this, mind you, all this. No, it goes deeper. It asks if I am able to keep all this. Does the catechism here mean to appeal our inability? Of course, we are so sinfull and bad. We suremake a mess of things. Watch, that you, not for one moment, go in that direction. No way that the confession hides behind our inability. No, for the last time it shows us how things really are. Even can-do is exluded, let alone to do, the fulfilment. And then I have to admit. No, I am inclined by

nature to hate God and my neighbour. Yes sure, I am a sinner. God has discovered me through his law. Christ sharpened it and now I have to agree. I can't do anything else. That answer three is not a dogmatic sentence. It is a self-accusation. I am like that by nature, according to my sinful character, says the confessor. What he means by this is: you have not created me like this, but I have become like this through my fall in Adam. I have become a rebel who by nature hates my God and my neighbour and I am inclined to do this..So is my situation before the face of God: misery, depravity.

Now congregation think about the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15. Then he came to himself, says Christ when describes the change in the life of that son. He came to himself. Suddenly he saw how his real situation was before God and men. He got up and went to his father. He confessed his guilt. Father, I have sinned against heaven and you. To where can we go with our guilt, our rebellion against the Father and our hate against our neighbour than to that Father? If Thou, Lord, keep the iniquities in memory Lord, who shall then exist? But by Thou there is forgiving, in order that Thou will be feared. Are we not allowed today to come to our youth with misery knowledge? If that is the case then we better not bother them with Golgatha's cross . And with what can we serve them better then with the only comfort!

Amen.

Lordsday 3

Sermon by the late Dr.R.H.Bremmer
Enschede.
The Netherlands

Translated by
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Edmonton, Alberta.

Reading: Romans 5:12-21
Text: Lordsday 3
Hymn: ~~unknown~~ 2 : 1, 4
After the law Ps 130 ??
After the creed: ~~Hymn unknown~~ Hym 2:5
Psalm 51: ~~22~~ 1, 2, 4
Psalm 17: ~~3~~ 6
Psalm 71: ~~27~~ 11, 13

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

In our time many young people struggle with the purpose of life. Why am I here? Toward what do I live? What is the purpose for me to be on this earth? Later on what does, at the end of my life, death hold for me? There are many young people who now have given up. I read somewhere that in the last few years there is an continued increase in suicides among young people. All over experts of youth psychology declared that we have to review the big questions of life and death to our people. Now, congregation that definitely does the catechism here in Lordsday 3. Here it discusses the big questions of this life, guilt and death. In this Lordsday a man bends over to speak to the young people of the church and let the older people also listen. Come, he says, I will take your hand and show you from where you came. I will show you your origin. I will show you how God created you, how good and beautiful. I will also show you what you and me have done with it. I will not hide anything. You will hear stone hard truths. But really I won't sell you apples for oranges. And listen closely: also those stone hard truths belong to your only comfort. They push you, as hard as they are, to Him who can steer you to the only comfort, the only meaning of life. Do you seek an answer to the question: who we, as humans, really are? Then listen carefully.

Lordsday Three shows who we really are.

Because it says:

- 1 Who we are;
- 2 What we became;
- 3 How we can become different.

1. In the theme of this sermon we spoke about Lordsday 3. This division of the Catechism into Lorddays came later. In the very first edition questions and answers followed each other. You can really see this in the beginning of the catechism. How closely connected are question 6 and answer 5. You have to observe closely to understand the connection. In answer 5 dismaying things were said. In a direct manner: the catechism says, I am inclined by nature to hate God and my neighbour.

That is an awful thing. I, child of man, I am prone, continually prone, to hate God who created me and my neighbour whom He placed beside me. If you let this influence you, a stonehard judgment was given in that answer on question 5.

And of course: immediately the question rises : how is that possible? How come? What is the reason for this? And that question Lord's day 3 puts in front of us in question and answer 6. Is that the fault of God? Did He create us so bad and sinful? At once you think: is that not an improper question? That cannot be true. Is it really God's fault? You should not even think in that direction.

And still the Catechism puts this question on the table. You could say: it throws that question on the table. Not because it means that we should look in that direction for it, happily not. But the men who wrote this catechism knew that many people think in that direction. And those they want to intercept and help with their answer. Also today you meet them, men, young people, who ask you: can I help it that I am what I am? Did I kick myself into this world? If there is a God, why does He not make the world different? Could He not prevent that people get at each others throats, and that they make so much misery for each other? But is it God's fault that there is all this misery among men? No, the catechism does not pass by the difficult questions of our time. It throws them on the table. And of course: it does this to help us, to liberate us from those awful questions.

Now look, how your confession answers this question. It does not make a profound argument. It does not argue with, very theoretical, over the beginning of evil. Immediately it makes a faith decision

No, it says. In the original text it says it still stronger. No, It .It seems as if the man speaking here, is saying: whichever way you want to think, this way never. No It. Something like this God can never have done. For that He is God.

Imagine that He, the holy and majestic God, would have created men wicked and wrong. Never. And then follow some very important words. They are: God created men good and in His image. In your mind underline that last word: God has created man. That opens up an enormous perspective. We are not here by our own accord, the world is not eternal. It has a beginning and beginning lies with God. We come as men, with our body and soul, out of the hand of God. He has made us.

Because of that the confession makes a faith decision, a very radical faith decision. Today we cannot get out from under to make that faith decision. We have been created as men by our holy God and we did not come into existence through evolution or development.

Let our boys and girls and also we older people never believe that we came into existence though evolution. You must have heard about the evolution theory and it good to give some information about this. This evolution theory was brought into the world by Charles Darwin, an english scientist of the previous age. And his theory made a profound impression on a lot of people. Slowly but surely all the higher things would

have developed out of the lower things. During his youth he made a trip around the world and came to the Galapagos islands in the Pacific ocean. There he found living beings who also lived in America, but under the influence of nature were changed on those islands. Out of that he concluded that under the influence of the environment, changes continually take place in nature from lower to higher. And so the evolution theory came into existence, according to which man as highest living being developed from lower beings. Enormous how this theory captured the spirits. In the Soviet Union it became the official teaching for the beginning of mankind and it is taught as such in the schools. Many Christians have abandoned the creation history for it. There is a strong false optimistic tendency in this theory. Men should be still in development. Paradise is not behind us but ahead of us. In fact congregation, in the evolution theory you will find a pseudo faith.

It does not give the real explanation of the beginnings of the world. That life developed into existence is assumed but not proven. That is why that all the attempts to build the evolution theory into the Christian faith are perilous. The Christian church, you, congregation confess in the Apostles Creed: I believe in God the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. This is irreconcilable with what the evolution theory supposes.

That is why the church refers you to Lord's Day 3, not to the evolution theory, but it takes you to the Bible, to Genesis 1 to 3, to the creation of man by God, the Creator of heaven and earth. Would God have created you wicked and wrong?

Come along, says here the church, come along and read what God says to us in the first pages of the Bible.

Was that not a powerful godly resolution, when the Lord said to Himself Let us make man like our image? By none of the creations you read of a prior resolution. Here it took place before God, man, the crowning piece of his creation, created. And how majestic did God make man. He formed him out of the dust of the earth and blew the breath of life in his nose.

After that He created the woman, out of the rib of Adam and brought her to the man. Here the Lord God acted adorably great. Both, man and woman, He created to His image. The way He designed man in His resolution, so God created man. Man was no higher animal, a being that had to be developed yet. No, the crowning piece of God's creation was he: in the image of his Creator.

What does this mean you ask? Then read what is written in Genesis 1:26. There the Bible says how God describes man as His image: let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth. God's viceroy was man. In the name of his Creator could he govern over all of God's beautiful creation.. Yes and then your confession adds something else: he was created, it says, in true righteousness and holiness. It is not so simple to explain exactly what these words express.

They are in connection with what the confession says in the same answer no 6, that man was created good, God declared that Himself when He had completed his creation work and especially that of men as man and woman. You read that in Genesis 1:31:

And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good. What is that word good here strongly opposite of the words wicked and wrong in question 6. What calls the confession here, what? Would God have created man wicked and wrong? The opposite is true: God created him good. And what that good means, the words righteous and holiness explain that to us..God declared man good. He created him so that he lived in paradise and walked accordingly to the holy law of God. Not a single fault could be found in man. As viceroy of God he kept God's law and inward he loved God. In his deepest inward he lived in holiness before God's face. How beautiful does the confession describe that in the following words: righteous and holiness. That little word " that " here has a deep meaning. In that lies the meaning that man would further develop into that image of God, like which he was created, in true righteous and holiness. In paradise God came to man with his vocation. You are as a by God created person, not a being that does not know from where it came or where it is going.

No, God calls you as people to his service to truly know Him as Creator. That is the prophetic calling God already came to us with in paradise. Knowing of which the confession speaks is a knowing with the heart , in love. And because of that the confession adds: heartily love Him and live with Him in eternal blessedness to praise and glorify Him. When man in paradise would live in true righteousness and holiness with God, God would present him with the splendour of eternal life. Man created wicked and wrong? Look at man , congregation, the way God created him and gave him his mandate. As God's ally, God created man to live with his God in a covenant fellowship. I cannot shift the blame of my sinful being on God . I am not allowed to do that. When I sin as man, I sin against Him. The old theologians made a difference between sinning against the law and sinning against grace. That was meant well. They wanted to differentiate between sinning against God's given laws and sinning against the grace in Jesus Christ, sinning because of unbelief. But is every sin not sinning against grace? Did not God create man in paradise to live with Him in favour and fellowship? And it was Adam's sin, is it not our sin, that we as men already in paradise deprived his favour?

And then something else. Does not a beautiful light fall here over the creation of man as man and woman? Has God not created a great responsibility against men in his being man and being woman? If man is just a higher animal: what is than living together as man and wife, nothing else than mating? Then the responsibility of coming together as man and woman is taken away. I think about what we read in Genesis 5 :1 and following. There God's Word says : when God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. Male and female He created them and blessed them and named them Man when they were created.

And then immediately follows: When Adam had lived a hundred and thirty years he became the father of a son, after his image and named him Seth. Marrying, getting children, propagating the human race also belongs to being an image bearer of God. We don't take children. We don't mate as animals. Over the

sexuality, the coming together as man and woman in marriage, shines the light of being image bearers of God. We meet each other, also in the sexual relationship, as imagebearers of God.

Man created bad and wrong by God? God created men, men and women, to glorify Him as our Creator and to govern with Him over his creation. In that light congregation, read Psalm 8. There the psalmist draws for us in poetic words how God created man. Thy made him, men, almost godly, and crowned him with glory and splendour. Thy made him govern over the works of Thy hand, Thy placed everything under his feet: sheep, cattle, and also the animals of the fields, the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea which cross the sealanes. In ecstasy about God's creationwork in men he cries out: O Lord, our Lord, how glorious is thy Name over all the earth.

2. So the confession has shown us who we are. But now presses the question on us, how it happened that we are as we are. The confession brings this question sharply formulated and intrudes to the forefront as it lets the pupil speak and lets him ask: from where does comes this depraved nature of men? Allright says now the pupil, how come that I fell so deeply? From where come all those restless passions? How come that I am, as I am, with all those evil desires in my heart? Let it have been good in the beginning, but how is it today? What do people do to each other today? From where all the misery with which people are struggling today? What am I going to do with that beautiful beginning in paradise now in my own life and in that from others? No, the confession here is not outside the reality of daily life in this world. It presses through into the depth of us men, as we are now. And again, again it takes us to the beginning of the world to paradise. There lies the origin of the world in which we live today. There is also the beginning of us depraved men in his sin and guilt. Listen to the answer the confession gives to the question from where our depravity comes from. It answers: from the fall and disobedience of Adam and Eve in paradise. No, it does not speak here about the particulars of our fall in the first beginning of this world. It will go into details later in Lordsday 4. It now emphasizes one point. You have fallen, it says to us, you men, you have fallen and you have been disobedient against your God and Creator.

No, the confession does not speak only about our fall. Then we could think that it happened outside of our will, that we became the victim of a power which outside our will pulled us away from God. No, the confession made us fully responsible for what, in the beginning of the world, happened in paradise. You have fallen and you have been disobedient. You have knowingly transgressed the command of God and violated his holy law. Perhaps you think: was it really that serious what happened in paradise? Did the picking of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil had to have such consequences? Did everything depend on that? Yes, says the confession: God had forbidden it. Here it is about a holy law. And with emphasis

the confession calls them both by name: Adam and Eve, the first human couple. They both stood guilty before God. Congregation, these are tremendous facts which confronts us. Question and answer 6 brought you man as God had created him good in paradise. It paints the glory of the beginning before your eyes, as the bible shows us in Genesis 1 and 2. Now the confession takes you along to Genesis 3. There is the origin of sin. Man fell into sin before God through his own will. Perhaps you think: let it be true, let man have fallen in God's paradise and became disobedient. What have I to do with that? Am I accountable for that? Yes forsure, answers the confession in answer 7, yes forsure you are involved, you are part in all of it. Because, it says then, and here every word counts, because there our nature became so depraved, that we all are conceived and born in sin. The catechism does not use the word original sin, but it lies behind it. It is a word that the christian church has used through the ages to indicate what is meant here. Churchfather Augustinus has struggled with it. In his youth he had sinned grossly and was the prey of his passions. Then later when he converted to Christ, he wrested with the question how sin ruled over his life. As large as life the words of Psalm 51 came to him. words David wrote down after his sin with Bathseba. See, says David in Psalm 51:5: Behold I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. There where the origin of my life is there is also the origin of my depravity. A while ago we used the word original sin. The church never meant it to be a hereditary tax. No, it wants to say that the sin of the first man will be accountable to all the following generations. The confession here speaks of our nature that is so depraved that we- you and I- we all are conceived and born in sin. It started with Adam and after him it continues from generation to generation.

Congregation think here about what apostle Paul writes in Romans 5. There he struggled as Augustinus did, also with origin of sin and guilt in the world. There are two, Paul says there, which have been of decisive significance for all of us. In case you have difficulty with the confession of the original sin as it confessed here in answer 7, then read this part of Romans 5 from verse 12 to the end. There the apostle puts both opposite each other: Adam, the first man and Christ the second Adam. Starting in the beginning, in verse 12, he says that all sin entered the world through one man, we could translate that with invaded, with as a result of that, death. And on that theme he continues. You also have to think about verse 18 where the apostle writes that through one deed of trespass led to condemnation for all men and powerfully he puts opposite to that, that through one deed of righteousness, the righteousness of the second Adam Jesus Christ, comes the justification to life. Congregation, may be you asked yourself: but how is it possible that the sin of that one, the first man, is making me accountable for it? Is that righteous of God? Let Adam have sinned, does judgment over him strike me? We can imagine that you are struggling with that. But notice the fact, that the confession here stresses when it speaks about Adam and Eve

as our first ancestors. Here it is not about an individual deed of sin of the first men. God had made a covenant with them and in that covenant all of mankind was included. That is why in the fall and disobedience of them both also all of mankind was included. In them we sinned with them. In God's sovereign accounting of their first sin as trespass God makes us co-responsible with Adam. As well as God accounts to us Christ's actual and passive obedience in the righteousness to life of which Paul spoke in Romans 5:18.

These are stone hard truths with which you are here confronted, but it is the reality of God's accounting of Adam's sin and included in that is, that we sinned in him.

It is not only about a dogma somewhere in an old book of the church. It is about that the catechism shows us that we all, yes it emphasizes: we all became sinners in Adam before God to the root of our existence. We cannot isolate ourselves from Adam our ancestor. You might think that if you only could be above your sins, it would not be so bad. If we only could get above our pride, our egoism, our sensuality. You will not get above these. A flower cut off from its stem, withers and decays. You cannot put it back on the stem. A tree that has been cut down is withered, although for a while it still seems fresh and green. In Adam we are depraved to the root of our existence. I am not only a black sheep in a white flock. I am with the whole flock by nature black before God.

3. In the first place we have seen who we were as men: good and created in God's image in true righteousness and holiness. We also have proclaimed to you what we became: conceived and born in sin. Luckily the confession does not end with that. There is still one more question, a pressing question, but, asks the confession, are we so corrupt that we are totally unable to do any good and inclined to all evil? That little word, but, which is the beginning of question 8, means a lot. Is it really so bad, that little word says? Haven't you pushed to extremes the depravity of men? Indeed, says the answer, it is really bad. The answer to this but has to be a stone hard Yes.

Only: still more is said. A new possibility is mentioned. It is really awful, that is sure: I fell in Adam and am rotten into the root of my life. And still: It does not have to stay that way. O no, We are not into the second part, that of redemption, But it throws its light ahead, here in amid the darkness of misery. Unless we are regenerated by the Spirit of God. Is that not powerful? There is ONE, says this unless, who was rotten to the core of his life. There is ONE who was conceived and born in holiness. He did not hate God and his neighbour. He was not inclined to all evil. He took my guilt and depravity with Him to the cross on Golgotha. There He has obtained the life-giving Spirit, as the Lord Supper form puts it so exquisite and through that Spirit he will liberate me from depravity and death. Through faith in Him will become a new creature.

He, Jesus Christ, He says at the end of this Lordsday: I have

told you stone hard things. You needed that. Because so you became while my Father had created you good. You have lost it, the paradise in which my Father gave you life. But you will get it back. I have a new paradise, the coming city of light with streets of gold and gates of pearl. No, that is not a soother for eternity as marxisme suggests. And there is also not a vague future expectation, as the evolution theory tries to sell you.

Give Me now your hand and go go with me through life. I will make you into a different person. I will renew your unruly and corrupt heart. I will have you born again through my Spirit. So shines the light amid the darkness of misery. So to put it in an oldfashioned manner, this third Lordsday also pushes, with its deep gauging of my misery, me to the only comfort in life and death. To Christ.

Amen.

Lordsday 4

God's punishment over the man without festive attire.

Sermon by the late Dr.R.H.Bremmer Reading Matt 22: 1-4

Enschede.

The Netherlands.

Text: Lordsday 4

Psalm 5: 1,3 and 5

After the law Ps: 19: 5

After the creed Ps 9: 6

Psalm 142: 1,4 and 5

Psalm 119: 31

Psalm 116: 2 and 3

Translated by

R.Winkel,

Edmonton,Alaberta.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the most fascinating parables of our Savior is the one of the royal wedding feast in Matthew 22, which we just read together. You saw there before you: the king send out his servants to invite the quests to the wedding feast of his son. That were of the elite from his kingdom. For a feast like that you do not invite just anyone. From the continuation of the parable they were the rich, large estate owners and businessmen. But they refuse the invitation. It is disgraceful, not willing to come when the king invites you. The king becomes angry. After all: everything is ready for the wedding and the quests are saying thanks but no thanks. Then he does something that really surprises us. This king is a very exeptional king and the diciples must have listened with wide open ears to the continuation of the story. Now he send his servants to the crossroads, places where people congregate and they have to invite everybody to the wedding : good as well as bad. These did come and the wedding hall was filled with quests. says Jesus.

At that moment the king himself enters and he looked with pleasure at the many quests. But what does he see? There is a quest without a festive garment. The king halts. He asks him a question: Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment? (verse 12). I think it must have become very quiet in that big hall. What would the mans answer be? Jesus says: And he was speechless. He just did not have an answer. Then the king said to his servants: bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (verse 13)

With these last words of the king, this wonderful generous and at the same time strict king, are we in the heart of Lordsday 4. The last Lordsday in the part of misery. We are confronted here with dreadful things: guilt of men and God's eternal punishment, with God's holiness and God's righteousness.

Before we we climb the mountain of salvation in the following Lordsdays ,we have to go through a deep valley. But we have to go through it and salvation beckons . We speak about:

God's punishment over the man without a festive garment.

1. That punishment is earned;
2. That punishment is eternal;
3. It does not detract from God's mercy.

1. The catechism continues the talk in question 9 with resisting pupil. Who has a lot of difficulty with it. He throws his questions on the table. You could summarize the question like this: is there not a lot about God you can find fault with? Look at what God all does. You become, as a way of speaking, cold because of it. God demand things from man, which he cannot do. In the previous Lordsday we heard that man is unable to do any good and is inclined to all evil. And now God demands that he fulfill his law. He has to love God above all and his neighbour as himself. And he can't do it. Is that not pure injustice of God? Imagine if a teacher at school has his pupils write a test paper about subject matter, for which they could prepare themselves. Then the whole class would rebel. Imagine if the income tax people would assess you for hundred thousand dollars, while you declared, that you did not have any income in that year? That is totally preposterous? You cannot demand from a lame person, that he walks? You cannot demand from a blind person, to read the newspaper to you? That would be totally unfair. Is not there a lot to find fault with God? Modern men totally agrees with him. God? Where was God when the Jews were gassed in Auschwitz? Where was God when the atom bomb fell on Hiroshima? Where is God in the third world where so many die of hunger and misery? Why is there so much unrighteousness and oppression in the world? All today's misery of the world, many blame God for it. This question, which the pupil asks his teacher, is that not along the same line? Does God ask of men impossible demands? To love God and your neighbour while God knows how far man has fallen.

Now watch how nicely the catechism tackles this question. It does not say to the pupil: keep your mouth shut. You are not allowed to ask such questions. No, here the catechism is guiding. It leads through talking this pupil, because it knows how people have problems with questions about God. It wants to help. It takes the questioner serious. It takes the placing of this question to come before God, as wanting to be on God's side.

Later it will proclaim the gospel, the glad tidings of the salvation in Jesus Christ. But then you have to know in how bad a position you are, and to say it in an old fashioned manner, out of which pit, God has pulled you out.

It says first, and now we, on purpose, cite the original text of the confession: No, He. Before all things this is for sure. This is a fact: God does not unrighteous things, never. Only, the answerer does not leave like this. It knows how these questions live in the bottom of many hearts. It is really necessary to go into this matter thoroughly. No, He. But listen now. Go to the first paradise of which I spoke with you before in the previous Lordsday. I am not finished talking with you about it. There is so much to see and hear in that paradise. Come along. Read along. Now read what the bible says about it in

the first chapters. Take a look. How did God create man? Did God create him as he is today, as you meet him around you, or in yourself? Did He create him as a liar or as a thief or as an adulterer? Did He create him as a murderer of his neighbour or as a swearer and despiser of God? Is that man as God contemplated, before he created him. But God did say: Let us make men to our image, to our likeness. So has God made men. Was not Adam a beautiful piece of work from God's hand? Did not God Himself say, when the creation of man was complete: it was very good. Moreover: Did not God make a covenant with men, in which He gave the promise of eternal life? In that covenant God gave Himself to men and He spend time with him as his child. God walked with him in the cool of the evening as a man with his friend. Did not men receive from God the gift to know Him and spend time with his Creator and Covenant God and to love God? Yes, men loved God in paradise. And Adam and Eve loved one another. They were given to each other as nearest kin. So unfolds God's image in men, in his fulfilling of the holy law of God. No, who reads the first chapters of the bible, shall agree that the catechism not says one word too much, if it declares that God created men so that he could do what God demanded of him. In his being created as in God's image, men wore festive attire which with God had created him.

Yes. perhaps you think: great, that was Adam, that was the first man. God had created him so, that he could keep God's law. But we? Is it not a lot different with us? How can God demand from us, fallen men, men conceived and born in sin, the fulfilment of his law? We are not any better than Adam in paradise? Does this comparison make sense? The catechism knows that this question can rise among us. It has heard so often from men. And that is why, it not leaves it with that reference of men being created good. It makes another step. It has more to say. But, it says now, and that but here has a deep meaning but man himself and all his descendants robbed themselves of these gifts, through the prompting of the devil, into wantonly disobedience. There lies the cause of all the misery in this world. No, not with God, never with God, God is holy, God is righteous, here God goes free. Listen here to what Job tells us from the speech of Elihu: therefore hear me, you men of understanding, far be it from God that he should do wickedness and from the Almighty that he should do wrong. (Job 34:10)

On God there is no dirt, for He is God. The guilt of our misery and impotence lies not without holy Creator, but with men itself. You, the catechism says, you yourself have torn into pieces the festive garment, which God had put around your shoulders. And yes, the devil has betrayed you, that is true. The catechism does not hesitate to bring this to the fore. He, the king of darkness, he made men in paradise to throw off the festive attire. He inspired first the woman and Adam to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Only, you can never hide behind that. You cannot walk away from your guilt. You men have been disobedient wilfully. O, what confronts the confession us here with our guilt in that word wilfully. In that lies the guilt of our fall.

Did you not want to be as God, knowing good and evil, that meaning lies in that word. There the confession pins us down with that word wilfully. How discovering the bible draws in those words of Genesis 3:6 : was to be desired by men. Yes, continues scripture , that the tree was desired, through it to become understanding. Then did not turn away from the tree. No, she took of its fruit and ate, and she gave also to her man who was close to her, and he ate.

Wilfully, the word the catechism uses in the original language, can also be translated with: rebellious. Adam and Eve knew that God forbidden that fruit. They dealt rebellious, wilfully against God' holy law. In those few words: the enticement of the devil and the wilfully disobedience encompasses that whole thrilling story of the fall. There is no getting away from it. You, man, says here the confession you are guilty over against God.

It is your own will, your own will to do such. You men, you have robbed yourself of the wonderful gifts God had given you.

This is how the account reads. How sharp is the division of debit and credit . On the one side credit, the "plus": God has you, men, created so that you could fulfill his law. And over against that the debit, the "minus": You have robbed yourself of these gifts. There lies the festive garment, torn into pieces, on the ground , in the mud of your guilt.

There is one more objection that the catechism very sharply recognizes. There is still one excuse which men through the ages have brought against God. You may think, fine, but that was Adam. Is that really honest , have some explainers of the confession asked, to especially here to point to Adam?

Is men from question 9 not men the way he lives today, in his from God fallen state? And is men from the answer not the first men, by God created as good: Adam and Eve?

Are you allowed to play them off against each other? Congregation the confession recognizes this objection. It knows how men resist , when confronted with his guilt. That is why the confession does not suffice by referring to the fall of the men. It adds something that makes it impossible to withdraw for everyone from this guilt.

What Adam and Eve did, did not only touch them, it declares, but it also touches their descendants. In that one, first man were included all his descendants. When that first man, as a strong tree, fell, the branches and the leaves of the tree fell with it. Adam did not only tear his own festive garment, he also tore the festive garments of his descendants. We have to put in a sharper perspective, congregation. we tore the festive garments ourselves through him. We ourselves. This has been shown to you in Lordsday 3. It comes back here. Even sharper then there. It is about our depravity through Adam, our defilement through his fall. Here the confession sharply points to your guilt. You have robbed yourself of those gifts through the fall of Adam.

We know of the objections against this. Can I be held responsible for Adams guilt, many people ask? Because of that, am I guilty before God? Yes, answers the confession, yes because of that you are guilty before God. Would you have done any better?

Put yourself in front of the mirror of God's holy law. Think about what David confesses to the Lord in Psalm 51:4 :
 Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight. Who places himself before God's holiness, has to admit: in my heart are the same desires as in Adam. No, men in question 9 is not another person as in answer 9. As men I am guilty before God, I fell in Adam. And so points the confession us all to the place where we stand before God: the place of guilt and unrighteousness. God goes free. We are guilty before Him. He clothed us in our first forefather with the festive garment in paradise. We ourselves have torn it into pieces in Adam.

2. Now we come into the heart of this Lordsday and of our misery, in which place we have put ourselves. For now comes the next question, the tenth, straight to us. "Will God allow such disobedience and apostasy to go unpunished?" Would God forget all this? And the confessions answer is straightforward: Certainly not". There is now way that God would forget this evil. God is God for that. He is terribly displeased, answers the confession, terribly with our original sin as well as our actual sins. And not only that. God is not only angry about our sins, he punishes them too. He punishes them, entirely righteous, both now and eternally.

Trough the ages men has objected to this statement. They have opposed this stronly. How is it possible, many have asked? Is God not a loving God? Does not God forgive manifold? Are you really allowed to say that God punishes into eternity? Can God allow that men will be lost eternally? We realise, congregation, That the confession speaks here about things which touch them in the depths of their souls. But have to speak about them. God Himself speaks about this in his holy Word. The confession here is not to ruin men, scare him horribly as some say. It is about being righteous before God. Also here in Lordsday 4, in the depth of our misery, the confession leaves God God, in his majesty and holiness. We could not speak about this, if not later on follows that beautiful part of our salvation. But before all things: God remains God also if He punishes rightly. Indeed, who does not now shudder here as our confession speaks about God's eternal punishment? Who does not think about himself and about his own sins?

At the same time: who does not thank God on his knees that he speak about these things so close to the cross on Golgatha? There where our Savior carried all that hellish punisment for us . We know it : the twentieth century men has difficulty with Scripture speaking about hell and eternal punishment. It wants to see God only as a suffering God, a God who suffers along with his people and would God then, punish eternally? And still: Here it is about God's holiness and righteousness. Did not God immediatly, after the creation of men, speak about punishment? When God ordered men in paradise to expand and watch over the garden of Eden, He added to that, you shall not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, because continues the Lord: for in the day you shall eat of it you shall die.

Death. Does the Lord only mean death as a biological ending of this life, as an doctor ascertains it? No, when God speaks about death, it is about death in its terrible procession, the eternal death. That is to be deprived eternally of Gods love and God's mercy. The apostle Paul, exegetist bar none, sums up in a few words at the end of Romans 6, as he writes: for the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. There they are opposite of each other, on the one side eternal life in Christ Jesus and on the other side: death. What could Paul mean but only: the eternal death? We think here also about Romans 5:12 where the apostle writes that through one man sin came into the world and through sin death and because of that death came to all men, for they all have sinned.

Think here also about your Savior. He Himself went ,for us , through the Godabandonment of the eternal death when He cried out at the cross : my God, my God why have You forsaken Me? He knew of eternal death. And just because of that He does not hesitate to warn us especially through his parables. Read , congregation the end of the parable of the royal weddingfeast which with we started. When the man without a festive garment did not have an answer to the kings question, the king said to his servants. Bind him hand ad foot and cast him into the outer darkness, there men will weep and gnash their teeth. Think also about the parable of the talents in Matthew 25. What did the Lord say to the man who buried his one talent in the ground? Cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Rightly the reformed exegetists have said that we should speak about hell, the place of outer darkness, sober and with care. It are images in which the Savior speaks. The worm that does not die is the selfaccusation of the lost which will harass them forever. The fire that is not extinguished is the fire of God's anger which will pursue the lost into eternity. God is not a sadist when He punishes. He wants that those, who have lived rebellious against Him, will feel His righteous punishment forever. God would not be God if He did not maintain his holiness in His punishment. Your Savior speaks about pushing us to Him, your guarantor, who took this punishment onto Himself. But because and more so ,we have to warn you and at the same time call you to Him, to take refuge in our Savior. Our confession knows how men resist this speaking of the Savior. Therefore it refers to a word in scripture which it completely copies, Galatians 3:10. The confession does not do this very often. Mostly it combines scripture data or cites only a few words. Here it copies totally that word from Galatians 3 in answer to question 10: He has said, it writes there: Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law.

Also think about this, congregation, God's curse begins to work here during this life. The catechism emphasizes that God punishes in time and in eternity. Instead of accusing God ,it pays attention to, what we as men, have deserved. What are there terrible situations among us men.

It is already here and now ~~when~~ ^{THAT} people hate each other and cannot live in harmony with each other. How is it in some marriages? How God's curse works through the social life in which people are very jealous of each other. How people ruin themselves in enslavement. God's curse which works through all that, is the curse of a holy and righteous God, this curse men has brought upon itself.

Congregation, today we do not speak about these things, because hell and curse are a necessity of nature or because God enjoys to punish. We, ourselves have torn the festive garments He gave us, and He is righteous in his justice.

3. Then after all, is it strange that the confession cries out: But God is also merciful? Yes, that is a cry. How does Scripture speak about God? Here we think about Psalm 103. Does it not state there: the Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. That is what is written there. That is the way God is. Yes sure, that how He is. And what is previously said does not take anything away from it. God is merciful and gracious. We can really imagine that the confession at the end of this Lordsday utters this heartrending cry. Not for a moment will it deny, that God is merciful. God is indeed merciful, begins answer 11. That is number one and that stays valid into eternity. God's virtues do not play tag, as it immediately adds: but He is also righteous. He is that both, in full and into eternity. Congregation, how adorable is God here. That is why Lordsday 4 does not take anything away from Lordsday 1, which we started with. It stays unmoveable: the only comfort in life and death. You are also in this Lordsday 4 in the middle of this only comfort. Your confession deepens this comfort. It is not about this comfort that God will forget our sins and let men walk over Him. It is about your wonderful God and Father who is merciful as well as righteous.

Do you have difficulty with this? Is whatever is confessed in this Lordsday about the man without the festive garment, difficult for you to cope with? Go to Golgatha, congregation, go to the cross of your Savior. Hear Him cry there: it is finished. It is finished, all what God gave Him to carry: our punishment. Then Jesus spoke about the man without the festive garment who was thrown out, He prophesied about Himself. He took our nakedness, our tearing up of the festive garment upon Himself. He has obtained for us a new garment, the spotless garment of complete righteousness. He will hand it to us, gratis, freely. About that the next 27 Lordsdays which deal with the salvation. It will declare to you what our Lord Supper form so matchless fine says to us: He was forsaken by God, so that we nevermore be forsaken by God.

Congregation, the festive attire is ready. The next Lordsday will show it to you. We finish with the words of apostle Paul from Corinthians 5: 11: as in the Dutch Staten bible:

We then, knowing the terror of the Lord, persuade men to believe.

Amen.

Lordsday 5

Is there a way?

Sermon by the late
Dr. R. H. Bremmer
Enschede, the Netherlands

Translated by
R. Winkel,
Edmonton, Alberta.

Reading Romans 3: 19-31
Text Lordsday 5
Psalm 77: 7
After the law: Psalm 77: 1, 7
After the creed: Psalm 79: 5
Psalm 103: 1, 3, 5
Hymn 29: 1
Psalm 106: 24.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

On October 31 in the year 1517 a man, dressed in a monks frock, walked across the square before the church in Wittenberg, in Germany. The next day people would celebrate All Saints Day. It was about noon. He had a large closely written sheet of paper in his hand. On that were written 95, through him formulated, theses. They were all aimed, direct or indirect, against the horrible misuse, that John Tetzel, the papal envoy, made of the indulgence. On that piece of paper, Luther declared, for he was that man, that he was ready to defend those 95 theses the next day in public.

The first thesis rang like a bell. As our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, speaks: Show sorrow for your sins etc. For He wants that the whole life of believers shall be one of penance. And especially the 62th The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and the grace of God. After 14 days these 95 theses were known throughout all Germany and after a few months throughout all of Europe.

Without these theses, there would not have been a reformation in the deformed church of the middle ages. Luther placed the gospel of God's grace high on a candlestick in dark Europe. Without these theses, also the 5th Lordsday of the catechism, would not have been imaginable. With this first Lordsday out of the part of our deliverance you are in the heart of the gospel. And there are 26 more to follow. Our deliverance is the heading of the second part. In that there is something like a shout of joy. Rightaway in the first question is asked for the road to salvation. How can we escape this punishment and be again received into favour? An intrusive question. We will think about this and also about the answer. We speak to you about:

Is there a way to salvation?

1. God opens it;
2. We cannot open it ourselves;
3. It is given in Christ.

1. Again we are in school. The pupil took his place at the desk. He has been thinking about what he heard the last time. Opposite from him sits the teacher. We are listening to the conversation they have. Last week the pupil had to hear some tough words. He was being accused. Through the wilfully disobedience and through the instigation of the devil he had robbed himself of the gifts, which God had promised him at creation.

Worse: because of that he had earned the temporal and eternal punishment. God does not forget our fall into sin. Imagine. God would not be God. The horror of the outer darkness had been discussed. Heart rending, the pupil had asked: is God not merciful? It had been a moving conversation. It touched the depth of our being in this world. The pupil had thought about it. He is ready for a next conversation and he confesses; I go through my knees and I capitulate. We have earned, according to God's righteous judgment in time and in eternity, punishment. Yes sure, I acknowledge that, confesses the pupil.

Only: and you can see him looking up at this teacher anxiously only how can we escape this punishment and be again received into favour? Congregation you can feel the tension that lies in this question. It is life question. Our eternal salvation is on the line. Sure, sure, he says: it is absolutely right in what you have told me so far. Please show me a way to escape.

The pupil has carefully framed his question about a way to escape. He has really thought about it. Look at it carefully congregation, at the word again that he uses in the question. He asks how we again be received into favour. No, he does not ask if we can be received into favour. He asks emphatic how we again can be accepted in favour. There is something of expectation in the eyes of the pupil when he uses that word "again". He is thinking about the conversation of last week. Then his teacher had told him about paradise in which God had created man. How he there, in paradise, displayed God's image and enjoyed the glory of a life with God in his covenant. And he really wants to go back to that. To that first world of God, in which man could enjoy God in peace, living in his favour. We, people of the twentieth century, can image that desire real well. It is a desire to a style of living which men of this century so passionately want. A world without environmental dirt, in which you can breath freely. In which acid rain cannot ruin God's creation and in which there will not be the threat of the atombomb hanging over men. In which righteousness rules and a large part of mankind does not perish because of hunger, misery and war. In which there will be no terror and no bombs which explode among innocent people. In which God will be acknowledged again as Creator of heaven and earth, whom men will serve with their whole heart. Is there no way to get to that paradise again, to a life in love with God and the neighbour? No, here in question 12 you do not deal with a dry logical question. It is a life and death question which kept this pupil intensively busy.

With anxiety the pupil looks at his teacher. What shall he answer? Then comes the answer: God demands that His justice be satisfied. Many explainers say: is that now the answer?

That block granite: God demands that His justice be satisfied. Could the confession here not answer more directly? Why not does the confession here point to Lordsday 7: that we are saved through a true faith. Or to Lordsday 23: that we through a true faith are righteous before God? Why that cumbersome with that: God demands that His justice be satisfied and with what then added? Congregation: you must have looked at a deep hole as a new apartment block will be built there. Do the builders start with laying bricks for the walls? No way, first concrete piles are driven into the ground, on which the walls of the building will be placed. That building has to withstand storms. It also should not sink in soggy soil. It has to stand on those piles. That is why they are driven into the ground, pile after pile, stroke upon stroke. Now, so it is with the confession. It is erecting the building of our deliverance. And that building has to have a very strong foundation. It has to be able to withstand the storms of false doctrines and unbelief. That is why the confession takes the trouble to go step by step and drives the piles of that firm foundation of God into the ground for the gospel of deliverance. Yes, take a good look at that answer 12. Do you have trouble with that word righteousness, when the confession declares that God will be paid to get this righteousness. I agree with you: it is not an easy word to explain. It looks somewhat unruly. Children sometimes have difficulty understanding it. But, it is a beautiful word that really belongs to God. It is a real fully alive word. Read the newspapers and listen to the media, don't they declare time and time again that righteousness should come into our society? Don't they call for righteousness in the lives of the nations? Don't they seek righteousness for the poor third world that is been exploited by the rich western nations? Don't politicians call for righteousness to come in our society? That the rich should not get richer and the poor poorer? Righteousness: in our world a real fully alive word. To that we have to add something important. When people of today use the word righteousness, they stay on the outside of that word. They do not penetrate into what this word really means. Perhaps we should express it like this: people of today use that word righteousness mostly in a horizontal manner. In the way of righteousness mutually among people in their society. But when the confession uses that word here, it does not think only about a horizontal meaning. Happily not. In the first place it thinks about the vertical meaning of that word. Surely, it also means that people among themselves practice righteousness. In the first place it sees about what we owe God. Better said: God insists that He receives what we men owe Him. In that word righteousness, is the word right. God has a claim on us people. And what that claim contains we already heard in the previous Lordsdays. He demands of men love for Him, his Covenant God and Creator. Christ taught us that, declares Lordsday 2: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.. Was did not the first and the main statute? Remember what your Savior added: You shall love your

neighbour as yourself. On these two laws, to the righteousness we owe God, depend all the law and the prophets. In the following Lordsdays was added, that we owe God the punishment which he has set on the trespasses of his righteousness. God's righteousness: that is his love-demand and punishment-demand righteousness.

There it goes into the ground the first concrete pile of God's justice. God wants that his justice will be fully paid.

For God is God and justice is justice and punishment is punishment. Before we can speak about the paradise which we desire to have back, that has to be for us as solid as a rock. Otherwise God would not be God. We cannot simply speak about righteousness we people owe each other, unless we not only first cement as a rock, what we owe God. How shall a good for life world be possible, how shall the glory of paradise be able to return, if we not give to God what is rightly His? Peace among men is only possible if peace comes between men and God. And so your confession calmly and firmly draws the conclusion: God demands that his justice be satisfied. Therefore full payment must be made either by ourselves or by another. Yes, so it is written: we have to pay God for His justice.

Through the ages men often kicked against that word "Paying". O, many people say: what is that a hard and cool word. Who uses that word if it about the relationship between God and us?

Paying, you do that to the milkman or baker or your creditors. That is not a word you use if it is about your relationship with God? Do you know, that the bible uses that word often, if it is about what we owe God? Have you read Psalm 116 correctly? When the poet of this Psalm comes to the end of praising his God, because He has saved him from death and from the anxiety for death, then he says: I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem and then he adds a whole-hearted Praise the Lord. Read in the book of the prophet Hosea chapter 14:2 : So will we pay the offers of our lips.

Scripture takes this plain word from our daily banking to express what we owe God. Paying: that is what you do over the storecounter, punctual and precise, to the last cent. Or to use another example, when with a hostagetaking ransom has to be paid, then the release of the hostage only happens when the ransom is paid up to the last cent. Well, that word uses your confession to show you what God demands. He is asking payment for our debt to Him up to the last penny. Because He is God. Your confession also points to the parable from Matthew 18 of the man who owed his master ten thousand talents. Who forgave him that debt, an unimaginable deed of forgiveness. And what did the man do, whose enormous large sum was forgiven? He seized a poor soul, who owed him a hundred pence, by his collar and insisted on payment. When his master found out about this, he delivered him to the torturers and continues Jesus: till he should pay all that was due to him. That was the masters right, punctual and precise.

Again: God is God and justice is justice. He has a right to this payment. But, congregation now notice in what context the

confession uses that word payment.

Does it do so to put us in a corner? Does it emphasize that paymentdemand to take away from us the prospect of paradise lost? To say to us that peace with God shall never come?

No way. You know what you read here? That is why we have to pay to this righteousness by ourselves or listen good, or through another. Here in the middle of that granite sentence shines the gospel. God insists on his paymentdemand, that is sure. But your confession opens up a great view about the deliverance, right in the answer of this Lordsday 5. There is a road to deliverance. There in Another who for me and in my place can pay. The door to the deliverance is not ajar like some claim.

No, there has to be payment, that is for sure. God is not a fickle God, different today from yesterday or tomorrow. God is God and justice is justice. But if I cannot pay, there is Another who takes my place.

Your confession here points to what Paul writes in Romans 8:3 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh -with other words: what we are short in satisfying God's paymentdemand- God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh that through the righteousness of the law might

be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. How great is God's pleasure. Here shines his sovereign love. When we went broke and were shipwrecked in the the achievement of his paymentdemand, He has found a way through which for us and in our place it could be paid for us: through his own dear Son. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

2. Is there a way to deliverance? So we asked in the theme of this sermon. You have heard the first answer. God opens the road, is that answer. And still it is as if the pupil who listens so anxiously to his teacher, did not listen attentively. Or that the answer slid by him. You would think: immediately he will ask who that Another is? No, he stays stuck in the first part of the answer, that we ourselves or through another have to pay. It is just that he does not notice the fingerpointing in that through Another. He only hooks into the first part. He has not understood the full depth of answer 12. He asks: can we pay ourselves? In that lies: if we now have all that devotion and love for God and to our neighbour, can we not ourselves make an arrangement with God? That pupil wants to work. He wants to get into action horizontally: once now we ourselves go and prove the righteousness in this life with our neighbour, don't we come into the clear with God's righteousness? He lays all the cards of do it yourself and of his devotion on the table. Pay oneself? You? I? Listen to what a cutting answer the confession gives here: Certainly not, it answers. No way. Yourself? We think here about what we heard in the beginning about Luther. If there was one, who tried to do it himself, it was he. He wanted to come into the clear with

God through his own righteousness ,through his own devotion. He did good works. He punished himself. On his bare knees he climbed the Pilate stairway in Rome. And so many have tried it. Our confession states this question against a background of a time, in which indulgences and good works had to open heaven. And how many, from the time past the reformation, have thought that they could find peace with God through their own experience and their own pious stature? We ourselves? In its answer, the confession, terse and powerful, cuts off every try to be just with God through the answer it now gives. We ourselves? On the contrary, we daily increase our debt. It is an unbelievable sharp answer, discovering and perturbing. Your confession does not give this answer based on a loose foundation. It points us to the book of Job, in which God quarreled with devoted and honest Job. What does Job confess in chapter 9:3 :he asks could a man be just over against God? Can a mortal and sinful man be just with God? Hear his own answer: If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand. It also refers to the statement of the Temanite Eliphaz in this impressive biblebook: Behold he puts no trust in the saints; yea, the heavens are not clear in his sight. How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinks iniquity like water.(Job 15:15,16.)

Someone has explained Eliphaz words like this: If the angels in their entirety, as they are pure, cannot close the holes sin has made in the dam of this world. how much less man who daily increases his debt. And, very discovering, the confession names here also the fifth petition of the Lord's prayer: Forgive us our debts, we pray daily. How could the Savior have taught us this petition, if we did not stand before God loaded down with debt?

Also, congregation consider, Psalm 130, that pilgrimagesong from the depth. Here confesses this templegoer his guilt over against God, which he is going to meet in his sanctuary. Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. Lord hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. How these words confirm, in what follows, what the catechism confesses here in answer 13: If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?

In answer 13 lies a for us, strong humiliating power. Don't read over that little word we. It says there: Every day we make the debt- yes sure, every day- bigger. Not: they the godless, the unbelievers do that. O yes about them we can accept that. We see how the world around us is full of unrighteousness. Men speaks loudly about a livable world, But has there ever been a time in which publicly, in writing and on television, there has been so much unrighteousness? A livable world: where everything is done to kill life, before it is born? A livable world: but when life seems not more livable, it is allowed to destroy it. The measure of the unrighteousness of this world threatens to be full. But we? In case we place ourselves before the face of the holy God, does it not count for us what the confession later says in Lordsday 23: Although my conscience accuses me that I have grievously sinned against all God's

commandments, have never kept any of them, and am still inclined to all evil?

And still, still the pupil who asks the questions is not driven to that Another, of which answer 12 spoke. Still he is seeking other possibilities. And how patiently his teacher listens, who answers him, to his questions. Also to the question which he belately asks in question 14: Can a creature, that only is a creature, pay for us? Is there really on our own creation level not a way to find deliverance? Was God not satisfied with the sacrifices brought to Him? When the temple was inaugurated by Solomon, did he not slaughter less than twenty thousand head of cattle and one hundred twenty thousand sheep? (2 Cron 7:5) Was God not satisfied with that? Did not through the old testament flow a stream of blood from sacrifices to extinguish God's wrath? God indeed was satisfied with that but only for a time. He saw behind that blood from cattle the precious blood of his dear Son, that once would be poured out for us. That was for a while. But God is God and justice is justice. He keeps demanding payment from men who are in debt to Him. What shall men do over against God? Who shall liberate us from his insisting on righteousness because of his violated justice? Who knows the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath, asks Moses in Psalm 90. So the pupil has groped from the bottom up all the roads of deliverance. They are closed.

3. The conversation is just about finished. The clock shows that for this week enough has been done. All the possibilities have been checked out. The doors of the jail, in which men had shut themselves in, were rattling. They were securely locked. Is there not one open door? In his utmost distress the pupil asks one more question, the decisive one, before school closes. This question is squeezed out of his heart. Do we have than to seek for a mediator and deliverer?

O congregation, how this little word "than" is emphasized. Now if it is like that, does that mean, that now all the other doors are closed, where can we seek then? By which Mediator? The confession here goes to Timothy 2:5, There Paul shows his young pupil Timothy the way in a world of idols and supposedly mediators. He emphasized strongly to him: Timothy in that world in which you soon, without me, have to lead and teach Christ's church, there is only ONE Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. Did you listen closely Timothy? Have you heard it too, church of all ages? He mediates between God, who insists on payment, and us. How beautiful does your confession put beside that word Mediator that other word: Deliverer. It stays in style the catechism. It stays in style to the end of this first Lordsday from the part of the deliverance. Here it could have named a name, the name of Jesus Christ. It could have pointed the finger to Him who suffered and died and rose from the dead. It does not do this yet. Here also in the last answer the catechism lays the foundation. It again drives a pile deep into the ground as the foundation of our deliverance. He, the Mediator, has to be, says the confession without naming his name, a true and righteous man and also more powerful than

all creatures, which means: He has to be at the same time true God. But we do not close this sermon without naming that name. It is Jesus. There is one in this disabled and chaotic world, there is one who can take us to grace, to paradise. There is One who can make this world livable again. who can restore God's peace. We show Him to you with the words of John the Baptist when he saw Him come to him: Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world. He is the Other. He has paid with the last drop of his blood for you and for me on Gogatha. He is God and man in one Person. He cried out: it is finished. God is God and justice is justice. That is as firm as a rock. Well now, He has paid God for us with his blood. On the thirty-first day of October 1517 a man walked back after he had nailed his theses on the door of his church. The true treasure of the church, was written on that paper, is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God. This Lordsday has laid an unshakable foundation for that gospel: in the One, the Other, in Jesus Christ. Congregation, SEEK HIM.

Amen.

Lordsday 6.

Christ our Redeemer.

Sermon by the late
Dr. R. H. Bremmer.
Enschede, the Netherlands.

Translated by
R. Winkel,
Edmonton,
Alberta.

Reading: Ruth. 3,
Hebr. 2:10-18.

Text: Lordsday 6.

Psalm 97:1,6.

After the law: Psalm 130:2.

After the creed: Psalm 132:8.

Psalm 103: 4,5,8.

Psalm 98:1.

Psalm 99:6.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the most beautiful books from the Old Testament is that little book Ruth. It is sheltered between the book of Judges and the books of Samuel. The synagogue placed it even in the section of the Scriptures, the last part of the Old Testament in Israel. But as small as it is, only 4 chapters, it is worth gold. It is not only very fascinating, it is full of gospel, and of the glad tidings. That glad tidings of forgiveness and of righteousness in Christ comes to us in this book in the form of Israelite laws and customs. It also gives you a good view on the Israelite way of life. It shows us Ruth, the Moabitess, who gleaned among the barley sheaves on the land of Boaz. While she does that, all the Israelite institutions come into play, which are related to the deliverance of life in the Messiah. Boaz becomes beside Ruth the central figure. He asserts himself as Redeemer, as the man who pays the debt for someone else. He does that for Naomi, Ruth's mother in law. He redeems her inheritance under Israel by buying it back. But not only that: he also acts as Levirate. That means as the man who marries Ruth to procreate by her for Mahlon, her deceased husband. Later on new life is coming, a son in the lineage that through the passing away of Elimelech and Mahlon was finished. So combines Boaz in himself the redemption and the levirate. You may think: great. But today we are into Lordsday 6, about the Lord Jesus being a true God and a true man. Are you not straying from your theme with this story about Boaz and Ruth? What has this to do with Lordsday 6? And what a difference between this fascinating story of Boaz and Ruth and this seemingly so a splintery Lordsday? Indeed Lordsday 6 is not popular with these sharp questions: why must the Mediator be a true and righteous man? Why must the Mediator be a true God? Is that gospel, the glad tidings? Well, congregation, this Lordsday is really the gospel, the proclaiming of God's glad tidings in Jesus Christ. It is that because it shows us our Savior as our Redeemer. Projecting this Lordsday against the background of the little book Ruth we see the message it will bring us. Lordsday 6 shows us how our Savior as our God can take action as our Redeemer. It also shows us that He really wants to do so. It confesses as a third person that the Savior

that Redeemer is and nobody else. That is why we speak today about Jesus Christ as our Redeemer. That is why the theme of today is:

Christ as our Redeemer.

1. He can be that;
2. He wants to be that;
3. He is it too.

1. Why could Boaz act like the Redeemer of Naomi and Ruth? Well congregation, he was family. You have to keep a sharp eye on this. You know how the Lord through Joshua gave the land Canaan to Israel as an inheritance. And inside the territory of the tribe every family, every generation received its own inheritance. Every Israelite lived on that portion under his own vine and his own figtree. In that lay the prophesy of the new heaven and the new earth which God's people shall inherit. Now it could happen that an Israelite lost his portion. There were Israelites who became poorer and either through lazyness or sickness had to sell their heritage portion. Otherwise they could not pay their debts. Such an Israelite had to work as a day-labourer for someone else. It could even happen that he had to sell himself as a slave. Then he became a slave for his creditor. God had, in the law of Moses, made efficient provisions for such situations. You can read about that in Leviticus 25. There you will find the law about the year of the jubilee. Once every 50 years the priests would blow the horn, they would ring in the year of the jubilee. Then all the real estate that was estranged came back to the original generation. The rich lost a piece of their riches. The poor and the slaves got back their possessions and their freedom. But fifty years is a long time, an half century. What would happen if you got into poverty just after the year of jubilee? The next year of jubilee was so far away. The Lord had also foreseen this. He gave that in Leviticus 25, the institution of the Redeemer. That word Redeemer is for us oldfashioned. We speak of a Redeemer, and that is what he was, he redeemed from debts and poverty. God gave to the nearest relative of such an impoverished Israelite the instruction to buy back the land for his brother. The creditor, who had become the owner of the land, was in such a case obliged to agree with the redemption. He had to agree that the land was bought back by the nearest kin of the man from he had bought it. Yes, and then the Lord had given another law to help his people in an emergency. Now mean the law of the liverate. It could happen in Israel that a man died young and left a childless wife behind. in that case the Lord instructed that the brother of the deceased man married his widow. Who knows he procreated the next generation by her That then was put in the name of the deceased brother, so that says the law in Deuteronomy 25:6 his name may not be blotted out of Israel. That law is even valid in today's Israel. Nowhere in the Scriptures you see the effect of both these laws more concrete then in this little book Ruth. Ruth and her mother

in law Naomi came back very poor from Moab, in today's language returned from emigrating. In this case it was a sinful emigration, because Moab was a heathen country. God's blessing did not rest upon it. Elimelech, Naomi's husband and Mahlon the husband of Ruth both died there. Now they returned to Bethlehem, having lost everything. I won't go into details of the story. You know how Naomi, sharpwitted as she was, saw the possibility to combine both these laws, the Redeemer and the Liverate. Because farmer Boaz, by whom Ruth was gleaning, was related. He could become the Redeemer, but there was a closer family relation who was first in line to take this Redemption obligation,

But who knows. Who knows. he may not be interested. And also if Boaz would be the Liverate and marry Ruth? Naomi already noticed that he was interested in Ruth. Who knows. And then develops the whole story as written in Ruth 3 and 4. Read it when you are at home. Ruth's trip to the threshing floor, Boaz willingness to act as Redeemer, also willing to marry Ruth, it is all told in a fascinating manner. The important point is: Boaz was kin and that is why he is called to act as Redeemer. Now, congregation we again look at Lordsday 6, at that first question and answer. First take a look at the first question. Why, asks the confession, does the Mediator have to be a true and righteous man? That Mediator, here mentioned, in no one else then your Savior, then Jesus Christ. Immediately He is the centre of this Lordsday. What does that mean that being a true man that your Savior is related? That He is member of that large human family. which we all together are part of. He has to be that, says the confession, he has to be, because of God. He has to be a real human being of flesh and blood like you and me. We are a little surprised that the catechism lays such an emphasis on this being human of the Savior. This is placed here as a first in the very front. We would expect that the confession in the first place would emphasize his being God. Through the ages the church has fought for this with all its power. Also through the ages this was attacked from all sides. What had the old christian church, the church of Athanasius and of Augustinus and all the other church fathers, to fight for this. You know the Nicene Creed. It must have been read here instead of the Apostles' Creed. Now there the christian church confesses the being God of your Savior. He is God out of God and Light out of Light. That was the big controversy in that battle during the first ages of the church. Arius denied it and Athanasius held on with all he had: Christ, our Lord, is true God.

Why does Lordsday 6 push this suddenly to the front, that our Savior is a true man? You would say that today's men is convinced of that. Don't they call Jesus the great Revolutionary? Don't they sing of Him as Jesus Christ Superstar? Don't they take Him to themselves as one of us? Now here comes Lordsday 6 and it puts a fat line under it: Jesus Christ has to be a true man. You may question: how come that this being man of Christ, being out of our family, comes so powerfully to the fore? Well, this is the answer: your redemption depends on it. This is as one

piece tied to the man being of Jesus Christ. You should think about this. He has to be a true and real man, because God's righteousness insists upon this, that the human nature, which sinned, also pays for the sins. Again, congregation, again the confession confronts us with our fall in Adam. We don't have to go into that. We looked into that in the previous Lordsdays, in Lordsday 2, 3, and 4. In them our fall in Adam was detailed. Now this is power: Christ comes as man to take your place. There where God's wrath is, there is no angel, there is no sacrificial animal, there is He. He is the man who paid our debt to God. I, as man, had and have sinned. I, as man, rebelled against the Lord God in paradise. Now, than God's righteousness demands, that pure holy righteousness, that I as man pay my debt to God? And so the gospel shows you also your Savior, as a true man, as our substitute. He was hungry when He was tempted by the devil in the desert for bread. He wrested as man in Gethsemane when he was sorrowful and became very scared because of the cup, the Father held in front of Him. He moaned at the cross: I thirst. He was tempted by the devil, but did not sin. As man He learned obedience out from what He suffered. You should not imagine your Savior as someone far away from you. He is beside you, as man. He offers you the hand in your temptations. He is as man, just like you and me, gone through the hell of temptations. In this Lordsday 6 in question and answer 16, it is immediately about your only comfort in life and death. He has you as man, through his suffering and death, ransomed out of the grip of the devil and redeemed us from all the debt. Yes sure, He is part of the family. He could never as our Redeemer have ransomed us from God's wrath, if He did not belong to our human family. It is surprising to see how the apostle Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians tied this oldtestament institution of the redemption and applied it to our Savior. He writes in Corinthians 1:30 He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. He has redeemed us as our Redeemer before God and to be able to do that He has to be part of the family. The same as Boaz was from the family of Elimelech. Your Savior was a true man, says answer 16. He had to be that. But that is not all. Lordsday 6 places something beside that. It says: He also had to be a righteous man. You should not misunderstand this. We are inclined to think about righteousness as someone who is righteous and reasonable in his dealings. The confession does not mean that here. It expresses that your Savior was without sin and spotless. Which of you convicts Me of sin? he asks the Pharisees. (John 8: 46). Nobody could. He went his way without sin and spotless. He, our Savior and Mediator. And because of that He can, being a righteous man, be your Redeemer. Imagine that Boaz was broke. Imagine that he was deep in debt. How could he act, at the gate of Bethlehem, as Redeemer for Naomi and Ruth? He could be Redeemer, for he could pay the debt of Elimelech and give back to Naomi her inheritance. Once more I look at the words of Paul in Corinthians 1:30. He puts it surprisingly concrete: Christ in His own Person became to us of God, wisdom and

righteousness. He is righteous for us. He Himself is our righteousness. So Boaz became, at the gate of Bethlehem for these two impoverished women, their personal righteousness. After their heritage was redeemed and Ruth was married, their position in Bethlehem was changed radically. No one could dun them for the debt. No one could bother Ruth about her situation. Everything was official and honestly done. Boaz took ten elders of Bethlehem as witnesses.

Is this not a glorious Gospel? A man, who himself is a sinner, says answer 16, cannot pay for others. That is why your Savior had to be a spotless, righteous man without sin. He was that, and He took the burden of God's wrath and carried it away. And not only that. Now come the third "had to" for our Savior. He had to be a true and righteous man and, says question 17 now, He also must be true God. Only like that He can be a Redeemer for us. What an adorable mystery you confess here, congregation. Your Redeemer is God and man in one Person. So the church has confessed Him in her old oecumenical forms. At the same time God and man: two natures, but one Jesus Christ. We can never understand this with our brains. So He also could, says answer 17 in that sturdy and at the same time emotional language of the catechism, carry the burden of God's wrath for us and obtain and restore to us righteousness and life. Precious words. What what we lost through our rebellion against God, He gives back to us. No creature could ever carry God's wrath. He did it for his being God supported his being man in those three hours of darkness on Golgotha. There He finished with the carrying of the load of God's eternal wrath in an eternal timespan and a wonder of grace, now he gives life back to us. He dresses us in the white garment of the complete righteousness which He obtained for us on Golgotha. As Boaz made Ruth his bride and gave her the wedding dress and wedding jewelry, so Jesus gives us the cloak of salvation and He dresses us with that in his merciful election. Yes sure, He can be our Redeemer, in full and complete.

2. He can be that, He wants to be that. Now on purpose I bring first question and answer 19 to the fore. Actually first answer 18 should now be focussed on. But question and answer 19 form a special important part of Lordsday 6 and they are not really done justice. That is why I now them, in the middle of the sermon, with power to the front. All what we have said so far about your Savior as God and man in one Person, our Redeemer, is once more summarized in that one little word 'this' in question 19: from where do you know this? There has to be ground under your feet, unshakeable ground, a strong foundation. We don't want to gull ourselves. It is about knowing for sure. No, it does not say: how do you practice this? Or: how do you feel this? Or how do you experience this? No, the surety of faith is not built on human feelings. It is about knowing. Of course, not in the manner to know 2 times 2 is 4. It is about to know what the following Lordsday, Lordsday 7, amply discusses. It is about knowing in faith, a knowing that touches you in the core of your soul. Now, upon the question: from where do I know this, the

confession gives a marvelous answer. God does not leave us dangling. He not only says to us, that Jesus can be our Redeemer, He will also show us that He wants to be this. For that, the whole Gospel is the guarantor. He wants to be our Redeemer, for that He has given us his Word. I think once more of the happenings on Boaz threshing floor. There Boaz gave Ruth his word. He said: and now my daughter, do not fear, I will do for all that you ask. (Ruth 3:11) He gave Ruth his manly word. When she later told that to Naomi, she answered: for the man will not rest, but will settle the matter today. He had given his word, right? Now, this is the way also with your Redeemer congregation. He has given his given His Word and that Word is called the gospel. It runs like a golden tread through the whole Old Testament.

Ursinus and Olevianus have worded in answer 19 one of the most important answers from the catechism. They did this very clearly. Every sentence in this answer is worth gold. You know what they did? They take you by the hand and guide you through the whole Old Testament and do not forget: without the Old Testament, the New Testament cannot be understood. In the Old Testament your Redeemer throws his shadow far ahead, already in paradise. Answer 19 calls this foreshadowing. Because, says answer 19, in that paradise God already proclaimed the holy gospel.

Really, right after the fall. Then already your Savior gave his Word that He would be your Guarantor and Redeemer. The Lord God already let it be heard, that the seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent. (Genesis 3:15)

The mother promise (?) we call these words, for from this very first promise came all the other promises. It is a powerful promise and God works it and underlines it throughout the whole Old Testament. Listen, how answer 19 this further develops: after that God that glad gospel proclaimed by the patriarchs and prophets. You see Abraham leave from Ur, the luxurious city of the moon goddess Sin, to the land that God would show him. He also was given a promise: in your seed all the generations of the earth shall be blessed. Abraham lived for that promise. He passed it on to his descendants. God guarantees his promises, that is what he told Isaac, who in turn passed God's promises on to Jacob. The story of the patriarchs is one great promise story, to comfort us, the believers of the new covenant. Hear Jacob proclaim on his deathbed the promise of the Messiah through Judah: Judah, your brothers shall praise you, the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. Genesis 49:10.

Leaning on the promise, Jacob cried out: I wait for thy salvation, O, Lord. Gospel being proclaimed in the old days. Sure, God vouches for his Word: the prophets spoke about this. I think about the Messianic promises which Isaiah proclaimed to his contemporaries.: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.... for to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulders, and his name will be called "Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting

Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9: 1 and 6. It would be too much to name all the promises, which God had given through his prophets. Their books are full with them. And still answer 19 is not finished talking about the gospel of the coming Messiah. God has the gospel, it declares, further portrayed through the sacrifices and the ceremonies of the law. Congregation, what is the Old Testament a rich book. You could say: it is one great picturebook, children can enjoy it. It shows us the salvation of the Messiah and shows tangibly to us the sacrificial service of Israel. It is one great proclamation of what our Redeemer will do in the fulness of time. It shows that in the blood that flows around the large copper burnt-offering altar, how our Redeemer will surrender Himself. How He will offer himself, his blood and his life for his people. All those sacrifices point you to the Lamb of God, who on Golgotha let himself be slaughtered for his people. And then the ceremonies. Look at the high priest when he on Yom Kippur, the great day of Atonement, takes off his beautiful official robe, and in a white robe with a platter of blood goes into the holy of holies to sprinkle blood on the atonement lid of the ark. See him put his hands on the head of the scapegoat, to transfer the guilt of the people and then send this animal into the desert. The whole priestly service, the tabernacle and its tools: It is full of God's atonement and redemption. So comes answer 19 to its climax. Lastly, it says: after all those ages of sacrifices and other ceremonies, lastly God has fulfilled the gospel through his only begotten Son. There in the manger of Bethlehem, there lies God's Son, made man for us. There lies the Redeemer, who through the hard wood of the manger already is confronted with his cross. Lastly. Now the cross of Golgotha rises up for us with God's Son hanging on it, for our trespasses. So He could not only be our Redeemer He wanted to be that. in full surrender into death. The whole gospel through the Old Testament witnesses this.

3. We come, congregation to the last part. Christ cannot only be Redeemer, He does not want to be that only, He is it too. That proclaims question answer 18. One pointed question: who then is that Mediator who at the same time is true God and a true and righteous man? You can hear the impatience in that little word "that". Now all is said, and from all sides illuminated how He has to be, now we want to know who He really is. Your confession answer this question with just about literally citing the earlier named place in Scripture: one Corinthians 1:30. Only it sharpens the words a little. it does that through with its first word: Our Lord Jesus Christ. What lies there a happiness of faith in that one word "our". Faith here appropriates God's treasures. No, we do not speak here of a Savior far away. It is not about a Redeemer who is strange to us. Faith lays its hand on Him. Outside faith we cannot say a word about Him that is valid. He is "our" Lord Jesus Christ. He bought us and we are His. So He is us, given to wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and a complete redemption. As I said before: answer 18 sharpens 1 Corinthians 1:30 a

little. It does not do this only with the beginning: our Lord Jesus Christ. In the dutch catechism, it does this by adding the word complete ,before the word redemption. He is given to us by God as a complete redemption. Congregation, there is through Christ a completed work and on that you may lean. That is the firm foundation on which you stand.

Do you know how you can summerize this answer? I think about that cry from John the Baptist when Jesus came to him to be baptized. He then points the finger to Jesus and cries out: Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. That lamb of God is being preached to you in this Lordsday as your Redeemer.

I may assure you in God's name: He cannot only be your Redeemer because He is God and man at the same time. He will not only be your Redeemer because the gospel speaks about Him and He quarantees his Word. I say to you as the last point: He is it too. Really, He is it. Take shelter under Him. And then say with the poet Da Costa from the last century: My Savior, my Redeemer, my sindestroyer. Praised be Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Lordsday 7.

The dire necessity of believing.

Sermon by the late
Dr. R. H. Bremmer,
Enschede, the Netherlands.

Translated by
R. Winkel,
Edmonton, Alberta.

Reading: Luke 13: 22-30.
Psalm 81: 1, 7, 9,
After the law: Ps 80: 8
After the creed: Ps 138: 2,
Psalm 27: 1, 2, 6,
Hymn 43 :1,
Psalm 2: 4.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

When your Savior went through all the cities and villages of Israel preaching, someone, a man or a woman, asked him a question. Lord, asked that someone, will those who are saved be few? That was a penetrating question. It was also understandable. The Lord Jesus had spoken about the kingdom of heaven and had compared it to a mustardseed that grows into a big tree, and about a woman who put yeast into three measures of flour and all that flour became leavened. What is happening in the kingdom of heaven is hard to understand, someone thought. You have to have a great faith to become a big tree from a mustardseed, or from a small amount of yeast to a totally leavened dough.

You need a great faith for that. Who would have such a faith? That has to be only a few. You can really understand that someone would ask that question. Still the question was wrong. He or her who asked the question, were calculating. Are they few? How many would it be? Would he be able to have such a faith? The questioner puts himself at a distance. At that moment he does not believe.

Pay attention to the answer of the Lord Jesus. He said to them, says the gospel here in Luke 13:23 : Strive to enter by the narrow door, for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. The Savior does not go into the question about many or few. He just passes this up. He puts that questioner before the demand of believing. You have to believe, says the Lord Jesus, and believing, that is entering through the narrow gate of the kingdom. You have to totally renounce yourself and in faith look upon God and his promises. And mind you, continues the Lord, You being saved is the ante of the game. For many, I say to you, will try to enter and cannot do so. They try to enter along a wrong road. They do not go along the narrow path of believing only. And watch out. Do not think, because you are an Israelite and not a heathen, you can easily enter the kingdom. And many shall come from East and West and from

North and South, and sit at the table in the kingdom of God. You have to believe, the Lord is saying, upon that depends your preservation, your eternal preservation. Believing is a dire necessity for your own salvation. Now this dire necessity of believing, the catechism will also in this Lordsday enjoin that to you heart. You have to believe, it says to us today,

but fortunately: you are allowed it do so. And do you know what you need for it? You have to believe everything what is promised to us in the gospel and that the catholic christian church has summarized in the Aposle's Creed.

We speak to you about:

The dire necessity of us believing

1. I have to believe;
2. I am allowed to believe;
3. I believe in communion with the whole christian church.

1. Question 20 come to us, congregation, with a matter of life and death. Who will be saved? he asks. Everybody? Will all men get back the salvation through Jesus Christ just as they all were condemned in Adam? Hee, here we think, the confession talked about that already. Did it not explain to us in Lordsday 2 that not all men will be saved? The confession presented us there already with the horrible seriousness of not being saved, but to be lost forever? Is it going to go into that again? It does not do that. The confession is putting something else on the orderpaper. You have to take notice of this question 20. What is the crux of the matter? I think that it is in the little words "just as" in the middle of this question .Do all people then get back the salvation through Christ "just as" they were condemned in Adam? For a moment you have to think back about what we discussed with you in the previous Lordsdays. That were two great realities. In the first place Lordsdays 2 including 4 showed you how we ,yes forsure, we all, are condemned in Adam. Out of Adam's fall welled up a dark muddy stream of guilt, which dragged along all men. It comes to you again hard as stone: All condemned in Adam. We shudder when we read it, but it is the reality which the bible shows us. Fortunately the confession does not stop there. It again opened the Scripture in Lordsdays 5 and 6, and it showed us how Jesus Christ, your Savior, came to save you. Out of Christ springs the clean river of God's grace. Was He not given to us to a complete redemption? The confession has put them side by side: the first Adam in whom we are condemned and firmly over against the second Adam in whom we are redeemed. I think that the confession had in mind that powerful chapter of Romans 5. because, the apostle writes there in verse 18: Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. Paul could not define the contrast between Adam and Christ any sharper. Through the first Adam all come to trespasses to guilt. Through the second there is righteousness to life for all. Only: now comes the question: how does this work?Does it go by itself? Are you all together out of it? Is this akind of automatic: Condemned in Adam and saved in Christ? You realize congregation, that this is a matter of life and death for you. Through Christ will all men then be saved? No,here it is not about the question if God will save all men, as the doctrine of the universal reconciliation wants. This is not on the order paper here.

It is about another question: how does this salvation in Christ touch me? Am I am to be totally passive? Will everything be decided without me?

You may think: how come that the confession puts this question on the order paper? Is such a matter of present interest? It is and that is a sure thing. You have to think about the situation against which this question takes a firm stand. Here it is that your confession maintains the gospel of Jesus Christ over against the practise of the roman catholic church. In those days a personal faith did not mean much. As long as you were baptized and used the sacrements and did not obstruct the work of God's grace, then your salvation was quaranteed. The roman catholic church used a typical expression for that. It said: A charcoal burner's faith is enough and charcoal burners were not the smartest people in those days. The roman theologians said of them: as long as they believe what the church believes for them, then this is sufficient. The church then becomes a grace instrument that gives God's grace more or less by itself to us. A beginning of faith was already satisfactory.

Against this, question 20 takes a firm stand. This way you get a kind of inherited grace beside the original sin. The institute of the church will give this grace to her members. Now you have to watch closely, how fine the confession dismisses this. Do we get back our salvation through Christ, as we all are condemned in Adam? Is there an inherited grace beside an inherited (original) sin? No way, The answer of the catechism is a terse: No. Surely not. There is no discussion about an automatic present of grace. You know who will share in the grace of Christ? Read answer 20: only those are saved who by a true faith are grafted into Christ and accept all his benefits. Imagine, if that grace would flow to us through the institute of the church. Then the proclamation of the gospel would not be necessary. Then God would not have made that sharp division between the seed of the woman

and of the seed of the serpent in the beginning of the salvation history. Then Christ, on the question if few would be saved, would not have answered with the call to go in through the narrow gate. And why did He have to warn, that many firsts would be last and lasts the first? No, not all will be saved through Christ as they all are condemned in Adam. But who then? The confession does not leave you in the dark. It gives with round words its answer: Only, and thickly underline that word, only those who by a true faith in Him, in Jesus Christ, are grafted into Christ and accept all His benefits.

Your Savior is the center of this answer. You have to be grafted in Him and only in Him. You have to accept his, only his benefits. What is this a marvelous answer. Imagine if the confession here answered: only the elect. Or: only those whom God in his eternal council would have destined for salvation. Many christians read this answer this way. But it is not written that way. The confession here puts besides each other God's grace and our own responsibility. These two cannot be seperated. and do not think that this grafting into Christ only happens in the eternity, as some say. Absolutely not. You will be grafted

into Christ. There is one who takes the initiative for that: that is the Holy Spirit. He takes you by the hand . He breaks the resistance of your heart. He brings you to Jesus. Do you seek that by yourself? Do you capitulate for the Gospel out of yourself?

No. The heart is to resistant for that. A man will resist this with all his power. And still you are grafted into Him. Is not that Grafting a speaking word? Grafting: that is one body, to become one body with someone. Be completely united with him. when our country (the Netherlands) was grafted into France, we became Frenchmen. Who through the conscription was grafted into the army , became a soldier. Or, using the image of Romans 11:19 : a text, which the confession cites with this answer: if you are grafted into the olive tree of the covenant, then you become one with the olive tree. This way the Holy Spirit grafts us into Him, we become one with Him. Am I then in believing totally passive? Or do I have to wait till the Spirit grafts me into Christ? Does this all happen outside my own faith activity? For sure not. For keep on reading congregation, keep on reading for your life's sake. That fine answer 20 has one more arrow on its bow and this will touch your heart. It answers in one breath with being grafted into Christ: and accept all his benefits. Often a mess was made out of this answer. Quite often these were made into two phases, following each other.

First. so it was said, you have to be grafted into Christ. First there has to be planted in your heart a germ of faith and after that you can accept all his benefits. The answer does not mean this. It is just looking at a painting from different angles. Here you are called to accept Christ's benefits, his full gospel. Now, now to you, his gospel, God's promises are proclaimed. And when you do this, when you lay your hand on Christ's accomplished work, then you will be grafted into Him. Then the Holy Spirit makes you one with Him. You never have to wait till one time you experience that the Holy Spirit brings you to Jesus. The confession points here to Hebrews 4: 2. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews wrote: For good news came to us just as to them; but the message which they heard did not benefit them, because it did not meet with faith in the hearers. The gospel wants to be believed and so in the way of believing the Holy Spirit grafts you into your Lord and Savior. I think about the man at the Beautiful gate of the temple from Acts 3. Silver and gold I do not have, Peter said to him, but I give you what I have: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth; Walk. Peter took his right hand and that man jumped up. He took that command in faith. He did not think: could this be true? Am I allowed too? Is it really for me? He jumped up in faith. I think about that woman who had suffered from a hemorrhage, who in faith touched the fringes of his garment . She had faith, she touched the fringes and she was made well. then the Savior said: Daughter your faith has made you well. (Matthew 9:22)

When I accept in faith as my Mediator and Redeemer, then at the same time I know: that is not of myself. God has put my hand in his. God has grafted me into Him through the Holy Spirit. So the confession shows us that not all, automatic,

get back the salvation, as they are condemned through Adam. Faith is necessary for salvation, direly necessary. I have to believe. Is that message not timely today? Should it not be proclaimed in the Reformed Church? Is it enough to be a member of this church as it was good enough for the charcoal burner to believe what the church believed for him? Asking the question is answering it. There is no salvation without faith in Jesus Christ. Kiss the Son, calls Psalm 2: 12 to us, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way; for his wrath is quickly kindled. And the Psalm adds very comfortably :Blessed are all who take refuge in him. The confession refers to this place in the Scriptures by answer 20 on purpose.

2. I have to believe. God is asking this from me. But am i allowed to believe, you may ask ? I want to do it, I would love to do it, but I am a sinful person. I often am at odds with myself and sometimes doubt if God's promises are for me. Is that salvation ,which Christ gives back to me, now really for me? Well, congregation let us take a look at question 21. The catechism helps you with your anxious questions. It focuses on the terse question, on which this whole Lordsday depends. What is a true faith?. he asks. in the older printings it says : what is a sincere faith?

You could also say: when is faith a real faith? Do you remember the answer from your catechism days? A person cannot remember the whole catechism. That is not necessary either. Still there are such questions and answers which you have to take along in your whole life as spiritual baggage. I read about someone who for some years was in a concentration camp. He did not have one book at his disposal. He knew some catechism Lordsday by heart and he said later that these helped him in difficult situations. Now to those important Lordsdays belongs answer 21. It clearly consists out of two parts. Faith it says, is a sure knowledge , whereby I accept as true all what God has revealed to us in His Word. That is one. And then no 2: at the same time it is a firm confidence that not only to others , but also to me, God has granted forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness, and salvation, out of mere grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits. And you know where that faith comes from? God reveals it in my heart through the gospel, says answer 21. What is this a lively and speaking answer. Of course through the ages theologians have thrown themselves on this answer. They put it on the cutting table of their dogmatic distinctions. You know then how it goes. Then such a lively and speaking answer will be mutilated. Do you know what they did? They made a two stage rocket out of it. They said: you have to discern between faith as a sure knowledge and as a firm trust. That knowing is the first stage of the rocket. Still this not a real faith. About that knowing, it is only so called historic faith. That means: That all what is written in the bible truly happened. You believe that with an historic faith You believe with that historic faith, that God created the world in six days. You believe the stories of the patriarchs, of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and th^{at} of the people o^f Israel.f

you believe that Jesus Christ is born out of the virgin Mary and that he did miracles. You also believe that he died on the cross on Golgotha and that he was resurrected at Easter. You hold all this to be true. But, this really is not the real thing. That shows up in the second part of this answer. In its speaking of answer 21 about the firm confidence, there, in the second stage of the faithrocket, it is not about historic believing anymore. Do you know, that there are church denominations in our country, where confession of faith in the church, only a confession is of that historic faith?

Doing confession of the truth, they call that there, not a confession of faith. The reality of faith, the salvation part, comes later. The first stage of the rocket pushes you quite a ways in the direction of the Lord, but the second stage brings you really close to Him. As if, congregation, your confession in the first part of answer 21 would have a different faith in mind than in the second part. For this is absolutely not so. Already in the way answer 21 is formulated in that first part, excludes that. I read there, that a true faith is a sure knowledge, whereby I accept as true all what God has revealed to us in His Word. Is in accepting as true all what God has revealed to us only an historic faith? Is that not saving?

Can I hold as true God's own Word, his own promises, without it touching my heart? Without me being involved with my whole existence? Think about the beautiful story of Abraham when God said to him: look at the stars Abraham, try to count them. You have to have seen that brilliant starry sky above the desert of Berseba to understand what that means. It is not obscured by artificial light or fog. Countless stars sparkle there in the sky. So shall your issue be, Abraham, said God to his friend. And Abraham believed the Lord, it says in Genesis 15:6, literally it says there: Abraham said amen to God's promises. He reckoned the Lord God to be trustworthy. And so says answer 21 that also: that faith is a true knowledge to accept with your heart all that God has revealed to us in His Word. Should I accept as truth that God has created the world and not at the same time come before such a great and majestic God in worship and humiliation? Should I accept as truth that the Lord Jesus has shed his blood on Golgotha and died without me fleeing to Him with all my guilt? Should I believe that open grave on Easter morning without accepting as truth, that Christ also for me has conquered death and that I am righteous before God through Him? How can men believe in heaven without accepting as truth that there is also a place for him in the house of the Father with its many mansions?

Here already your confession, in the first part of this answer, speaks and becomes personal. I, it says, I accept as true all that God has revealed to us in His Word. I am in the community of the church, among the multitude of believers, which no one can count. It is to us, all of us who believe, revealed. But I accept it as the truth. Can you really accept something as truth, without it having

touched the core of your soul? Even the demons shudder, writes James in his letter (James 2:19), because they believe in God. That alone makes all those devilish spirits shudder before the almighty God. Do I have to believe everything what is written in the Bible? Everything? Yes, of course. The Bible is one unit. It is the book of God and is full of his promises and threats. The ties and loops of the tabernacle, the bells on the garment of the high priest, the colors of the veil, the judges of Israel, the letters of the apostle Paul: they all are related to the great centre of the Bible: Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer. That is what answer 21 emphasizes in the second part. It is not about historic faith on a soulsaving faith, but it shows us that the sure knowledge from the first part is never a moment without that firm confidence in all what is in the Bible, aimed at my salvation. I may trust that God also to me, will give all those mighty things named there, namely forgiveness of sins, eternal righteousness and eternal salvation. Let them penetrate you, one by one. View them with a cheerful heart. It is really not a small thing. You have to be perplexed. Eternal righteousness, because God has forgiven my sins out of pure grace, only on the base of the merit of Christ. Eternal salvation: death nor life can separate me from the love of Christ. This answer lays all this close to your heart congregation. There are a few words in this answer which earn your special attention. In faith you trust, it says, that all this is not only given to others but also to you.

In this sounds the wonder of God's grace. It is as if your confession will say: do not think that all this is only for others, for the elders of the church or for the minister on the pulpit, or for the old respectable church-goer beside you. No, it is also given to you. Just like that, out of pure grace. May be you consider by yourself: all good and well, but will that faith totally exclude doubt? Will a believer never be tempted about this main point? He will be, as long as the devil is active in this world and he is that. He fights you from two sides. You could say: he fights you from the outside and from the inside. You are living in a secular world. You live in a society from which God is pushed away. It means a continual fight to keep believing in the Lord. The devil fights you from the godless world. He does that also from the inside. He will throw, on the most importune moments, the doubt question in your heart,

is all this really also for me?

Congregation, fight against that devil. Fight against that doubt.

Hold on to the words: also for me. But I know: My Redeemer lives, says Job amid his temptation from satan. (Job 19:25) For I am sure, cries Paul in Romans 8:38, that no creature, no power in this world will be able to separate me from God's love. Looking back on all his fights, also on the fight from within, he writes Timothy: I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. (2 Timothy 4:7) There is still one small sentence in answer 21 that we, up to now, did not discuss. But it belongs to it and it gives you the key in your hands to enter the palace of the faith with

all its benefits. The Holy Spirit, it says in the beginning of this answer, works that faith in my heart through the gospel. Have you thought during this sermon: how do I come to this faith? I have to believe, yes sure, and I am allowed to believe. I want to very much. How do I get it? Well, in that last little sentence you find the answer to that question. God the Holy Spirit works in your heart through the gospel, through the glad tidings that Jesus Christ has died for you and is resurrected and is now your advocate by God. To put it very simply: you have to go to church. There you open your ears for the Word that is being preached there. And most important: you have to open your heart for it. The catechism sermon will really help you with this. Going to church twice? You find that too much? But during that second time, the promises of the gospel will be explained to you, systematic, point by point. Some one wrote once: the true catechism listeners are the best christians and there is much truth in that.

3. Now we come to the last part. Lordsday 7 is not finished yet. It shows you in the last two questions and answers that you cannot believe by yourself. You believe, congregation, among a large congregation, in the community of the whole christian church. You are helped in your faith. What does a christian have to believe, asks question 22. Try to express this. No, better than answer 22, it cannot be done. That answer is surprising. Everything, is the answer, what has been promised to us in the gospel. No, it does not say, everything that has been taught us from the gospel. Believing is not knowing by heart a row of dogmatic theses. It is believing the promises of the gospel. Lordsday 7 is in the heart of the reformation. Believing is not only belonging to a church that believes for you. We saw in the beginning of this sermon how fierce the Reformation was aimed against this. You believe yourself, with all your heart. Where should your faith aim than only to the rich promises, with which God comes to us in the gospel?

Do you ask: what are these promises? What are they? Well, the confession does you a favor in this answer 22 and also in answer 23, they are put into a row for you. The 12 articles of our catholic and undoubted christian faith gives you a summary of them. Now your confession is exactly where it wants to be. The catechism is actually nothing else than a cheerfull comment on the three large parts of our christian faith.: 1.the 12 articles; 2.the ten commandments; and 3.the Lord's prayer. It will explain this to you in following Lordsdays, in the framework of misery, redemption and thankfulness. Is this not a master touch of your confession? It connects the 12 articles of faith with the old christian church from the time of the apostles and martyrs

In that church they originated, those 12 articles. At the baptismal font of the old christian church. I believe in God the Father almighty, says the person to be baptized. And in Jesus Christ, he or she continues, and in the Holy Spirit, added those men and women and so the confession grew into what is today the twelve articles. You are here at the core of the christian

faith. Someone compared the catechism with a roaring river high in the mountains is its spring, the confession of God Almighty. Then it flows on: to Jesus Christ and all his work done for us. At the river's end it comes to those last articles with that mighty view: forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the flesh and eternal life. It will be enjoyable to discuss these articles with you in the following Lordsdays. No, the Reformation did not found a new church. It joined the old christian church of the apostles, martyrs and church patriarchs.

Once more I think about that question of someone in the beginning: Are there only a few that will be saved? Fight to go in through the narrow gate, answered the Lord Jesus. Not all will be saved but only those who deny themselves and in faith trust God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Lordsday 7 holds out a helping hand. Generously, amply, regal. Grab that hand. Without faith you cannot go through the gate. You cannot go to eternity with less. It is about you, about all of us, about the honor of our God.

Amen

Lordsday 8.

I believe in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Sermon by the
late Dr.R.H.Bremmer,
Enschede,
The Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton,Alberta.

Reading: 1 John 5,
Text: Lordsday 8,
Psalm 150: 1,3.
After the law: Psalm 147 :7,
After the creed: Psalm 18: 16,
Hymn 2: 1,2,3,
Hymn: unknown,
Hymn 43: 1,3.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Quite a few among you must have had a Jehovah witness at the door. One of the points, which they like to speak about is the trinity of God. Especially over against ignorant people they strongly reject this. How can one be three, they ask, and three one? You can figure this out. So they try to mislead people. Jesus God? Not so, they say. He is the executor of Jehovah, but not God himself. As an architect has a executor i.e a contractor, who supervises the work and takes care that the blueprints of the architect, the building plans, will be realized, so is Jesus the executor of God's plan. He Himself is not God. How can God be humiliated, they ask, and Jesus, according to the christian faith, is humiliated? The Holy Spirit?

That is not Someone, that is Something, a power, but no God. Something is no Person, at best a Power. so they contest the catholic christian believe in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Jehovah witnesses are not the only ones who do not want to know of the faith in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Also the Jewry reject with force the trinity of God. It refers to Deuteronomy 6:4 where Moses told Israel: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; the Lord is one. Moses confesses here forcefully the oneness of God over against the many gods on the heathens. Hear Israel, he says. In Hebrew is that Sjemang Jisraeel. And that Sjemang Jisraeel became the confession of the later Jewry. It is written on very small pieces of paper inside small tubes which the orthodox Jews fastened to their doorposts. It is also in very small boxes fastened to the prayerbelt, the tefilliem, which they wound on their arms and head when they prayed in the synagogue. Indeed: the Lord, our God, is one. We say that with the Jewry. Is our real christian confession in which we know God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in conflict with that? Absolutely not. The christian church confesses with force God's oneness and unity. Only: that Lord who is one, comes to us in the New Testament as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That confesses the catechism in Lordsday 8. Before it explains the 12 articles one by one, the confession shows that all the 12 articles speak of God: of God the Father, of God the Son and of God the Holy Spirit. Here we learn how to know God. Here we also learn to worship

Him and totally depend on Him.

OUR BELIEF IN GOD THE FATHER, GOD THE SON, AND GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT.

1. So we know Him;
2. So we confess Him;
3. So we depend on Him.

1. One of the things ,brothers and sisters, with which modern man has so much difficulty, is that belief in God. Can you really get to know God? This is asked by many. The agnostic, the idea that men of the things outside of what you can see and feel have no knowledge, is strong in our time. That it rains, you can verify. Go outside, then you notice it and you put up your umbrella. You can also verify lightning. You can take a picture of it. When it storms, doors begin to rattle. But God? Can you prove that God exists? Can you convince an unbelieving scientist that God exists? Not a single proof or experiment has established that fact.

Still there always have been theologians who think that you can prove God. Especially the romancatholic theology is very emphatic about this. All things, the roman-catholic theologians say, have an origin. That you exist finds its origin in that you have a father and mother. That outside a tree grows, finds its origin in the fact, that some time ago it was planted. Etcetera. One finds its origin in the other. And if you reason backwards, then eventually you end up by the first origin of all things, who themselves were not caused. The first origin of all things bring everything into motion. And that is God.

They also have other proofs. So they say: all things have a purpose. The one purpose is aimed at the other and finally you will get to the highest purpose of all things in this world.

The first origin and that highest purpose, they then call God. You can, say these theologians, also approach the existence of God from another angle. They assume that virtues will be rewarded and evil will be punished. That does not always happen in this world. Not every good deed is rewarded and not every wrong is punished. Because of that, there has to be a higher Being, God, who ultimately, in the here-after, will reward virtue and punish evil. They try to prove this through their subtle reasonings that God exists.

Congregation, none of these reasonings has ever brought one to believe in God. There is much to be said against it.

How do you know, ask the evolutionists, that behind all things lays a first Origin, that in itself does not have an origin? Matter is eternal and has always existed. Do not all things have a purpose? It does not seem that way, others say. The world is really in chaos. And what that rewarding of virtue and punishing of evil concerns in the life hereafter: who can prove that? On the basis of human reasonings no one is ever brought to believe in the triune God. Faith does not rest on reasoning. That is why the first of the 12 articles start with the words:

I believe in God. Not: I believe regarding God. Also not: I believe that God exists or that " a " God exists. No, in full and with power: I believe in God. Who believes in God, takes the plunge. He steps out of the world of the things which you can see and feel into a totally different world. In the world of the faith. He heard God speak in his Word about himself, about his glorious Being-God, about his Father, Son and Holy Spirit being. That he believes. Our belief in God rests on God speaking about Himself. Those believing in God have read in Hebrews 11:1 that faith is the assurance of things not seen.

Who believes in God like Moses, who was steadfast in the faith, as seeing the Invisible.(Hebrews 11:27)

As a believer you enter in the world of God, of his Word and of his promises and on that you can rely. These are things which are too high and too wonderful to understand, but they are still real, God backs this up with his Word. Faith is an indivisible act of trust in God. That does not mean that

you put your brains on a non active mode. You can, congregation, think about that faith in God and explain it. Here the catechism does that too, and it does it masterly. It asks, very simply, how the 12 articles of our faith, are divided. Notice the manner in which the catechism here speaks. It does not ask: how do you divide these articles? It is not about a constructio which we lay upon the 12 articles. No, how are they divided. In a manner of speaking: a child can understand it. The division is just there. You can see that immediately. Does not the first article begin with: I believe in God the Father, the Almighty? And does not the second say: and in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son? Does not the last part of the 12 articles begin with: I believe in the Holy Spirit?

What have these 12 articles of our holy, catholic and christian faith a fine structure. They are embroidered on the trinity of God. That is the pattern behind this. If you say to believe in God, at the same time you say that you believe in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. This structure of the 12 articles does not amaze us, when we think about their origin.

When in the first ages a heathen converted to Christ, he wanted to be baptized. We have a beautiful example of this in the story of Philip and the Ethiopian. When he through the teaching of Scriptures by Philip became a believer, he asks: what is to prevent my being baptized? Philip answered: If you believe with you whole heart, it is allowed. The Ethiopian answered : I believe, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.(Acts 8: 36,37) In that answer were the 12 articles. Later the missionairies asked the heathens, who wanted to be baptized: what do you believe? They answered: I believe in God as my Father and in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and in the Holy Spirit. Out of those confessions grew the 12 articles. Yes, congregation, there is something else in the formulation of the 12 articles by which the confession makes a masterly move. On the question how are these articles divided it answers with: the first part is about God the Father and our creation, the second part about God the Son and our redemption and the third about God the Holy Spirit

and our sanctification. It does not say: of God the Father and the creation. No, God the Father and "our" creation. In theological books you can read as header above a certain chapter: God and the creation; Christ and the redemption. But here it is not a theologian talking, who scientific and theoretical deals with the teaching of God or the doctrine about the creation. Here the common churchmember is speaking, one who confesses his faith. Here you are speaking. They are, to use this expression, every Tom, Dick and Harry of the church, they are speaking here. Theologians like Ursinus and Olevianus, who wrote the catechism, are beside their brothers and sisters in the church, beside officeclerks and truckdrivers, beside students and boys and girls of the factory, beside secretaries and directors, beside seniors and housewives. The whole congregation of Christ here is talking. Christians of the first hour and we, the workers of the eleven'th hour, confess here to believe in God, who created us, redeemed us in Jesus Christ and sanctified us for his service through his Spirit and because of that is our God.

Congregation what sounds that "our" festive. If I confess here my faith in God the Father, I do not speak here subtly about the first Origin of all things or about a last Purpose. I speak here cheerfully and happy about my Father, who is Almighty and has created me. Who created the whole world. I am here in the centre of the world, the way my faith sees this. You could say: the magic wand of the faith has touched me and the world around me and now I look at all things differently. If in a while I go outside and see the stars above my head or see the sun shine in all that I can see the magnificence of my Creator. I myself have been created by Him. Wonderful are thy works, my frame was not hidden from thee, when I was being made in secret. Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance. In his book are written all my days, when as yet there were none of them, sings Psalm 139. The whole creation is his work.

It did not evolve during millions of years from a cell as the evolutionists say. It is his majestic and fatherly work. He takes care of me. Is He not my Almighty Father? You have a different perspective when in faith you look at questions about abortus and euthanasia when you see the Father behind all life. He shows the clouds, air and winds their track and path. He finds ways on which my foot can go. In the book of the prophet Isaiah 45:18 there is this mighty word: he did not create it a chaos, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the Lord and there is no other. The creation is his work and that is why we have to be thrifty with this world. Men has destroyed this world in their prosperity-race and often they are disgraceful about the environment. You do not go along with that? It is the creation of the Father.

The confession continues; I believe in God the Son and our redemption. Here I am not doubting over against my redemption. I believe in God the Son and his redemption. God the Son: that is Jesus Christ my Savior. He is not a great unknown. He is the Savior conceived by the Holy Spirit and born out of the

virgin Mary. I see Him lying in the manger of Bethlehem. There He lay; for me. Jesus: God in the flesh, who hung on the cross on Golgotha. God the Son, that is Jesus Christ, who conquered for me, grave and devil and who rose from the dead. He is the Man through whom God will judge the world and who will return. There is a cute childrens song: And the tree gets thicker and thicker. Now this applies to your confession. For I confess also that God is God the Holy Spirit, the God of our sanctification. You may find this a dignified word: our sanctification. And yet: there is so much meaning in that word sanctification. It does not only touch your personal life, but the whole creation. You may think about this word only of what the Holy Spirit inside our heart, in our personal life does. There is still more. The catechism thinks here also about God's church. He, the Holy Spirit, gathers them all, all those men and women from the whole world, which through all the ages formed God's church. He gathers them through the Word to God's holy, catholic christian church. He gathers them from all the generations, tongues and nations. He continually works on the gathering of the large multitude, which no one can count. Racism and discrimination are absolutely contrary to the church gathering work of the Holy Spirit. He brings all of us . black and white and brown, together in the community of saints in Christ our Head. He welds around us the firm band of brotherhood over the whole world. He gives you forgiveness of sins. He washes you in the precious blood of Christ. That also belongs to the festive work of God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification. And later, then comes the mighty breath of the Holy Spirit and sweeps across the world. He will raise all the dead from the dust of the earth. The dried deathbones , of which Ezekiel 37 speaks, He makes them into live people which will sing God's praise into eternity. He gives God's children eternal life in a new heaven and a new earth. Indeed the tree gets thicker. You will quit thinking about it.

2. You may think, nowhere the catechism is using the word trinity. It only speaks of God the Father, of God the Son and of God the Holy Spirit. This is true. In fact: the word trinity is not in the Bible at all. Are the Jehovah witnesses then right? Are the Jews then right when they put over against the christian doctrine of the trinity Of God the Sjemang Jisraeel from Deuteronomy? Your confession knows that this question can rise with you and that is why in question 25, it again gives the pupil the right to speak. He asks anxiously , why do you name three Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, while there is only one God? The catechism, on purpose, places by this question, the text about God being one from Deuteronomy 8. It is as if it wants to say: it is written here. Congregation pay attention to answer 25. It is a powerful and convincing answer. The confession sweeps away all doubt about the trinity of God. It answers: Because God has so revealed Himself in His Word that these three distinct persons are the one, true, eternal God. Is that not a convincing answer? Your confession here bases itself directly on God's Word. It does not do this very often.

Mostly it places texts from Scripture under the questions and answers. Except the odd time, as an example in the doctrine about the sacraments, it comes with the whole Word of God over against those who contradict the trinity. It is as if it wants to say: Open your Bible. Read the Scriptures from Genesis one to Revelations twenty two. Everywhere God makes known that He comes to us in three Persons: as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When necessary the church must dare to speak about this. Powerful, confessing and to those who contradict telling them to be quiet. There is a lot being wagered here. Have you ever read the Athanasian creed, the great church patriarch of the fourth century after Christ? Via him the old church confessed in the first article: Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he holds the catholic faith. And then right to the point article 2 says: which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And if you still have questions what the catholic faith is all about, read article 3: And the catholic faith is this; that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity. This way the old church confessed it and the confession of the Reformation in answer 25 concurs. So, in three Persons God has made known Himself in his Word.

You think: are there really places in Scripture by which in so many words, speak of God's trinity in one? Sure, congregation, they are there and we will name them too. No one less than your Savior has spoken of the Father like this. I think about the last words in the holy gospel of Matthew: Your Savior is close to ascend to heaven. He has called his disciples together for the last time there on a mountain in Galilee. In a while he will ascend to heaven from Jerusalem. But now He gives them his last instructions. Hear the regal words which flow from his lips. Me is given, all the power in heaven and on earth. All things are subordinate to Him, to Him the Son of men. But his pupils should not stay together there in Galilee. He sends them out, into the world. Now follows his great commission. Go then, says your Savior, make all the nations into my disciples. They have to go to the ends of the earth. And then He continues with: baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teach them to keep everything what I commanded you. Can it be more convincing?

Jesus joins here clearly to what happened when He was baptized by John the Baptist. There at the beginning of his public appearance in Israel, God the Father had spoken to Him as His Son. And lo, writes Matthew in chapter 3. When these little words, and lo, and see, are in the gospel, we better pay attention. And see, a voice from heaven saying: This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. And once more: and see, the heavens opened and He saw the Spirit of God descend as a dove and come upon Him, Jesus Christ. Immediately, at the beginning of the gospel, Matthew shows us, that Father, Son and Holy Spirit belong together. Indeed God has made Himself be known in his Word. One more text of proof: when Paul closes his second letter to the Corinthians, he prays in 2 Corinthians 13:13, which congregation was close to his heart, a blessing to of

the triune God: the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. He really understood that the baptizing commission of Christ gave him the boldness to bless the congregation with that triune Name. O, sure, There were already voices in the old church which spoke against this catholic belief of the church. The same as today they did not want to accept that Jesus is God's Son and the Holy Spirit God. Especially the apostle John has struggled with these heretics in his letters He has proclaimed with power that Jesus is the Son of God. Who is it, he cried to the heretics and the congregation, who conquered the world, than who believes that Jesus the Son of God is? Three there are, he continues, who witness in heaven: the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit: and these three are as one. (1 John 5: 5-7) In the mouth of two or three witnesses all words shall be counted as true. That is valid here. That was evidence out of the New Testament. How about the Old Testament? someone may ask. Do we have to keep that closed? For sure not. Only we have to realize that the golden rule here is valid that the Old Testament from the the fulfilment in Christ has to be read that way. That is our faith starting point with the reading and studying of the Scriptures. The Old Testament is fulfilled in the New. That is why the christian church does not keep the Old Testament closed with the confession of the trinity of God. Look up Genesis 1:26. There God says with the creation of man: Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. The christian church of old has used this as proof. God speaks about Himself as plural. Hebrew, the original language of the Old Testament does not know majesty plural as we do. That is why we explain this speaking of God as a godly deliberation among the three Persons. There is one more place in the Old Testament which the christian church likes to bring forward if it is about God's trinity. We think here about which God gave through Moses to Aaron: The Lord bless and keep you: The Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you, The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. In the last text comes the appropriate work of the Holy Spirit to the fore. He takes it out of the conciliatory work of the Son and gives it to us to possess in peace, which He presents to us in Christ. So they shall lay my name on the Israelites said the Lord to Moses. Who reads the Scripture as a unit, recognizes in the highpriest blessing God's triune Name. The pupil anxiously asked how the church could speak about three Persons, while God is one. Now, we hear the answer. God has made Himself known: in three distinct Persons. all the Scriptures speak about this. To make sure that there is no misunderstanding, the confession adds something. Very reverently and very careful These three distinct Persons, says the confession are the one, true and eternal God. Do you hear the sound of worship in this answer? The world curses God. It is shameful to read the cursing in the media and to hear it in society. The church worships. The church worships with reverence and respect the one, true and eternal God. Her prayers speak with reverence of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It blesses with

that holy Name her members which after the church service go back into the world. It does that reverently, praising God. Congregation, you have a wonderful and majestic God. In that godly majesty He comes to us in his Word. The faith sees Him coming to his children as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Imagine, if God had no Son. Imagine, that He in that Son not had stepped outside Himself and from eternity in his eternal love not had given it to his Son. How could He have loved us? He would have been a stiff God, the way Islam sees Allah. This is the mightiest and deepest in our confession, that God has poured out Himself in His Godly love in His Son and that they come together in the Holy Spirit. So He is for us the one, only and eternal God, whom we worship.

3. Now we come to the last point. We have seen how we know God as the Trinity. That was the first part. Then we thought about how we worship God in his being Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Now we will see how we can depend on this God. Here we bring to your attention the short summary in your churchbook. It is not a confessional writing of the reformed churches, but it is indeed a clear and comprehensive mirror of our reformed confession. Real nice how it takes in answer 22: why we confess three Persons in God, it literally copies the catechism answer in answer 25. But it adds something and that is what we want to see. It adds: we are also baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Congregation, you have been thrown on the triune Name of God at your baptism. As David cries in Psalm 22:10 upon thee I was cast, upon my birth, we may say: Upon you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we are thrown at our baptism in our youth. In Him, God triune, lays the unshakable foundation of my life. God the Father promises to provide me with all good and avert all evil or turn it to our benefit. God the Son promises me that He washed me in His blood from all my sins and unites me with Him in His death and resurrection. The Holy Spirit promises to me what I have in Christ, namely, the cleansing from my sins and the daily renewal of my life. He takes us by the hand and brings us into eternal life, into the congregation of the elect. God is the God of my baptism. Hear Israel: the Lord is our God; the Lord is one. Hear, Israel: the Lord is our God: He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That is the way we know Him. That is how we confess Him. So we may depend on Him: the God of our baptism. Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel. And blessed be his glorious name forever. (Psalm 72:19)

Amen, yes Amen.

Lordsday 9.

The first article: My God and my Father.

Sermon by the
late Dr. R H Bremmer.
Enschede,
The Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel.
Edmonton, Alberta.

Reading: Psalm 121,
Text: Lordsday 9,
Psalm 33 : 1,5,
After the law: Psalm 34: 7,
After the creed: Psalm 35; 9,
Psalm 121: 1,2,3,
Psalm 146 :3,
Psalm 145: 5.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

What do you have, as congregation of Jesus Christ, a nice liturgy, a beautiful order of worship. Do you realize this? All is tuned to all. Central is the proclamation of the gospel. Everything leads to that and from there the service reaches its end. The songs we sing, the faith we confess, the law we hear, it brings us to the glad tidings that Jesus Christ suffered for us and is resurrected for us. And then not to forget the prayers and the offers for God and the service for his needy.

It is all tuned to one another. Even before the benediction is said, before the service begins in all its phases, the servant says the beginning prayer. You most likely know it by heart and still it is new in every church service. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. That prayer is out of Psalm 121: 2. Only there it is in the singular of the poet: My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. That votum or beginning prayer was a great idea of the old reformed church, that it let all its services begin with this votum. We are all together a weak people. From nature we are conceived and born in sin. Now we meet God in the meeting as congregation. There will be preaching. There will be praying. There especially will be listening. There a child will be baptized. We break bread and drink from the cup of thanksgiving at the Lord Supper. Whom better we could call on for help than Him who made heaven and earth? We are here with the votum immediately at the head office. With less than that we cannot devotionally partake in a church service.

Our help is from God, who made heaven and earth.

Well, congregation about that Lord the catechism speaks in Lordsday nine. We confess about Him in the first article: I believe in God the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. Here you confess your faith in that God. You say, with the whole church, I believe in God the Father and by saying that you also confess Him. That is in today's world of great significance. In this godless and cynical world God's congregation confesses its faith in Him, who created heaven, earth and the whole world.. The first article is a fundamental article. It goes back to the first words of the bible. It teaches you to name that mighty God of which Genesis 1: 1 speaks that He created heaven and earth, your Father. We preach to you today:

THE CHURCH CONFESSES IN THE FIRST ARTICLE ITS FAITH IN GOD THE FATHER.

It speaks about:

1. Its richness in faith,
2. Its trust in faith,
3. Its foundation in faith.

1. Have you ever noticed how carefully the formulation is of question 26, the beginning of this 9th Lordsday? This time you do not hear it say: what do you know about these words or what benefit is it to you? No, very simply but still intrusively your confession says: what do you believe when you say: I believe in God the Father, the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth? Here it is about believing in God the Father from A to Z. And you know: believing is not only a sure knowing but also trusting. You must have remembered that from Lordsday 7. And yes, when you look at this answer, you may be become a little frightened. What a long answer. Quite often the catechism pupils have a problem with it. Don't let it frighten you. Take a good look at that long answer. As you can see the answer is really three pieces. When you calmly look at the answer, you see that the word Father is central. The eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is because of his Son Christ my God and my Father. That is the core of this Lordsday. And around that everything has been placed. If you really think about this long answer, you will discover that it is not prose but a piece of poetry with the core words of a minute ago as a central thought. What has this answer a mighty and great beginning. At once it reaches back to the time of eternal life. It right away speaks of the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And later you will say it again that this eternal God, Creator of heaven and earth, for the sake of Christ is your God and your Father. Your confession does not speak here about a God in general, no, it speaks to you about the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. You hold unto this. You cannot speak a sensible word about God outside of Christ. Think about these words from the beginning of the gospel of John: No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made Him known. (John 1: 18) God the Lord is from eternity the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and our Savior is from eternity the Son of God.

Here your confession confronts you with with great and profound matters of faith. Have you ever thought about what it means that God from eternity the Father is of Jesus Christ and He from eternnity the Son of God? Here we touch on God's first initiative that He takes from eternity. From eternity God brings his Son out from Himself and never will that process be completed. It will go on eternally. The church has, very reverently, used the word oscillate in its speaking about these things. The Father oscillates from eternity the Son and the Son will be oscillated from eternity by the Father. That is contained in that word eternal, that your catechism uses so

emphatically for the Fatherhood of your God about Jesus Christ. You might find all this a little difficult. We will try to make it clear to you by showing you the difference Of God's oscillating of his Son and the birth of a child. For the latter you always need two people: a father and a mother. Without the connection of a man and a woman, no child will ever come into this world. In the second place: you can register the moment of the birth of a human being to the minute. At this or that time the child was born. With that you can look at the clock. With the oscillation of the Son everything is different. God brings his Son as Father out from Himself. He never has needed some one else. Godlike and majestically He oscilates his Son from Himself. There is also never a moment in which this is completed. Eternally the oscilation continues of the Son through the Father. By speaking of the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, your confession here shows you the godlike background of the incarnation of the Word. This has been God's first initiative. Now your confession takes another step. Now it speaks to you about the second initiative that your Father took. That eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, it says, has created out of nothing, heaven and earth and all what is in it. Worship God in this mighty wonderwork, congregation, this creation of heaven and earth out of nothing. God did not need any material to do this wonderwork. As He from eternity oscilates the Son from Himself, so He has now brought forth the creation out of nothing. It was his sovereign deed. Genesis 1 is one of the mightiest chapters of the bible. It shows you God in his glory and majesty. He calls into existense the things that do not exist. (Romans 4: 17) God spoke and it was there. God said: Let there be light, and there was light. God said: Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters and it was so. God said: Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to seperate the day from the night and they were there. He speaks and it is there. Is your God not be worshipped, in this creationwork? Hear the 24 elders in Revelation 4: 11 glorifying as representatives of God's whole church: Thou-they sing-Thou are worthy to receive the glory, the honor and the power, for Thou didst create all things, and by will they existed and were created. Once more: God created the world out of nothing. He was not depending on nothing or on someone. Somebody once said, seemingly jesting and still seriously meant: God has, out of the high hat from nothing, created the world. Congregation here you, with your belief in God as Creator, are dead against the evolutionary thoughts in the science of today. You cannot combine these two, as some thinkers have tried. Because or you make God dependent on a material, which in the way of evolution came to be, with which God continues to work, or you let God create the first material which with He does not bother with any further. Congregation, God is a God of miracles. He created sovereign heaven and earth and prepared it also as a dwellingplace for mankind. Isaiah expresses this so beautifully about the God as Creator: For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens - He is God - who formed the earth and made it, He established it; He did not create it a chaos, He formed it

to be inhabited: I am the Lord, and there is no other. Isaiah 45: 18. With that we have the answer on the question why the confession does not speak about the creation of man. It only confesses the creation of heaven and earth. Well, in a matter of speaking heaven and earth are the side scenes, the stage, where God's great work with men is enacted. Isaiah expresses this regally: God has not created the world as a chaos or as a desert. No, He created her to be inhabited. Our earth seen as part of the universe is, in a way of speaking, only the size of head of a pin. But on this pin's head your God created man, his image. On this pin's head God did his great redeeming work when you as man rebelled against Him. Your confession speaks about this also in answer 26. God upholds, it says, as Father of Jesus Christ, this world by His eternal council and providence. Yes certainly, no power in this world can wrest this world out of God's Fatherhand. Perhaps sometimes anxiety comes over you: what will become of this creation? What do people do with it and what are they going to do with it in the future? How will our next generation make out on this world? Congregation, here you confess your faith in God the Father, the Almighty. That means that not any power in this world, neither the devil, nor a godforsaken menkind, can break God's rule over this world. He is with her on the way to a new heaven and earth. That you may hold unto with all the power you have. Let this also encourage our scientists, who are involved with geology and biology and with the humanities. They quite often have questions. Sometimes they wrest with the enigmas about the creation of everything. Let them keep in mind: the Bible is not a science book but it is a book for scientists. The Scriptures intend is to show God's greatness and delight in the work of creation. Who can even create a drop of water? Only God can. So we are allowed also in science work to praise Him for work of his hands. Now you have come to the pinnacle of that long sentence in answer 26. You have confessed that God the eternal Father is of Jesus Christ in the oscillation of his Son. After that you have confessed the second godly initiative in the creation and the maintenance of the world. Then you are putting your heart on the table. Yes, forsure, your heart. Now you may say that this mighty and wonderful God because of his Son is your God and Father. Congregation, read but do not miss the words: for the sake of Christ His Son. These really belong in that last sentence. That is now the third initiative of your Father. He brought the Son forth from Himself, that was one. He created heaven and earth and maintains them, that was two. And now He adopts you as one of his children. For the sake of Christ. That is three. Do you hear the ring of the gospel through these words: my God and my Father? Think about the words your Savior spoke to Mary Magdalene, just after his resurrection: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. Or about Thomas' exclamation, after Christ had shown him his scars: My Lord and my God. In these words lies a powerful appropriation of the faith. Once somebody said to me, while he was in a hospital; Reverend, you should not think that I am an unbeliever. I really believe that there is a power that guides

us. Is this higher power belief strange to some churchpeople? Your confession does not even consider this. It says: my God and my Father. For the sake of Christ.

Congregation, that word "Father" for God your Creator is marvelous word. He is the eternal Father of His Son. He is the Father of the whole creation. He is also your Father. That word Father brings the Lord really close to us. Not to long ago I spoke to an eighty year old man. His father had passed away years ago. You should have seen his enthousiasm when he spoke about his father. There came an old yellowed picture of his father on the table. Everyday he still thought about him. Daily as a child he walked with his father through the forest. That is where they lived, and when it was dark, he was scared. But when I felt the corduroy pants of my father, he said, then I felt safe. Now in that way our heavenly Father gives us His hand through that Fathername. For that we hold unto Him during the most difficult situations of life.

Do not forget: you have been baptized in the name of that Father and there He promised you that adopted you as His child and heir. So why is it so difficult for many to speak the words 'my God and my Father'? Think about the words of apostle John in his first letter: See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

(1 John 3: 1) The wellknown english minister Spurgeon said: believing is difficult for many, because it is so easy. And he added: God gives us in the Bible a blank cheque. All we have to do is fill in our own name and cash it. When you struggle with the question if you are a child of God do not forget the firm foundation answer 26 gives to you. He is for the sake of Christ His Son my God and my Father. There is a tender sound in that. It wants to say: He gave up His Son for it.

Congregation, think here about Romans 8: 32: He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will He not also give us all things with him? For the sake of his Son Christ.

2. Out of this richness of faith in the Fathername is born for us the trust in faith. Answer 26 let one flow out from the other. It continues after that 'my God and my Father' with: In Him I trust so completely as to have no doubt that He will provide me with all things necessary for body and soul.

In believing, knowing and trusting are plaited into eachother. Now that I have learned to know my Father as the God who created heaven and earth, I also may trust that He, with His Creators power, will look after me. I may not even doubt this says you confession. There is cause for us to fight against this doubt. Everyone of us knows of momemts or times when that doubt assails you. You know yourself how the devil tries to make God's children worry and doubt. The men, that wrote Lordsday 9, knew this. That is why the cry not to doubt if He, Father will care for us. It is not scanty what we can expect from Him. Answer 26 says very personally: He will provide me with all things necessary for body and soul. Some say that this part of answer 26 is not valid anymore in our social welfare state. Does this not look after us? If you become unemployed, it gives

unemployment insurance payments. If you are very sick and you need an operation, health care will pay for it. Yes these are here indeed and we can be thankful for it. In the past there was need through poverty and sickness and because of low wages. In the thirties unemployment was a terrifying experience.

We may be very thankful for the payments of the C.P.P. and the O.A.S. and for our holiday pay. Congregation, we can experience this as a piece of care from our Father. Also in and through the welfare state this word keeps its power. He provides me with all things necessary for body and soul. This care of the Father comes to me through all the social laws and rules. Only if we recognize it. And on top of that: there are some among you, who still today have financial problems in this welfare state. Do not take the care and education of children in a family a lot of money? We think here also about getting children. You know how many speak about this today in a degrading manner. They are weighing on purely materialistic bases if they should have a child. If there are already two and a third is expected you sometimes get to hear reproaches, even from some, from whom you would never expect it. Getting children today is not a small matter. The rearing and education takes a lot more than in the past. If this is your worry, then let this marvelous catechism answer penetrate you. I can so trust my Father, that I do not have to doubt that He will care, also for the child that I expect. Also for the children who are already here.

Here are the firm promises which we can look at and from which we can draw strength. We think about Psalm 23: 1 ; The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Or Psalm 55:22 : Cast your burdens on the Lord, and He will sustain you; He will never permit the righteous to be moved. Or that word from 1 Peter 5:7 : in which these words of the Psalm are incorporated: Cast all your anxieties on Him, for He cares about you.

As Christians we may and we must fight a fierce battle against the public opinion that says that children are not wanted and not hesitates to justify the killing of children before they are born. What is the expression 'unwanted child' awful and what a heavy load is placed on the life of those children. Our Savior shows us another way with our worries. We may point you to the promises which He us, his children, gave in the sermon on the mount. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be yours as well, literally it says you get them as a bonus. Your Savior calls on you to throw all your worries away. Do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? After that He lets follow the cheerful words about the birds and the lilies. Look at the birds of the air they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And about the lilies of the field: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Matthew 6: 25-29.

Perhaps you may know that old childrens song: O, we children, we live happily like little birds for the Lord above cares for you and me. This sounds childish and may be you ask, if this song is relevant for grown ups. It makes a lot of sense when put against the background of the words of the Savior in the sermon on the mount.

And still answer 26 is not at the end. It has kept back something for you, something especially comforting. the answer continues in Him I trust so completely as to have no doubt that He will turn to my good whatever adversity He sends me in this life of sorrow.

Your confession has been blamed for here it proclaims a melancholy pessimism. That sorrowful life: does the catechism have to confront us with that? What do you think: is your confession here not realistic? No, It is not pessimistic, but certainly realistic. So is life is it not? Did not Moses speak about toil and trouble in Psalm 90? Have you ever been in a hospital? Have you ever visited someone in a psychiatric institution? Have sorrow and harm never surprised you? Does it not also happen to God's children: an incurable illness hits you, and with the news about it, you have to be ready for it?

Answer 26 here is in the centre of life's reality.

You have to notice two points. In the first place the church confesses that the adversity in this life of sorrow, is with God's knowledge. He knows about the ill He assigns to me in this sorrowful life. To accept this is very difficult for modern man. How can the God be in the adversity that hits us? How could Job say; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. He only could do that for he knew: God is also in the adversity that comes to his children. Only: there He is different than with the unbelievers. That confesses answer 26 in full. The church says here: He will turn to my good whatever adversity He sends me. Answer 26 closely repeats the apostle Paul in Romans 8. He says in vers 28 of that great chapter: we know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. We really can have a problem with this. Sometimes it is so difficult to accept: all things will turn to my good. How could the apostle write this? Congregation, he could do this only because he saw the grief and sorrow in the perspective of eternity. Read vers 18 of this same chapter. There again the apostle speaks with certainty about Jesus Christ. He writes there: I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. Paul here holds a scale in his hand. In the one bowl he throws all the grief of today. With that he means all the suffering between the fall in paradise and the return of the Lord Jesus. All that suffering: illness, grief, sorrow, dying and death. All that thrown into one bowl, does not weigh up against the glory in the other bowl, which shall be revealed to us. This glory will just come, means Paul: surprisingly, from above, over us and then we shall see how the Lord has turned

all adversities to my good. Sometimes you may also see this in this life.

We think here about the story of Joseph.

When Jacob has died, his brothers begged Joseph for forgiveness for what they had done to him. They threw themselves facedown before him. Hear now what Joseph answered:

Fear not, for am I in the place of God? You meant evil against me - did they not sell him into Egypt? - but, he then continues; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive. (Genesis 50: 20)

Because we have the promise that God will turn all adversity He sends us, to our good, we may in need with prayer seek his face, the face of the Father. When Sanherib besieged Jerusalem and because of that King Hezekiah came into great distress, Hezekiah spread the blasphemous letters of Sanherib before the face of God and prayed; Thou hast made heaven and earth. Incline thy ear o Lord and hear. 2 Kings 19: 16.

Because we can call upon a Father, who created heaven and earth we can also place our greatest needs before Him. He is Father and He has at His disposal all the power of salvation.

3. Answer 26 combines beautifully the both, God's Fatherhood and God's Creationpower, For He can do this as an almighty God and also will do this as a faithful Father. What a finishing touch. You confess in the first article: I believe in God the Father, the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. Now your confession shows you: That might of God is in service to his Fatherhood. We realize that people of the twentieth century have difficulty with God's omnipotence. God is weak, say the theologians of today, God's suffers with the people. God's omnipotence: they would rather not hear about it. But that is why it is so important that the church gives to its younger members who soon will be in modern society: Hold on to this first article with all your strenght. Your Father is an almighty God. You may lean on a Father who made heaven and earth.

When the wellknown christian politician reverend Talma became minister, he said: I still would like to preach about God's omnipotence for another 52 Sundays. He had seen wonders of that during his pastorate. With this God, indeed the wonders have not left this earth.

Congregation, we have shown you at the beginning that every meeting of the congregation begins with a votum:

Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. That Lord is your almighty Father. You may lean on Him, not only in the Sunday churchservice but all the days of your life. God be Praised.

Amen.

Lordsday 10

JUST FOLLOW HIM QUIETLY.

Sermon by the
late Dr.R.H.Bremmer,
Enschede,
The Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton, Alberta.

Reading: Psalm 23,
Text Lordsday 10,
Psalm 147: 1,
After the law: Psalm 81: 7,8,
After the creed: Psalm 73: 8.
Psalm 23 : 1.2.3.
Psalm 146; 4.
Psalm 138: 4.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sometimes little happenings have great consequences. Time and time again the Bible shows this to you. As an example we think about the story of the Jewish girl Esther. One night King Ahasuserus did not sleep well, so he had someone come to read from the cronicles of his kingdom. From that it was discovered that Mordecai had saved the life of Ahasuserus. He had brought to light an attempt to kill the king, but he was never rewarded for doing so. This was for Ahasurerus a reason to summon Mordecai and so the wicked plans of Haman were foiled.

There would be many more examples to name. We also think about the Jewish girl that worked in the house of Naaman the Syrian. She brought about that Naaman looked for a cure by the prophet Elisha and through that came in contact with Jahveh, the God of Israel. Sometimes little happenings have great consequences. The Bible and also our own daily experiences prove it again and again. Now here you confess in Lordsday 10, that small as well as great things are under the guidance of God. All things, again all things do not happen to us by chance, but come to us out of His fatherly hand. That confesses answer 27.

Father cares for us and takes us, his children, by his Fatherhand. Lordsday 10 connects beautifully to the previous catechism Lordsday 9. There you confessed that God for the sake of Christ is my God and my Father. Now you pick up the thread again and you confess that now God wants to be your Father in Christ, that nothing in your life will befall you by chance, neither the small nor the great things. Everything comes to you from the Fatherhand. Yes that is what you confess here and it is easily said: nothing by chance and every thing from Fathers hand. We do that under the theme of a wellknown song:

JUST FOLLOW HIM QUIETLY.

That means:

1. No calculation,
2. Neither resignation,
3. But surrender in faith.

The Bible begins with the majestic word: In the beginning God created heaven and earth. In those few starting words of the Scripture lies a message, God, so say these words, is the sovereign Creator of all things. Then the Scriptures show us how God went ahead step by step in his creation work. He created light and darkness. He created the lights in the firmament and created the fish and the birds. Then as a crown on his creation He created man, after his own image. And God saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good. His godly pleasure rested on the works of his hands. When God finished his work, says the Scripture, he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it. God rested. That does not mean that God from then on did not do anything. On the contrary: He looked at it with satisfaction.

This was now the work of his hands. That He from the seventh day now upholds and governs. God did not quit working. He kept working from second to second. Now not to create the creation anymore, but to uphold it and govern it. God did not let go of his creation on the seventh day. He did not leave it to fate. He upheld it in his trust and almighty power and led it to its destination.

You should realize this. People quite often think that God is free from this world. In their eyes God, at the most, is for the Sunday and for the sermon, for religion. Others see God as someone who is throned high above this world and hardly bothers with what happens to it. But that is an image that ridicules what the Scripture says about Him. The Bible shows you, how God is involved with the things of this world, with you and with your life.

Your confession here names a few Scripture passages which speak very concretely about this. It refers to the speech held by Paul on the Areopagus in Acts 17. You know how Paul proclaimed God to the philosophers of that time: who He is and what He does. Paul proclaimed: God is not served by human hands as though He needed anything, since He himself gives to all men life and breath and everything. (Acts 17 : 25) Imagine says the apostle that God needed us. It is the other way around. He himself gives us all life and breath and all things. You cannot put it more concretely: The breath in my nostrils comes from God.

Would God not be involved with the world? Congregation, read the beginning of the letter to the Hebrews. There the writer of this letter says that God the Son upholds the universe by his word of power. God did not only create all things through the Word. (John 1 : 3) He upholds now through his Son from second to second. Yes, God not only carries and upholds the world, says answer 27, but He governs it too. The confession here uses a fine nuance. In that governing is that God propels and leads all things to the goal He has set for it. Who governs, has, if he is a good governor, a goal in mind. Also in that the confession repeats the Scriptures. I think about the chapters 4 and 5 of the book of Revelations. John there saw God throned on his holy throne, high above this world. In his hand He has a book, sealed with seven seals. In that book of God's ordinances

is written the course of world history.

Then the Lam approaches, Jesus Christ, to Him who is on the throne and breaks the seals one by one. God shows us here in a symbolic language, how He through Christ directs history to its great goal, the new Jerusalem with its golden streets and gates of pearl.

Congregation, they are heavy words by which answer 27 begins. God's almighty and ever present power upholds and governs all creatures. Who shall measure the power of God in its intensity? But now the confession has opened the way for a sentence so poetic and so cheerful and happy, that we are enthralled by it time and again. Hear what the conclusion is from that upholding and governing of the world by God's ever present power. It is this: that leaf and blade, rain or drought fruitful and barren years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, indeed all things, come not by chance, but by his Fatherly hand. Here your confession stands with this sentence in the centre of life. Would God have nothing to do with the things of normal life? Come on. This answer shows you a human life with all its facets. Foliage, that tender green that sprouts from the trees in the spring and colors so beautifully in the fall, Grass, that after the winter, grows in the meadows. Rain and drought: there are regions in this world where everything cries for rain. The scribes of Israel said: There is only one, who carries the key of the heavens and can let it rain. That is God. Fruitful and barren years, riches and poverty, we could say it in today's language: times of prosperity and of economic recession come from Him. So let the searchlight of the confession shine its light on all the facets of reality. Health and sickness: one goes from specialist to specialist and the other is healthy. The confessions shows us life of everyday, in which one fares totally different than the other.

Should God have nothing to do with the things of normal life? Dear folks: He has everything to do with it, says answer 27, and it emphasizes the faith conviction with the last words, in which you confess that all things come not by chance but by his Fatherly hand.

Should God have nothing to do with the things of normal life? He has everything to do with it as my Father. Lordsday 10 connects here with Lordsday 9. Together with the previous Lordsday it is under the heading: God the Father and our creation.

It is here not about a far away God, a stiff God, who just lets things happen on this world. No, it is the God of whom you have said in Lordsday 9 that He is, for the sake of Christ, your God and your Father. That same God who upholds all things through the Word of his power and who gives life and breath, has opened his heart for you on Golgotha in the blood and the suffering of Jesus Christ.

About that God is it. About that Father who for the sake of Christ calls you his child. Out of his Fatherly hand all things will be given to you. That governs now also your whole life. That beautiful sentence is not written for nought. Here the

pedagogue is speaking, who bends over the child, and shows his pupil, concrete and down to earth, what that means for your life, that God is your Father and governs your life. You must understand what is said here in answer 27, cuts deep into your life. That is, if you believe with your heart what you confess with your mouth. When you really believe with your heart that all things come to us not by chance, but by his Fatherly hand, then the theme we put above this sermon gets a concrete contents. Just follow Him quietly. That goes against your flesh and blood. It cuts off by the root all the calculations of your life. It calls you as a child of that Father to live in faith, without calculations, trusting his promises.

Many times your Savior has called his disciples to this life style. When He sends them out as sheep among the wolves, He adds: so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. (Matthew 10: 16). Innocent: that is straightforward. Without a side meaning, without calculation, straight toward your goal. Aren't you walking at Father's hand? Certainly, with that you have to pay attention and be vigilant. Therefore, wise as the serpents but that is different than living by calculation. Your Savior shows this calculating life style in Luke 16, in the parable of the unrighteous steward, who in time took measures before his master came back. Your Savior adds that children of this world in regard to their generation are more calculating than the children of light. These have a calculating life style. But this clashes with what you confess here about God's Fatherhand. When you see it open up your life, then all the cramps will disappear from your life, just follow Him quietly. The life style of David in Psalm 23 then gets meaning. The Lord is my Shepherd and you can repeat what David said: I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in the path of righteousness for his name's sake. A sheep does not know how to calculate. It follows the shepherd wherever he goes. It knows with this shepherd it is good. I will stay by him. Again, this goes against flesh and blood. Our life is so often full of calculations.

Some marriages are made out of calculation. What a grief has this caused in many lives. Sometimes plans are made for children full of calculations. In doing business and in society calculations are important. It is about success and a good position in your life. There are even all kinds of psychological methods recommended to succeed in your life. With that your neighbour is included as a 'thing' in such calculations. He then becomes an object of your plans and calculations. Where then is the love toward your neighbour? Living without calculations has also its consequences for church life. Our fathers, who liked many theological distinctions, spoke of a universal, a special and a most special providence. All those distinctions seem a little scholastic, but what they tried to express is worthy to consider. They meant this: God's universal providence goes over the whole world, over all the people. God's special providence takes his congregation under its loving protection and the most special has God's providential love

watching over Christ, his Son. Perhaps we also could say it like this - we go than from the front to the back - :The Lord had in his providential leadership of this world in the first place meant his Son. He has led all things in the life of your Savior so, that He could complete his great redeeming work for us. And for the sake of Christ He now upholds and governs also the church and the world. Church history has often been the model of God's loving protection. That is why we as churches should not live narrow minded but without calculations and trusting the Father in this turbulent world.

2. Our first point was; trusting in God providential ordination excludes all calculations. We add to that in the second place: resignation. Sometimes it seems that the highest christian life ideal is to resign oneself in what ever happens to you. Is that really the life style of ' just follow Him quietly'? Your confession sees this different. It asks in the second question of Lordsday 10: What does it benefit us to know that God has created all things and still upholds them by His providence. The answer again is poetic and the image exciting, in prosperity be thankfull and in adversity be patience, and for the future have your trust in our faithful God and Father. So in the first place: in adversity patience. Does that mean resignation? Just accept it and say: now if the Lord has so decided this, then it has to happen this way. Congregation there is a big difference between patience in adversity or to be resigned to it. Who ever resigns himself to things, then has to put up with it. Who in adversity has patience, lives in the tension of the faith and asks God for strenght to be able to bear it. Resignation in your life breaks the power of prayer. Who ever in adversity and misery in his life submits to it, does not pray the Lord for help and deliverance anymore. He does not live in the faith that God can do miracles. The confession here points to Job 1: 21. This is an impressive place in the Scriptures. Here Job says: Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return; the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. Did Job resign himself? Read beside Job 1: 21 what Job says in chapter 3: 3. There Job is the counterpart of resignation. He curses the day of his birth. There he said: Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night which said, ' a manchild is conceived'. Job did not sit on that pile of ashes in resignation, It stormed in his soul. Inside he wrested with God and when at last he comes to saying : the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, he has fought a heavy internal struggle. Beside Job we think here about Jeremiah. Amid his struggle to do his prophetic office over against the fierce opposition, he cried out: Cursed be the day on which I was born. The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father, a son is born to you. (Jeremiah 20: 14,15) You may think those are strong words which men like Job and Jeremiah spoke. They are. You can in see in their hearts. They did not hide their internal struggle for God and men. They fought with the problems life confronted them with. Indeed, if in your life you

stay with the things you can see and feel and you cannot see God above these things, you are nowhere. That will not say that who looks up to God, will lead a problem free life. Certainly not. Do you always get an answer to the questions life comes up with? Does not sometimes a complaint break your heart and on which you do not get an answer? Yes, sure, it is easily said, no calculations in this life, just follow Him quietly. You may be sick, incurably ill. You can be handicapt, sometimes from one moment to the next. You could have lost a child, through an awful traffic accident. All things come by his Fatherhand and at the same time you have the feeling that you hit a brick wall with all your ideals and expectations. And the ungodly? They grow like grass and all the evildoers flourish. (Psalm 92: 7)

Congregation there is so much in this world which cannot be explained. There is so much hopelessness, despair and misery. Where are you then with your getting all things from his Fatherly hand? Ach, we cannot give you answers on all your questions. We ask you: go with them to the cross on Golgotha, to the Man of sorrows, to your Savior Jesus Christ. Hear Him cry to the ear of the Father: my God, my God why hast Thou forsaken Me? Is that not an awful protest? A child that cries to his father out of his abandonment. As if there would have been a reason for this horror in his life. That was never the case for Him, never. He held onto the Father, to the very end. And yet - a hand moved a curtain in front of the sun. Nails, a hammer, soldiers who were scoffing. A human heart, a righteous human heart, that seeks the Father and a Father who is repulsive. Here is a real righteous human. Here is the human who lived to the very end out of love. Who held unto God to the very end. Did He get an answer to His lamentation? He did not, but still He held unto the Father in that dark hour. He did this as an guarantor. This means: He did it for you and in your place. He did that in full faith surrender to his Father.

So you also can find strenght by Him through surrendering in the faith. Not for resignation. Jesus did not resign. He cried out about it. But He held unto the Father and so He has obtained for you the strenght to do the same. You may lay your sorrow, the empty places in your life and your internal struggle in that Fatherhand. Also think about this: there are questions in this life for which a human never will find the answers. How can I accept that God let enter sin and misery and death in this world? I cannot reasonably explain it. But I do know, that I am a sinner and a rebel against God. And that I only for the sake of Jesus' cross and His Mediatorwrestling on Golgotha have been accepted as God's child. I have earned the misery and the horrors of life and death because of my guilt before God. So as I bear in mind that only through the sovereign grace that I may be his child, this will also keep me humble over against the questions which come up in this life. People can make things so difficult for us. People have done so much harm, in society, in the church, and among themselves. And yet: as you realize that you are a sinner before God, then

you can see God's hand in everything that happens to you. God rules over all things. God also uses people, also the bad ones, to reach his goal in a sovereign and mighty manner. Think about the story about Joseph. He said to his brothers: As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring about that many people should be kept alive. God also governs sin. Rebellion against what people do to us, is often rebellion against God. If there would have been one, who humanly speaking could have rebelled against God, that would have been your Savior. But in his protest He held unto the Father in that twice repeated: my God, my God.

3. The first thing we saw was: Lordsday 10 does not call us to live out of calculations. The second was: also not to sit down in resignation due to all life's miseries. Now we get to the third: God calls us to live in surrender of the faith to Him. Once again we look at the second answer, that answer 28. Your confession here speaks about us being a christian in emotional words. To put it concise: Be patience in all adversity. Be thankfull in prosperity. And for the future trust in your faithful God and Father. This is a high ideal and often we cannot reach it. Let us be honest, it storms very violently in our heart.

And yet: if you in faith look at Jesus Christ, your Guarantor, who went through the depths of hell with its horrors and god abandonment, faith will get the overhand and obtain the victory. We said it a while ago: the old reformed people said that God's most special providence is revealed in the life of our Savior. God guided his life step by step. So we can also, in considering and practising Christ's life and suffering, find the firm ground to get to a life style, to which you here are called.

Think once again about Job. He cursed the day of his birth with harsh words. But that same Job said: the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. There was no resignation by Job. It was taking the offered Fatherhand in the midst of protest, rebellion and temptation. It was the same with your Savior. My God, my God, he cried, why hast Thou forsaken Me? And yet, a little later there is surrender:

Father into thy hands I commit my spirit. The Fatherhand reached out to Him, in the midst of the darkness, and Christ took hold of it. Again we will think about the 23 rd Psalm, of which we already cited the first part. Now we will listen to the second part. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, and what an internal strive and rebellion can be in that, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Again the Fatherhand which grasps tightly that rod and that staff. Congregation, once more we bring the theme of the sermon to your attention. Just follow Him quietly. Away out of your life with calculations, now also away with all that passive making resignation. There is and stays a Fatherhand reaching out amid all the temptations in your life. That you may grasp it in the surrender of the faith.

I go my way in a chaotic and turbulent world.

One thing I know: the power in this world is not in the hands of diplomats and impertinents, of terrorists and politicians or of powerbrokers in whatever domain.

The Father governs.

Amen.

Lordsday 11

NO NAME IS SWEETER.

Sermon by the late
DR.R.H.Bremmer,
Enschede,
The Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton, Alberta.

Reading: Zach. 3, Matt.1: 18-25
Text: Lordsday 11
Psalm 113: 1,3.
After the law: Psalm 105: 15
After the creed: Psalm 111:3
Psalm 72: 2,7,9,10
Hymn 13: 3
Hymn 14: 1.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Not to long ago there was an article in wellknown magazine about the relation of the christian faith to today's Judaism. To say in a concrete manner: from the church to the synagogue. On the cover of that magazine was a beautiful picture in connection with that. In the centre you read the large letters: Jesus between church and synagogue. On the left you see drawn the star of David and on the right a cross. That magazine had a timely story, for in today's Jewry and in the Jewish theologie there is much interest in Jesus. A Jewish rabbi tells that in the time he was being educated for the rabbinate a New Testament lay in a dusty corner of the library, and near the end of the training and it was taught in the last hour of the term. And look now, he continues, the New Testament is the focus of the today's Jewish theologie. Congregation, is your Savior really between church and synagogue? Is He the centre figure between the two? For the answer to this question Lordaday 11 is very timely. It sets for us the name of Jesus in the centre. Why, says question 29, is the Son of God named Jesus, that means Saviour here immediately your confession chooses the way in which the question is put. Your Saviour is the Son of God. And what a nice name He has: Jesus. That name is thoroughly Israelitic. We will get into this later. You may however not forget for one moment, with that thorough Israelitic name, that He is he Son of God. He is not between church and synagogue. He is way above both. For the church and for the synagogue there is only salvation in that name. One of the drafters of your confession, Zacharias Ursinus, adds to this Lordsday: the name Jesus is the sum total of the gospel and at the same time a shield against all temptations. The congregation of Christ has understood this through all the ages. I think about that hymn of Gerdes from the previous age; There sounds a lovely name through the clouds uniting heaven and earth. That is seeing it in a great expanse. The poet then adds: No name is sweeter and better for your heart. Also this is true, as long as we do not forget, for Jesus to have this sweet name, Jesus had to travel the bitter way of suffering and sorrow. Today we speak about:

The glorious name of Jesus.

1. It is wholly Israelitic
2. the Son of God bears it and
3. it forces a choice of position.

1. Congregation, sometimes little words in the bible and in your confession have a deep meaning. And so is it with the little word "and" in the second article of the apostles' creed. Through that one little word your confession ties the first article of God, the Father and our creation with the second, with as heading: God the Son and our Redemption. Did ever notice, that with this one word "and" your confession immediately strides ahead from creation to redemption? And still there is a deep chasm between the two. In between that lies your fall into sin, your rebellion in paradise against the living God. The 12 articles do not say a word about this. They continue from creation to redemption. Yes and not totally. For does not your confession of God as creator remind you of your fall? You confess that God Almighty created you and created you "good" to his image. At the same time don't you realize that you in Adam from that wonderful original state of good creation fell, and rose up against God? Indeed the twelve articles do not use many words about it. But as it with that one small word "and" changes to the confession of Jesus Christ, then this means for you that you confess in his name against the background of your deep fall and guilt. Especially against that dark background the name Jesus stands out wonderfully. What an attention the catechism gives to you Saviour. The part "God the Father and our creation" it does in two Lordsdays. The part, God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification in three Lordsdays. But for Christ, our Redeemer your confession appropriates no less than nine Lordsdays. And Lordsday 11 is the first one. At once it puts you in the centre in the confession of God the Son and our redemption. For it is asking you very directly: Why is the Son of God called Jesus, that is, Saviour? No, congregation, that name, that glorious name, did not fall out of the sky. It was not a "find" of Joseph and Mary. The name was firm from eternity, by God. In God's own council. God Himself choose that name for your Saviour. He saw to it that your Saviour received that name. You know the story about the name giving of your Saviour? You find that in the fascinating beginning of the gospel by Luke. It is worth the time to consider this. It shows the Israelitic background of the name and the birth of your Saviour. There she was, Mary, a young woman in her home in Nazareth. May be 17 or 18 years old. She gets an important visit. No one less than the angel Gabriel presented himself to her. You must know how Gabriel introduced himself to the priest Zacharias? I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God (Luke 1 : 19) Shall the glory of the Creator of heaven and earth not have reflected on his throne servant? Now he stands before Mary and says: Hail, O favored one, The Lord is with you. Mary was troubled and considered what sort of greeting this might be. It is really something to be told by a throneservant of God, that you are the favored one among women. Gabriel took care of Mary in her

confusion and emotion. Do not be afraid Mary, he said, for you have found favor with God. Congregation, what a promise, favor with God. Hear what that favor, that special favor, consisted of for Mary. And see, said Gabriel, you will conceive and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. Gabriel then says mighty things about that son of Mary: He will be called the Son of the most high. He shall sit on the throne of David. His kingdom shall be into eternity. Weren't that priceless promises that Gabriel gave to that Jewish girl about her son? It is the first time that in the gospel of Luke that the name Jesus is used, here in the message of Gabriel. You shall hear it many more times, offering salvation, promising redemption. Do you now understand that the name Jesus comes from on High, from God? Was it not ready, this holy birth notice, High by God? You shall give Him the name Jesus: a glorious and godly command. God does not do things by half. He does not leave the name giving of the child only to Mary. He also gives Joseph the command the child, that will be born out of Mary, to name it so. You know this: Joseph was worried about what was happening to Mary. She, his bride, was expecting but not from him. In what attitude should he accept this? He, her honest fiance, did not want to compromise her. Adultery by a betrothed woman in Israel was the same as breaking up a marriage. The death sentence was the law. (Deut 22:24) He did not want to do this to her, so he resolved to divorce her quietly. In this situation, when Joseph was full of scary thoughts, the angel of the Lord came to him. See, says Matthew in chapter one verse 20, see, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. When you read that little word 'see' in the Bible, it should fascinate you. So it does here. The angel relieved Joseph from all his worries. What has been conceived by her, it said, is from the Holy Spirit. And again follows the godly namegiving. She shall bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. You may hear in Jesus name, which has been given by God two times for Mary's son, a nice wordplay. Jesus is the newtestament form of the oldtestament name Joshua. In the language of those days the angel would have used the name Joshua. It was a common name. In the history book by Flavius Josephus about the Jewish rebellion you will find that name over 10 times. So common was that name. He was just as common as with us: John and Henry. Joseph and Mary must have asked themselves: Is that all? Does this child have to have such a common name, a child conceived by the Holy Spirit? Congregation there is in that name humiliation and concealment. Your Saviour went through life with a plain common Jewish name. And yet. As he grew up and did his redemptive work, Joseph and Mary must have thought different. Their son had a common name. But there is a glow in the faith about the depth of that name. God had shown before in the Old Testament what a depth there lay in that name. Think about Joshua the son of Nun, in the time of the desert journey and the entrance into the promised land. Also think about Joshua, the son of Jozadek the high priest, from the time of the return from the captivity to the promised land. Congregation, what is the Old Testament important to understand the New Testament. You could say it is like a big

picture book, in which God shows us how He will give you redemption in the fullness of time in the coming of the Messiah. Just to really understand the name Joshua you have to see it in the light of God's salvation history with his people in the Old Testament. Today we will show you something of it. You know how Joshua, the son of Nun, was the right hand of Moses and later his successor. At first he had a different name. He was then called Hosea. But when he as one of the spies, refused to weaken the hearts of the people by scaring them with the Enakites, Moses gave him the name Joshua. His first name Hosea means redemption. Now Moses puts the name of the Covenant God in front of it: Jahweh, the Lord redeems, Jahweh the Lord rescues. That word redemption is typical. It means: make room. Opening tightly locked doors. Rescued from misery and death. You can find this Psalm 34 : 6: this poor man cried and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. Now, that is the name Hosea, the son of Nun, receives. He shall show in his life and in his battles, visible and tangible, that the Lord makes room and rescues his people. You could call Joshua a fighting general. In today's language: a four star general. See how he leads the Israelites in the battle against Amelek when it was travelling to the Sinai. Moses, Aaron and Hur fought the battle with prayer, on top of the mountain. Joshua led the people on the plain into battle. And later: when he together with Caleb calls the people to enter Canaan and to attack the Enakites. Joshua: the Lord saves. And again later, when he leads Israel at Jericho and in the battle with the Cananite kings. Jahweh: the Lord rescues. He shows that when he is in the vanguard before his people. He is in the front. He makes room. That was the first time that God showed in a concrete manner that with Him, through a man there is deliverance from distress. Now we ask for your attention for the second Joshua, which we spoke about: Joshua, the son of Jozadak, the high priest. He together with Zerubbabel, the son of Salthiel, gave leadership to the people when Darius made it possible to return to the promised land. You could say: God puts beside Joshua 1, the fighting general, Joshua 2, the high priest. Joshua, the son of Nun, brought Israel from the desert into the land of rest, in the land of milk and honey. Joshua, the son of Jozadak, brings it back to the promised land. You know the task of the high priest. He reconciled the sins of God's people. Now, there was a heavy trespass of idolatry to reconcile. Without that reconciliation the return of the people was impossible. You have to see how Joshua, the son of Jozadak, was busy in that atonement work. The prophet Zechariah shows that to you in one of his visions, in Zechariah 3. The suspense in the atonement is reaching the ultimate. The prophet sees Joshua, the high priest, standing before God, while satan stood at his right hand to accuse him, Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes, while standing before God and his Angel. His garment and his turban were filthy. Was that not a thrilling, plastic image of the debt of God's people, which was laid here on the high priest? Now listen what the Lord said: Behold I have taken the iniquity away from you and I will clothe you with rich apparel. Joshua gets a court dress

and a clean turban on his head. God has taken away the iniquity of his people.

You shall name Him Jesus, Gabriel commanded Mary. On the one side: a plain common name, a concealment. However at the time congregation, who sees this name giving against the background of the Old Testament, a name full of revelation. He speaks to you of the deliverance of God's people from the power of its enemies. He also speaks to you of a high priest, who reconciles the trespasses of God's people. So the Old Testament shows us who Jesus is and what He is going to do. When your Saviour was circumcised, Joseph gave Him according Luke 2 : 21 the name Jesus. named by the angel, before he was conceived in the mothers womb. That name Jesus was from eternity laid down by God the Lord in his council to reconciliation. The Lord had shown him the deeper meaning of the both Joshuas in the old covenant. God had given him to Joseph and Mary through his angel. Congregation, on the eight's day He received that name. At the same time in this circumcision his first blood was shed. He now goes as Israel's Redeemer to the cross on Golgotha to prove that name. Indeed there along the clouds sounds a sweet name, which unites heaven and earth. Do yo still remember the question which with Lordsday 11 began? Why is the Son of God called Jesus ,that is, Saviour? So has the Lord proclaimed that name to you. in his forerunners and in his name giving: your and mine Redeemer.

2. Yes, and what does this really mean to you? With the answer to that question we are in the centre of today's discussions. Jesus: Redeemer, Saviour. Of what does He deliver you? O, say many christians of today, He inspires to revolution. According to them you have to read the name Jesus in a revolutionarily context, against the background of oppression and suppression. Also according to many, the christian church has spiritualized that name to much. Don't we live in an awful world? Look, say the christians in favor of socialism, at South America, and at South Africa and other countries in this world. Should we not preach Christ over against as Saviour? Does He not inspire to rebel against the oppression through capitalism and imperialism? Is not His name: Saviour? Did christendom not spiritulize Jesus message and did it not only draw the attention of the people to heaven? But we live on earth and what does Jesus have to say to that?

Congregation now, we shall also as christians , especially as christians, keep a sharp eye on the injustice in this world. The rich often have oppressed the poor. Also christians in the name of Christ often have discriminated the Jews. But where lies the root of all the misery in this world? Lies the root only in the material things, in the abuse of riches and power? Think congregation, about what we said in the beginning about that little word 'and', with which the second article of the apostles' creeds begins. In that, the fall and the disobedience of us, men over against God, was negotiated. Adam and Eve, we men, rebelled against God. From that flows all the misery in this world. In that world

of guilty people and godlessness, came God's Son to save, to preserve sinners. He stood in our place over against God. The confession expresses this sober but powerful. It says, He is named Redeemer and Saviour, because he redeemes us from our sins. He touches the root of our lives and redeems and renews that through his blood.

No, He did not come into this world to call for a revolt against the Romans. He did not kick against the establishment, against order. He dined with taxcollectors and sinners. He called for to give to Ceasar what is Ceasars and to God what is God's. He went for us to the cross and atoned for the guilt of the world on Golgotha with his blood. God had that name Jesus ready since eternity. He showed in the both Joshuas what redemption is. Those two Joshuas your Savoour now unites in his one redemption work for us. He paid for our trespasses and guarantees us the peace and quiet in God, here and now into eternal life. He, your Saviour rose from the death and the grave. He defeated the devil and sits now in glory at God's right hand, till He shall return to judge the living and the dead. Here your confession as christian church strikes against today's Judaism. It does not want to know of a Saviour who hung on the cross, dies and rose from the dead to glory. It expects an earthly Messiah kingdom. Pay attention to the present tense which your confession uses. It says: because He saves us from all our sins now, today and all the days of your life. He is your Mediator at his Father. From Him flows a continious stream of redemptive power. He saves you, effectively, from sin, from all your sins. Your confession emphasizes this be saying that there is no salvation to be sought or found in anyone else. By emphasizing this strongly, that your Saviour is the only unique Redeemer, the confession takes position over against the roman catholic religion. No salvation by Mary or anyone else. Only with Jesus. And in today's age you can add: no salvation in any other religion. Not by Marx, not by Buddha, not with any sect: only by Him. When Peter stood before the Sanhedrin after the healing of the lame at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, he confessed the unique position of your Saviour. He said: there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name other heavengiven among men by which we must be saved. Acts 4: 12.

He had even said before in so many words at the healing of that lame man. I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk. (Acts 3:6)

What a power is there in that unigue name. How come that we as christians are so often powerless in this society? Why are the believers so often the prey of unbelief and doubt?

Because we do not tap into this power, which is given this unique name, in faith and in prayer. We often end our prayer with the words: in Jesus' name. Do you realize what you are saying? Or is it for you only a dead formula? Yes, this name forces a position choice.

3. Congregation, let question 30 really influence you.

Do they believe than in the only Redeemer Jesus, those who seek their salvation and well-being with the saints, by themselves or somewhere else? And then the sharp answer: one of two things. because one or the other. Your confession gives you no room. It is yes or no, black or white. Here there is no other choice. Whom says yes to Jesus, says no to to any other person or authority by whom you could find salvation. We saw it before: your confession stands at the front of the protestant confessionover against roman catholicism. That happens here in Lordsday 11, for the first time in a direct manner. It will happen more often in the following Lordsdays. But it is really special that

just here, by the name Jesus, it happens so emphatically. So striking is that name of your Saviour, that he forces you to make a choice. We can hardly imagine anymore why the church in the middle ages worshipped the saints. That grew in the time when the old christian church remembered her martyrs. People knew the date of their blood testimony and every year their martyrdom was commemorated. That slowly but surely grew into worshipping those martyrs. The next step was that people asked these saints for intercession in time of need. Besides Jesus a whole row of men and women came into existence who became intercessors before God. That your confession cuts off by the root. Your salvation is only to be found by Jesus. By no one else. Perhaps you may think: all good and well. Do we still have to know about this saintworshipping? Is it still timely for us? Luther has once said, he could say things very terse, if you cut me open, you will find in my heart a papist. He meant: it is in all our hearts to find not only and exclusively our salvation with Jesus. Was Luther mistaken? We don't think so. Think about the many who do not want to do anything with saint worshipping but who still not seek their salvation with Jesus. They look for support in their faith in their own experiences. They do not dare to accept Jesus as their only Saviour without having experienced themselves that they are born again and converted. There had to be marks of identification, and there had to be experiences, on which they also wanted to lean. But your "protest" against Rome only makes sense as long as Jesus and his finished work are the only ground on which you lean for your salvation.

What is it often difficult to only depend on Him. You must have met people who say: I had such a pious father or my mother died so glorious. That is wonderful, but not to invoke this over against God. Your confession knows the human heart inside out. It also knows the heart of those who on Sundays like to hear much good about the Saviour, but who during the week in their work and business, do not need anybody. Congregation, do not forget that in question 30 salvation and well-being are put on one line. Jesus is the Guarantor of both. He is not only your Redeemer on Sundays in church, but also during the week in your marriage and in your business and in your work. May be there are young people here in the church whose lives are stuck. They cannot find it anymore, they are struggling with their sins and shortcomings. Look at Jesus. Look at his

finished work. Ask Him for forgiveness and strenght for a new start. Perhaps there are young people who think: only if the world was different and who critisize the structure of society with its threat of war and violence. Do not forget that those structures consist out of people. Give Him a central place in your life and thoughts. We remember once more the hymn which we began with: There sounds along the clouds a sweet name, which unites heaven and earth. This is also valid in today's turbulent and chaotic world. And also valid is the rest of that stanza: No name is sweeter or better for the heart. He looks after the wounds, also the social and worldwide wounds, and cures all sorrows. Jesus: He is what He is named. He is not between church and synagogue, but above both. For each human there is only salvation in Him.

One more thing: we cited the sentence: no name is sweeter or better for the heart. But don't forget that this name can bring a bitter judgment over you when do not let that name rule your life. He is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, said the old Simeon, when he held the child Jesus in his arms and praised God, this shortly after the name giving. Only like this, in complete surrender you can maintain that there is no name sweeter than Jesus name. Then you also can close with: Jesus, your name has all the honor, for Thou are Lord of angels and all creation.

Amen.

Lordsday 12.

ANOINTED WITH OIL OF JOY.

Sermon by the late
Dr. R. H. Bremmer,
Enschede,
The Netherlands,

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton, Alberta.

Reading: Acts 26: 1-28,
Text Lordsday 12,
Psalm 89: 1,2.
After the law: Psalm 18: 7,
After the creed: Psalm 93: 4,
Psalm 45: 1,3,6,
Hymn 2: 3,
Hymn 63: 1,2.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The part of the Scripture which we read together, Acts 26 confronts you with a fascinating moment out of the life of apostle Paul. He was imprisoned in Ceasarea, in those times one of the big ports in Palestine on the Mediterranean Sea. You can see the imposing ruines of this city between Tel Aviv and Haifa. Paul's lawsuit first was dealt with by the governor Felix. After him by his successor Festus, who could not make a decision either. That is why he has Paul examined by king Agrippa, monarch of Galilee, who with his wife Bernice were quests of Festus. Agrippa as inhabitant of the Jewish country was very well acquainted with the Jewish religion. The Roman Festus thought, may be he can throw some light on this case. So Paul gets the chance of a lifetime. He may now proclaim the gospel, the glad tiding, to a Roman governor and a half jewish king. He did that masterly. First he gave a detailed narration of his calling to be an apostle. After that he proved out of the Scriptures of the Old Testament that Jesus is the Christ. He proclaimed nothing else then what the prophets and Moses had said, what would come to pass, that the Christ must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to the people of Israel and to the Gentiles.

Acts 26: 23. Paul's audience reacted angry on his words. Festus cried out: Paul you are mad, your great learning is turning you mad. In his answer to Festus, the apostle directed it at the same time to king Agrippa. Who shall have to agree that what he proclaimed is the truth. Paul said: all this did not happen in some remote corner. And then a direct question; King Agrippa do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe them. Pauls does not avoid the direct confrontation with king Agrippa. King Agrippa had to make the choice of his life. He has to say yes or no. We cite his answer: In a short time you think to make me a Christian. It must have been very quiet in the courtroom. There fell the word 'christian'. One thing king Agrippa understood very well, with 'Christ' belongs 'christian'. Unfortunately: Agrippa refused to make the decisive step of his life. He did not let himself be called a christian through the proclamation of Christ. Paul's reaction was wholly evangelical: I would to God that not only you but also all who

hear me this day might become such as I am, except for these chains. Agrippa could not make the step from Christ to christian. The catechism will take you along in this Lordsday to make that decisive step. After it has proclaimed Christ to you in answer 31, it asks you, directly, why are you called a Christian? Today we will see why these two, Christ and christian are joined together. I speak to you about:

Through Christ I become a christian

First we speak about: Who Christ is and then: what it is to be a christian.

1. Today question 31 brings us in the centre of this theme. Your confession asks; why is He called Christ, that is, anointed? Your Saviour is not only named Jesus, as we heard in the previous Lordsday, but also Christ. That is a significant name. It is the Greek word for Him, who in the Old Testament is called the Messiah. And both those names are translated into Anointed. Congregation, you could say that the Old Testament is a big picture book. It shows you everything what the gospel proclaims in the New Testament in a plastic manner. Think about the anointing of David to king of Israel in Samuel 1: 16. The prophet Samuel comes into the family of Isai in Bethlehem. He has received from God the command to anoint one of his sons to king over Israel. Samuel lets Isai's sons pass in front of him, one by one. Eliab, the oldest, is not the one. Abinadab, not either. As the third Samma: also not this one. So all the 7 sons of Isai passed by the old prophet. By not one of them did Samuel get an indication from the Lord to anoint him to king over Israel. When Samuel questions Isai, he said: yes I have one more son, but see, he is tending the sheep. Samuel also has this son appear and then the Lord says: Get up, anoint him, for this is the one. Samuel then takes his oilhorn and anoints David in the midst of his brothers.

It was not the first time in the Old Testament that someone was anointed for his office. You find the same ceremony, very fascinating, in Leviticus 8. There Moses gets the command to anoint Aaron to highpriest. In details the Lord tells Moses how it had to be done. He has to dress Aaron in his new highpriest robe. Then he had to dress him in his white undergarment, after that his blue-purple robe. Then Moses put the ephod on him, and then the breastpiece with the twelve diamonds, on which the names of the tribes of Israel were engraved. Then Moses put a beautiful turban on his head and after that, when Aaron is dressed according to God's instructions, Moses pours the anointing oil on Aaron and anoints him to high-priest over Israel. And still the Old Testament is not finished about the anointing of office bearers for God's people. Read about this in 1 Kings 19. There the prophet Elijah is on mount Horeb. God comes to him in the rustling of a soft breeze and gives Elijah, who was despondent, new instructions. He has to anoint Jehu to king over Israel. After that he has to anoint Elisha, the son of Shaphat from Abel-Mehola, to prophet in

Elijah's place. Not only kings and priests were anointed in their office, also the prophet Elisha. Perhaps you may think: what is the meaning of this ceremony, this anointing? And especially what was God's intend with it? Why did He have such office bearers anointed? Congregation, you should not think about what we call an ointment like for a wound. No, here it is about anointing oil, yes may be you could describe it as perfume or eau de cologne. It was a fragrant fine oil, made by adding fragrant vegetable matter to plain olive oil. Were this oil poured out on some one, then it would envelope him, because of evaporation, in a cloud of fragrance. The anointing with such oil meant two things for an Israelite. In the first place it was a sign that God appointed someone to a special task. David was assured that through the anointing by Samuel, that God had called him to be king over Israel. Aaron was assured, after his anointing by Moses, that he was called to be the highpriest. That in the first place. But something else is added. That cloud of evaporating anointing oil was also a sign and seal of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit over the anointed one. It made him capable for his task. The Lord gave David in his anointing the assurance that he received God's strenght to be king over Israel and Aaron to be highpriest. In that anointing by Samuel or by Moses God anointed them Himself. Think about Psalm 2: 6 : I have anointed my king over Zion or that beautiful verse 7 of Psalm 45: Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows. And in Isaiah 61: 1, the Holy Spirit made Isaiah prophesy about the coming Messiah : The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. Congregation now read the answer of your confession on the question why is He called Christ, that is, Anointed. You see then that through the speaking of the Old Testament about anointed servants, it all points to Him. He was portrayed in that. He becomes for us visibly portrayed. Because, answers the confession on this question: Because He has been ordained by God the Father, and anointed with the Holy Spirit, to be our only highpriest and our eternal king. He, Jesus, is anointed by God Himself. No, not with anointing oil as those office bearers of the old covenant. God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit. See you Saviour come up out the water of the Jordan. There He was immersed by John. Now He went up from the water and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on Him. Matthew 3: 16. As the dove from Noah could not find a spot to rest on this cursed and flooded earth except on Noah's hand, so could the Holy Spirit in his fullness only descend on Him who sinless went up from the waters of the Jordan. Upon Him, the by God sent Saviour, He rests and Him anoints the Holy Spirit with the oil of joy to his threefold Saviour's office of prophet, priest and king. Congregation, it was the initiative of Calvin to draw, to typify the Saviour's work of Jesus, your Mediator and Guarantor with the three office bearers taken out the life of the Old Testament. Fortunately the catechism followed him in that. Take the description of you Saviour as prophet. Your confession uses a heavily laden sentence for it, but it is worth

the trouble to weigh it carefully. Your confession says; He has been ordained by God the Father, and anointed with the Holy Spirit, to be our chief Prophet and Teacher, who has fully revealed to us the secret council of God, concerning our redemption. With that word "chief" by prophet and teacher answer 31 puts your Saviour in the light of the Old Testament. There were some impressive prophets of God. Men like Elijah and Elisha, Isaiah and Jeremiah come to your attention. In their time they proclaimed God's council for redemption to his people Israel. And yet, what are they in comparison with your Saviour? He has fully revealed the council of God for the redemption of his people. They pointed to Him from afar. They could not reveal everything about God's plans for redemption of his people. They supplemented each other. Now He has come, Jesus Christ, and in Him God puts his heart on the table. In Him God the Lord has fully expressed Himself. Congregation, you do not have to think about a prophet as someone who only speaks about the future. He does that too. But a prophet does more. He proclaims God's message of salvation and redemption to the people and explains that message. That is why the confession also calls Him teacher. With this you should not think about someone who teaches a class but about your Saviour who proclaims and explains God's promises. Your confession here draws a lovely picture of your Saviour. He spoke with authority as prophet and teacher and not like the Scribes. He proclaimed the narrow road which leads to life and warned about the wide road. Whores and taxcollectors listened to Him. He called out: Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matthew 11: 28,30.) He laid his hands on the children and blessed them. The Lord Jesus did not only come for the grownups but also for children. He was angry at his disciples when they wanted to keep the children from Him.

Your confession says: So He has fully revealed to us the secret council and will of God concerning our redemption. You have to take a good look at these words. Your confession wants to say with them: what has been hidden from eternity by God, what the Lord had fixed from eternity in his council, his own godly forethought, has now come to light. He, Jesus Christ, has as the chief priest revealed, announced and proclaimed it to you. There does not lie a second secret behind the gospel your Saviour proclaimed to you.

There are Christians who think that the gospel is really not enough. They want an extra assurance of God's election which exceeds the gospel. Let us say it once and for all: There is no other assurance by God than that what comes to you in the gospel. God gives you in his promises in Christ all you need for this and future life. Your confession here uses the 'fully' for a reason. In the time of the catechism there were quite a few fanatics who thought that you had to receive a special revelation from God, a special experience that you were a child of God. Your confession puts itself foursquare against this. There is no council of God behind the council of God, which was made known to you in the gospel.

That is why going to church for the assurance of the faith is so important. God lets his glad message be proclaimed to your ears. That is why the servants of the Word carry such a great responsibility in their preaching. They may proclaim this glad message Sunday after Sunday. It is for all the people in the church, grownups and children. Children also should know they are included. Your confession is not yet finished speaking about your Saviour. After it has proclaimed Him to us as our chief prophet, now it is going to speak about Him as our only High priest. It says: who by the one sacrifice of his body has redeemed us and who continually intercedes for us before the Father. Again answer 31 uses a fine description, now for the highpriest office of your Saviour. With his prophetship it uses the word chief, with his high priestship it uses the word one. There is only "one" Highpriest and He has redeemed with His "one" sacrifice once and for all. There is only "one". He is unique. Do you notice how the confession sets itself against the roman catholic religion? In the roman theology the pope is named pontifex maximus, the highpriest of the church. The confession here says, imagine, how do they arrive at that? As if there would be a new highpriest every time, as often as when a new pope is elected. We do not have a highpriest that, again and again, is replaced with another. We have one: Jesus Christ. Answer 31 points to that mighty word in the Scriptures

from Psalm 110: 4 : you are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. The priests from the order of Aaron came and went. They died and were succeeded by others. This highpriest is forever, eternal. The priest of the order of Aaron continually had to bring sacrifices for the sins. Every Great day of Atonement they went into the holy of holies to atone for the sins of the people of the past year. This highpriest made one sacrifice for our sins on Golgotha. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified, says Hebrews 10: 14. Caustically it rejects here the sacrifice of the Mass. That one sacrifice of your Saviour on the cross was enough once and for all.

Answer 31 describes the highpriestship of Christ so wonderfully. It does not stay with the sacrifice he had made on Golgotha. No, here your confession sees in one perspective his sacrifice on Golgotha and his intercession for us, today, in heaven. It stands right behind Paul's hymn of Roman 8. There the apostle says in verse 34: it is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. In one sentence the apostle unites Golgotha, Easter and Ascension and to end with the triumphant words: who indeed intercedes for us. Paul here speaks in the present tense. Your Saviour intercedes for you now, today, tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. Answer 31 says that with that one little sentence: who continually intercedes for us before the Father. Is this not a wonderful gospel? You have a highpriest who continually brings the fruit of his labour before the Father, pointing this out to the Father. He says? Father, you know my sheep. You know how little they do right. You know how weak

they are and how they keep falling into sin.

You know how hard it is for them to keep my commandments. I have suffered for them. I have poured out my blood for them. I died for them. I stand up for them before You. Does it surprise you that Paul immediately after that triumphant: who indeed intercedes for us, continues with: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Professor Holwerda writes very comforting in a sermon about this Lordsday: Christ does not pray away the misery of this world, but that we may be able to bear this misery. He does not pray away the temptations for us, but that we may stay firm in the faith. He does not pray away death and sickness and the hunger in this world, but that we may triumph through faith in his resurrection over all misery and death in this world. Congregation: Since we have a great highpriest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, then Paul adds: Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4: 14,16)

And still, your confession is not finished speaking about the offices of your Saviour. He is not only our chief Prophet and our one and only Highpriest, He also is our eternal King. Here the description of eternal for king is in the right place. It will not only say that there is no end to his kingship. No, it will bind it on your heart how dynamic and energetic that kingship is. Look how answer 31 describes that kingship of your Saviour. He governs us by His word and Spirit and who defends and preserves us in the redemption obtained for us. The confession quite often uses that duo; Word and Spirit. You cannot separate those two. In the Word works God's Spirit. God's Spirit seizes us through the Word. All the energy of this eternal king He uses to defend and preserve us through His obtained redemption. There are some enormous powers fighting against God. In 16th century it stormed in the world during the time of the catechism. It storms again in today's world. Demonic powers are trying to ruin the Kingdom of God. False doctrines are set to wipe out the gospel of Christ from this world. Congregation, you have an eternal King. At Easter He conquered death and devil. God's Word shall abide forever and shall not be moved. He rescues his weak church with the through Him obtained redemption. No one will snatch his sheep from His hand. So your confession has showed you in a few sentences who your Saviour is as Anointed, as Messiah and as Christ. His name is Jesus, that we saw in Lordsday 12. He is the Christ anointed with oil of joy over his fellows as your chief prophet, your one and only highpriest and your eternal king. That is Lordsday 12. That is his threefold office. There is in that word office something encouraging. When a doctor is called in the middle of the night to see a patient, he cannot stay in bed and think: I will go tomorrow. It is his job to go right away. In this manner your Saviour functions in his threefold office of prophet, priest and king. He puts out for you permanently So He wants to be worshipped by you. Lordsday 12 is the explanation of what you confess in article two of the Apostolic Creed: I believe in Jesus Christ. God's only begotten Son, our Lord.

Don't you believe in Him? We emphasize this question. There are many pretent christians or name christians in this world. They say they believe in Him but they don't. They do not do justice to the name christian. To cut that off, to confront you with what believing in Christ really is, your confession adds a second question and answer to the first. About that we will speak now.

2. But why are you called a Christian? asks question 32. In reality this question is out of order. In these Lordsdays it is about the Apostolic Creed? And your confession here wants to explain, step by step, what the names of your Saviour mean? In Lordsday 11 it was about the name Jesus and in Lordsday 13 we shall speak about his name: the only begotten Son of God and over the name: our Lord. The question: Why are you called a christian? , does not really fit. Indeed the confession is out of order. Why not for once? And especially: is not behind this to show the consequences that name has for you? A while ago we spoke about pretend christians and name christians. they are also in God's congregation. Your confession shall later in Lordsdays 30 and 31 speak about the unbelievers and hypocrites who have to be kept out of God's congregation. It exposes them here already. For the name " christian " is a precious name, a solemn name. You do not bear that name without a reason. That is why your confession shows in answer 32: who really is a christian. No, question 32 does not put the question to you: why you are named reformed or a calvinist. It wants to make sure that we realize, that there is more at stake here. It is about being a christian as such. When that is in order, then the rest will follow.

And then something else: answer 32 lays a close bond between Him, Christ, and us being a christian. The answer speaks to you very personally: Because I am a member of Christ by faith and thus share in his anointing. It is like the confession wants to say: pay attention. Now it matters. Something of the anointing with the Holy Spirit drips now on you, when you through faith are bonded to Christ. You are a christian when you are a member of Christ. He is the Head: and you together with all the other christians are his members. You are a christian when Christ is everything for you. If you are through the faith so bonded to Christ, than these 3 offices of Him have a place in you being a christian. Your confession makes this clear to you in a few short sentences. He is your chief prophet. Now you may through Him also be a prophet, says answer 32, as prophet to confess his name. You are not finished with that, when you have done profession of faith. That is certainly very important and let the young people, who are here, not postpone it. They have to make a decision, a decision for life. But once you have done profession of faith, then it actually begins. With: as the answer describes, you being a christian, to profess his name. In that word professing is: publicly own up to Him. It is to stand up for Him, when and where ever. Follow Him as the Lord of your life.

The confession points here to Matthew 10: 32: where you Saviour Himself says: So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven. Professing Christ before men: in the time of the catechism this often meant jail terms and sometimes martyrdom. We often have so much difficulty to profess his name in our society. And yet: it is expected from you. As a christian. After that " confess His Name " follows immediately.: and as priest present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him.

Actually congregation, you cannot part these two: the professing of Christ's name and sacrificing yourself to Him. I cannot profess his name, if I do not commit myself one 100 percent. If I not add my love and my prayers, certainly in the society in which we live today. Nowadays you hear from all sides: we live in a secular society. They want to keep the name of Christ and of God out of public life. The old saying: Religion is a private matter, is valid again today. There we are, as christians in that stone hard society of today. From all sides attempts are made to renew that society. For one, Marxisme brings the renewal, for another the individuality, or giving the same opportunities to the other. People are attempting to force equality. All kinds of actions are carried out: occupying factories, strikes, walking with banners for all kinds of purposes, are the order of the day. So society has to be changed. In this chaotic revolutionary world, you as God's congregation are called to profess, as a priest, Christ's name and at the same time, and that is the third part in answer 32: and as kings fight with a free and good conscience against sin and the devil in this life. These three are joined: professing Christ's name, give your all to Him, and as kings fight against the demons of today.

Congregation of Jesus Christ do we work to sanctify society? What goes out from us as christians? Being a christian in a secular world is not simple. It is asking from you to live continually in the faith and in prayer.

Certainly: you begin with yourself. in your own life, in your marriage, in the family in which you live. It continues in the congregation of which you are a member. In the association with your brothers and sisters, with your office bearers, and with the sheep entrusted to you as office bearers. It carries through, in society, in your work, in your choice of position to the great questions of this time. In matters like abortion and euthanasia, but also in your attitude in the business where you are employed and in the way you spend your money. We want to go back to the beginning of this sermon. Agrippa had understood from the preaching of Paul what a christian was. Some one who is bonded to Christ with heart and soul. In this way those first christians professed Christ in the society in which they lived. When the christian Probus was led in front of the pro-consul to be judged because him being a christian, he asked him for his name. He answered: my name is Probus, but my name of honour is christian. Let us also be christians in these times, bound with body and soul to Christ our Saviour. Then we shall, to end with the words of Lord's Day 12, also after this life, reign with Him eternally over all creatures. Praised be Jesus Christ, our anointed King.

Amen.

Lordsday 13

My Lord and my God.

Sermon by the late
Dr.R.H.Bremmer,
Enschede,
The Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton, Alberta.

Reading Romans 14: 1-17,
Text Lordsday 13,
Hymn 2: 1, 4.
After the law: Psalm 143: 1,
After the creed: Hymn 61: 1,
Psalm 2: 1, 3, 4,
Psalm 21: 5,
Psalm 72: 10.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

If you ever make a visit to Rome, you have to visit the catacombs. You must have heard about them. Deep under the ground of Rome there are passages which were dug out to manufacture bricks. Later those passages were used for burying the dead. Especially the first christians made use of these passages for that purpose. They dug left and right in these passages and made recesses, in which they put their dead. Over the years a whole network of passages came into existence, these are now lit with electric lights and you can visit them. What makes looking at these passages so fascinating is that the christians made drawings on the walls which symbolized their faith. One of the most well known is the one of a fish. The Greek word for fish is Ichtus. The letters of that Greek word are in that language the first letters of the words: Jesus Christ, God's Son, Redeemer. So they confessed there at the graves of their loved ones their faith in Christ as the Son of God. That was their original christian confession.

The old christian church inserted those names also in their confession of faith. You know: which was originated at the baptismal font of the christian church. There, when they let themselves or their children be baptized, they confessed their faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. We have already explained the first two names. In Lordsday 11 you have confessed that God's Son is named Jesus. Certainly, Lordsday 11 starts with that: Why is the Son of God called Jesus, that is Saviour?

After that you confessed in Lordsday 12, that He, the Son of God, also is called Christ. And now Lordsday 13 will round this off. It asks in question 33: Why is he called God's only begotten Son? It is about Him, who is named in Lordsday 11 the Son of God. That He is now called in the 12 articles God's only begotten Son, our Lord. Lordsday 13 is asking for the meaning of that only begotten Son of God of our Saviour, and it puts at the same time in question 34, the question why He is called our Lord. Two important questions and answers. The christian church of the twentieth century raises the flag of the old christian church high: I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, our Lord.

THE CONFESSION OF JESUS AS GOD'S ONLY BEGOTTEN SON AND OUR LORD

1. Which is rooted in the gospel;
2. lays the foundation under us being a child of God;
3. makes us free servants of a unique Lord.

Have you ever noticed the difference of beginning with the Lordsdays 11, 12 and 13, which in their explanation of the names of our Saviour are so close together? Pay attention, Lordsday 11 begins: Why is the Son of God called Jesus? Lordsday 12 immediately connects with this by asking: Why is He called Christ? You could expect that Lordsday 13 would ask: Why is He called God's only begotten Son, our Lord? Question 29 does ask this, but it adds something. It looks at us, in a manner of speaking, inquiring like and asks something more, namely: Since we also are children of God? There is something emotional in this. We belong together, your confession wants to say He is God's Son, that we have confessed together in Lordsday 11, He is God's Son, but we are God's children? We belong to the great family of God? Why does the church than add that word only begotten? Your confession answers, that word only begotten does not take away from the fact, that he is our great Brother and we as christians are children of God. Only; He is this in a very special way. He is the eternal and natural Son of God and we are this in a different way, we are, for Christ's sake, out of grace, adopted as God's children. Your confession, here in Lordsday 13, has a nice touch. You understand: it is not so simple to explain to us what this Sonship of God of our Saviour means. You can hear that in the deep meaning words: that He is the eternal and natural Son of God. You run into danger to try to understand things which are to high and to strange for us.

Theologians take these words to speculate with them and to have profound contemplations about them. Your confession does not want this, period. It is about enriching your knowledge of the faith, right in practical life. That is why it connects your Saviour as the Son of God with us as the children of God. Against that background its explanation in answer 33 becomes transparent. We said a while ago: these words natural and eternal are of a deep meaning. There is a depth in this which we cannot fathom. And still this confession came out of the gospel. Think about the conversation of your Saviour with his disciples in Ceasarea Philippi, in Matthew 16, a zenith in that gospel. There Jesus asks: Who do men say that the Son of men is? You know the answers that followed: The one says: John the Baptist, another: Elijah, and then another: Jeremiah. Then Jesus comes with a direct question: But who do you say I am? Then Peter gives that resolute answer. He says: You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus answered: Blessed are you Simon-Jona. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. Here you are at the heart of the gospel: Christ the Son of God. Congregation take a look at the gospel of John. It speaks in many places about your Saviour as the Son of God. Immediately at the start John proclaims:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and he paints us the glory of that Word as the one only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.(John 1:14)

A few verses further, he points out to us: that no one has ever seen God, However: the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made Him known. (John 1:18)

Who does not think here about the central place of the gospel of John, chapter 3 verse 16? in which Christ Himself said: For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. Recall the confrontation of Thomas with the risen Lord. Christ asks Thomas to place his hand in my side and says to him not be faithless but believing. Thomas' answer is then normal for the whole christian church: My Lord and my God.(John 20:28)

There are still more places in the gospel of John, which we can name. We also think about John 8 verse 50, where Christ emphasizes; Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.Or in John 10 verse 30: I and the Father are one.

How is it that through the ages the church again and again has struggled with this confession and kept it against many temptations? We think here especially about the struggle in the first ages of the christian church. While it formed in their first beginning of that confession: I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, our Lord, and it sealed this with blood and confirmed this at the graves of its believers, we see it get into a crisis on this point in the fourth age after Christ. You have in the back of your Book of Praise two ecumenical creeds which are all about that struggle:the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed. They are for a definite reason in your book of Praise. Behind this lies the struggle Athanasius, one of the great church patriarchs, had with the heretic Arius in the city of Alexandria. Hardly had ceasar Constatine the Great made an end to the persecution of the christians, and the battle began. Arius wanted to speak about you Saviour as a Godly beingbut he flatly refused to confess that Christ God is out of God

and Light out of Light. But Athanasius held unto this with all the strenght he had. Congregation be thankfull to him for this. He realized that the gospel itself was at stake. O yes, he agreed with Arius that the Saviour was also man. The gospel itself speaks about Him as man among men. At the cross he cried out: I thirst. During the temptation in the desert He became hungry, In Gethsemane He began to become greatly distressed and troubled. In all that He was as his brothers, except for sin. But, and this Arius refused to acknowledge, at the same time He was and remained God. Athanasius fought for this with all his strenght What good is it to us, if we have a Saviour, who is not truly God, he cried out. How could He forgive us our sins? If He was not truly God, how could He have conquered death for us? That central contents of the gospel Athanasius maintained with strenght against Arius. Once again congregation,be thankfull to him. He brought about that the christian church in the Nicene Creed inserted the well known passage that Christ is God of God and Light of Light These are words that inspire you to

worship. At home read the fiery Athanasian Creed, in which the trinity of God the Lord, so also the being God of his Son, is confessed with power. Behind these confessions of the old christians church Lordsday 13 stands here for the church of the Reformation. It kept in its confession, that Christ is the eternal and natural Son of God, the tie with the old christian church. The reformers did not found a new church. They continued the ecumenical line of the old church. They did not confess to two Jesusses, a godly and a human Jesus. They confessed to one Jesus: God and human in one Person.

Congregation, you have a Saviour, who as human is close to you in Him being tempted in Gethsemane and at the same time as Son of God conquered death and the grave.

Once more take a look at those sober words in the beginning of answer 33: your Saviour is the eternal and natural Son of God. In that is included a deep salvation secret. He is the natural Son of God, that is what you confess here. Before he became man, He was the eternal Word, that was with God and the Word was God through Which all things were made. The church has chosen the word oscillate for the generation from eternity of the Son through the Father. God has a Son. From eternity to eternity The Father generates the Son. When a human child is conceived and born, two are needed for that: a father and a mother. Here you confess in that word natural that only the Father generates the Son from Himself. That child that lay in Mary's arms in that christmas night, is God's own Son, who in his being God took our human flesh and blood. And once more: when a child is born, the moment of birth can be registered.

We can write down: at this time and on that date this child was born. But your Saviour is the eternal Son of God. He is that from eternity to eternity. His generating through the Father cannot be registered. It was a godly generating from eternity to eternity. And without doubt, writes Paul to Timothy: Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion: he was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory. (I Timothy 3: 15)

God's eternal and natural Son is the Child of Bethlehem and the Man on Golgotha appearing among men.

It is of the greatest importance that you maintain this confession in our time. It is not about a dogmatic theses, a piece of theory. No congregation, this confession about your Saviour being God is a matter of vital importance to the church in these times. What are there strange and unbiblical notions about your Saviour. For many He is today a great revolutionary, a fiery rebel who struck against the Roman government of that time, or who resisted the establishment of the Farisees and the Scribes. Again others, and I think about professor Schillebeekx, say:

Jesus was a great prophet but that He would be God's eternal Son is a repaint of his life's story by the evangelists. They even speak of a double Jesus: a Godly and a human. Do not get carried by this false doctrine.

Confess with the church of the apostles and prophets, of martyrs

and reformers, that Jesus God's only begotten Son, is God's eternal and natural Son. Your salvation depends on it. How else could He settle our cause with God? How could He lay the foundation for our salvation, if He was not truly God? There is no other way to God than through Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He wiped out our debt, said the old reformed fathers. Is that also today not a timely word? Wiping out is blot out, destroy, do away with it. In Isaiah 44: 22 the Lord says; I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like a mist. The King James Bible here uses the word blotting out. The Lord does that, because his own dear Son knew what to do with our debt, as Son of God paid our debt to the last penny to the Father.

2. With the confession that Christ is God's only begotten Son, the catechism does not stop. It adds in a fine manner: we however, are children of God by adoption, through grace, for Christ's sake. Do you remember that at the beginning of this sermon that we pointed out that in question 33 a close tie is laid between Christ's Sonship of God and us being a child of God? Your confession asks: how can we be children of God, while He is the only begotten Son? Now, the difference between his being a child and us children of God have we explained to you in the first part of the answer. He is the unique Son of God, eternal and natural. He is that by Himself. But now your confession wants to make it clear to you, that this not take away anything from being your own child of God. on the contrary you are for His sake, out of grace, adopted as children of God. What a strength and comfort lies in that word adopted. In that is the whole doctrine of free grace. Congregation, you know what adoption is. Through the law a possibility is made, that a couple, which did not receive children from God, now lawfully can adopt a child. Such a child has then all the rights as one conceived naturally. It is not a child from the adopting parents in the blood but through adoption. Now, that lies in that word adoption. By nature we are children of wrath. In Adam we have lost that the childship. Now comes God the Lord and He adopts us, out of grace, to be his children for Christ's sake. The Scriptures speak about this already in the Old Testament.

Think here about what the prophet Ezekiel in chapter 16 says about God's adoption of his people Israel. The prophet compares Israel with an orphan, which when it was born, was thrown along the road in a field. There he lay tossing in the blood of his birth. The verse 6 says: Then I passed by you, and saw you weltering in your blood of your birth, and I said to you, in your blood: Live. Under oath I entered into a covenant with you, says the word of the Lord, and you became mine. So God took Israel to be his son, as an orphan found along the road.

So the Lord has adopted us to be his children. You should not work yourself up to be a child of God. You cannot even do this. You can never reach this level through your devoutness or your good works. God gives you this childship out of grace. Your confession points here to Romans 8: 15, 16 where in the heart of Paul's righteous doctrine is stated: for you did not receive

the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of Sonship, through which we cry: Abba, Father, and then the words that follow: it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God. How liberal and comforting does the apostle Paul speak over our childship of the Lord in the letter to the Ephesians, in chapter 1: 5 , He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will. You may also think about the prayer from the Lord's Supper form that makes the access to the lord's Supper table so open and roomy: that we do not doubt that Thou wilt forever be our gracious Father, nevermore imputing to us our sins but providing us with all things for body and soul as Thy dear children and heirs. Or the words from the form for the baptism of children: as it speaks about us being baptized in the name of the Father. God the Father testifies and seals to us that he establishes an eternal covenant of grace with us. He adopts us for his children and heirs, and promises to provide us with all good and avert all evil or turn it to our benefit. You are here at the heart of the reformed covenant doctrine and of the gospel. Congregation, in that, that out of grace being adopted to children of God, lies the purpose of your life. What is a life without this grace? Without this adoption as children? Life goes by so fast. You are born, you marry, you get children, you care for them with love and old age comes nearer. Or you go through this life, you do your work, the years fly by. What is the use of this all? Why do we live on this world? Is it not great that immediately at the beginning of your life the promise sounds: that he adopts us for His children and heirs? That we may with David say in Psalm 22:10 Upon Thee I was cast upon my birth, and since my mother bore me Thou hast been my God. Living out of that promise you may believe that later at the end of your life an inheritance awaits you, the full inheritance of eternal life with in his glory and with the Lamb.

Congregation, may we just say all this? May you call yourself a child of God? Yes, that you can. That you can by seizing God's promises with a believing heart in the midst of the struggle of your life. What lays the reformed covenant doctrine a firm foundation under your life. You may call your children of God, not on the basis of a certain experience, not because you received an inspiration or something like that. Only because God assures you in his promises that He has adopted you out of grace as his children. What have these word out of grace in this answer a deep sound. Write them over the struggle of your life, over the battle against your sins, your doubts and unbelief. He takes you, as you are, only out of grace. What a comfort comes from these words at the death beds as our life with its sins and shortcomings appears before us. You may hold unto this, against all the temptations of the devil: God takes me, out of grace, to be his child.

3. Now we come to the last part of this Lordsday 13. In that

your confession explains why you call Jesus our Lord. This is the last of the four names which your Saviour bears in the Apostolic Creed: Jesus was the first, Christ and God's only begotten Son the second and the third and now at the end: our Lord. It is the translation of the Greek word Kurios. You know that word from the wellknown christmas song that ends with Kyrie eleis: Lord, have mercy on us. It is a word the evangelists took from the world of their time, there this title was used for the ceasar of Rome. He was the Kurios, the master of this world. For that is what this word means: boss, sovereign, ruler of all things. Immediately in the gospel of Luke the angel, who proclaimed the birth of the Saviour, uses this word: for to you is born a Saviour, namely Christ the Lord. And many more times after this Luke will use this name for Jesus. The Ceasar the Kurios of this world? No way: That is Christ, risen from the dead. Congregation, there lies a close tie between this Lord and you, with which the Apostolic Creed confesses about Him. Have you ever noticed how terse the Apostolic Creed speaks about you Saviour? It names only his names: I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son and when it is about his redeeming work only with the short indication; who suffered under Pontius Pilate, is dead and buried. But here, with this name is the word "our". He is ours you confess and we are His, it cannot be any more heart felt. He is our Lord.

Answer 34 reacts to that in a clear manner. It emphasized that "ours". He has bought "us" with his precious blood. He has liberated "us" from all the dominion of the devil. So has made "us" his own. You must have noticed that this answer 34 looks alot like the first answer of your confession, about your only comfort. Only : that is more personal. It starts with "I". That I with body and soul, both in life and death, belong to my faithful Saviour. Here it speaks more objective: He has bought and redeemed us. Here in answer 35 the faith speaks how it is between Him and us. Answer 34 is very close to Peter 1: 18,19 to where the confession empatically points: You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lanmb without blemish or spot.

The apostle hints about the custom of the old days, that a slave could buy his freedom. He deposited a sum of money in the temple of an idol, as an example Apollo. When the total sum was enough, he went with his owner to that temple. The priest would makeup a contract of his idol and put him under the protection of that idol. The apostle Paul says now: you are ransomed not only with gold or silver but with the precious blood of Christ, as from a lamb without blemish or spot. You are not owned by Apollo or by some other idol. You are Christ's, with body and soul. There are deep consequences in this confession. We all are of Christ. He has paid and freed us all. That has consequences, also for our mutual relations. The apostle Paul emphasized this In Romans 14. In the congregation of Rome, there were all kinds of questions. The one, says the apostle in verse 2, believes that he may eat anything, while the weak man eats only vegetables.

You have to know, that there were people who without any scruples ate what was sacrificed in an idol temple. An idol is nothing in this world? they said. Why should you not eat that meat, which the idol priest had for sale? There were others who would never do this. Practically all the meat sold by the butchers had been in the temple before, and as a christian they did not want to eat this. Pay attention how Paul tackles this in Romans 14. He knew very well that those who did eat the meat from the temples, looked down upon them who did not. The apostle says in verse 3: Let not him who eats despise him who abstains, and let not him who abstains pass judgment on him who eats; for God has welcomed him. And what it is all about congregation, is how central the apostle put our Kurios, our Lord in these matters. He says in verse 6: He who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, of the Kurios, since he gives thanks to God; while he who abstains, abstains in honor of the Kurios, of the Lord and gives thanks to God. It is about that the meat-eaters and as well as the non-eaters serve their Lord, their Kurios in this. So you see that the apostle is pulling both parties to the centre to their Lord. They are both in spite of all this still His. Did He not buy both parties with his blood and so set them free. Should not they adopt each other in Him? Then he in verse 8 goes on: None of us lives to himself, and none of us die to himself, for if we live: it is for the Kurios, for the Lord and if we die; we die for the Lord. So then whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lords, the Kurios. It cannot be more central. There always will be different opinions in the church. One, for the sake of Christ wants to keep everything as it is. He wants to judge everything very carefully and sometimes lives punctiliously. There are others who have a broader view. How sharp the apostle here sees both sides. He who stretches things, because he does not find it worth his while to judge things in the light of God's Word, who does not set the Lord who bought him, in the centre of his life. And the others, who want to keep everything as is, because it was right in the old days, they do not put Christ in the centre of their life either. We should not let ourselves be ruled by tradition, but judge things out of Christ, our Kurios. We should not just go our way carelessly in these times but judge them out of Christ, our Kurios. As Paul says in verse 23: for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

Living close to God makes us sharp in the judging of our time. Then we read a book as through his eyes. We watch television as through his eyes. We choose a position about the burning questions of today in the political and social life out from his dominion over all things. Answer 34 ends with: He has made us His own possession. Shall we practice this in our lives? There are christians who go through life full of worries. They see dangers everywhere. There are also christians who go through life carelessly. They do not see dangers anywhere. Congregation enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few. Matthew 7: 13 and 14.

It is the narrow road behind the Kurios, who with Him is also wide again. No one can say: Jesus is Lord, Kurios, than through the Holy Spirit.(1 Corinthians 12:3) There are those who have prophesied in my name and have cast out demons, of which He will say: I have never known you. Congregation pray for the Holy Spirit that He may tie you more and more to this Lord, this Kurios.

**Because no one lives for himself,
and no one dies for himself,
we all live and die for God our Lord,
for we belong to Him.**

Wonderful, to be the possession of such a Lord, of such a Kurios.

Amen.

Lordsday 14

GREAT IS THE SECRET OF THE DEVOTION.

Sermon by the late
Dr. R. H. Bremmer,
Enschede,
The Netherlands.

Reading: Isaiah 8: 23-9: 6
Luke 1: 26-38

Text: Lordsday 14,
Hymn 14: 1 and 2,
After the law: Psalm 32: 1,
After the creed: unknown
Hymn 1B: 1, 2, 3,
Hymn 18: 2,
Psalm 98: 2, 4.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton,
Alberta.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

In our time one of the things that gets special attention is sexual guidance. A lot is written and shown about it in the media as newspapers, radio and television. In all kinds of ways the wonder of fertilization and the birth of a child is shown to us. Young children are already getting familiar with it. Science is penetrating deeply into the secret of the origin of a human life. Still is and it stays a great wonder that God creates a new child out of the sexual intercourse of two people. God creates life. Certainly, He uses people for that and doctors can help with it, from and to the completion of a test tube baby. God works also in this through people, but God does it. That is why the birth of a child remains a great wonder and a gift from God. What a joy is there every time God gives us children. We do not want children or we do not want a child right now. We receive them as a gift from God. Psalm 127:3 says: Sons are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. And of course this is valid for our daughters. Happily the parents send out birth notices when the Lord has blessed them with the birth of a child.

Here in Lordsday 14, it is also about the birth of a child, of your Saviour, who at the same time is God and man. Conceived by the Holy Spirit and born out of the virgin Mary, confesses God's church in the third article of the Apostolic Creed. It was a real special birth, that of the child Jesus. Through his holy conception and birth, our births are sanctified. Behind his birth is the great wonder of the conception by the Holy Spirit. Here it holds true: take your shoes off your feet, for the soil on which you stand is holy. In the conception of Christ God the Holy Spirit works worshipful, powerful. It is also a godly necessary miracle. For God's Son could not have taken our human flesh in any other manner. It is in the third place also a wonder that gives us a rich "use", a rich devotion. Today we speak to you about how

THE CHURCH IN THE THIRD ARTICLE CONFESSES THE WONDER OF THE HOLY CONCEPTION AND BIRTH OF CHRIST.

That wonder is:

1. Worshipful
2. necessary,
3. bears rich fruit.

The first question of Lordsday 14 sounds somewhat different than the previous questions. Those mostly asked to the " why" of what the church confesses. Look at the previous question: Why do you call Him our Lord? Here, in the beginning of Lordsday 14, at once is asked to the contents of your your confession: what do you confess with the words: who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born out of the virgin Mary? You hear in that question, that the pupil is placed before a great miracle. How does he have to understand this holy conception and birth of the Saviour? With interest he looks up to his teacher. Explain it to me, he wants to say with this question. Now, this time the teacher does not make it easy for him. After all here it is about high and holy matters. You see this right away with the start of the answer: The eternal Son of God who is and remains true and eternal God, has taken upon Himself through the working of the Holy Spirit a true human nature out of the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary. This is great start. Also in this there is something triumphant. Your confession here wants to say what we have already discussed with you in the Lordsdays 11, 12, 13 : that is what you have named your Saviour. There you also confessed that your Saviour is God's only begotten Son. God of God and Light of Light. And now we will speak with you about his Salvation work in this and the following Lordsdays, but now it does not become different. He is and remains in this the eternal Son of God. But listen how close he has come to you. He has taken a true human nature from the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary. And still He is and remains the Son of God. With that word remains the catechism actually goes along the edge of you confession. Should this come into this discussion, that He is not only God but also remains as such? This is tied to His being God. But to prevent all misunderstandings, your confession uses that word here. Your confession wants to say:
He was God before his birth in Bethlehem. He remains it too, when He took upon Himself our flesh and blood at his birth, and He shall remain so into eternity.

Yes, this third article places you, congregation, in Bethlehem, and still further back in Nazareth. Especially the first chapters of the gospel of Luke speak to you about this. What a glad tiding about your Saviour is brought to you in Luke 1 and 2. What has the message, which Mary received in Nazareth, moved her. And behold you will conceive and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, said the angel Gabriel to her. In her answer she is in her emotion before us: How can this be, since I have no husband ? For Mary this a riddle: she as a young girl, engaged but not married, cannot understand the message of the angel. Gabriel in his conversation with Mary goes one step further and proclaims to her, the miracle that will happen to her.

He said: The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.

What can Mary answer to this? Congregation, her answer comes from her faith. Trusting, full of faith, she says: Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word. In faith she makes herself subservient to the Holy Spirit. You may think: how is all this possible? How can this young girl in such a short time assimilate that message from the angel?

On what did she base her faith? Well congregation, you have to see behind this girl and her words of faith the whole Old Testament. You may and cannot isolate the New Testament from the Old. Mary here stands in her answer in faith fellowship with the whole salvation history as this comes to us in the Old Testament. Otherwise her surrender in faith cannot be explained in such a short time. The most new theology does not want to know about this miracle. It rejects this with all its power. One of its representatives, professor Berkhouwer rejects the conception of our Saviour through the Holy Spirit as an historic happening and denies that this salvation fact is related to the Old Testament. This story about Christ would have been added later by tradition, to express that our Saviour is the Son of God. (Christelijk Geloof, 1973, page 308)

The more reasons is it to see this worshipful wonder in relation to God's work in the salvation history. This shows you how the Lord God from the very first beginning intervened in the womb of mothers to have the Messiah born out of this lineage. So Eve said, after the birth of Cain: I have gotten a man with the help from the Lord. She saw in Cain's birth the beginning of the woman's seed that the Lord had promised. She already counted

with her first child on God's intervention. And when Cain because of his the murder of his brother was pushed aside, she called the son, who was born in the place of Abel: Seth, that means substitute. God continued to work on his holy lineage. And think about the wonder of God in the birth of Isaac out of the barren Sarah. Does not the prophesy speak about of a miraculous intervention when Isaiah prophesies: Behold a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14) Does not Isaiah say in chapter 9:6, for us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be on his shoulder, and his name will be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace?"

We should not peel the birth of our Saviour out of the salvation history. Again and again God's hand from above over people speaks about bringing his Son out of the holy lineage in the world. Professor Berkhouwer wrongly explains that the birth of the Saviour out of Mary only was spoken about in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. You may also think about what the apostle Paul writes in Galatians 4:4 : But when the time had fully come

God send forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. No, the christian church has to and may maintain here the great miracle: that God the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary and in her conceived God's holy Son. And Mary, who was reared in the knowledge of the Scriptures,- think about her song-, has understood that she was chosen by God for this great miracle. She has received her Son through faith from the Holy Spirit.

Again you may ask: how this was possible? The answer is: through the power of the Holy Spirit who put Mary's womb into service so that God's Son could take on our flesh and blood. Everything here has to be judged very carefully. Congregation, pay attention how carefully the church in this third article has formulated its holy and catholic faith. It does not say that your Saviour is conceived out of the Holy Spirit, but of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit did not fuse itself with our human nature, but laid seizure on that nature, conceived from Mary the Saviour. She made herself available with those words in faith: Let it be according to your word. That is why your confession also says, that the eternal Son of God, who is and remains God, took upon Himself true human nature from the virgin Mary, through the working of the Holy Spirit. Your confession connects closely to what the apostle Paul writes in Plilippians 2:7, that your Saviour emptied himself, taking the form of a servant. No, your Saviour with Him becoming human did not cease being God, Paul says in 1 Timothy 3:16 that indeed the mystery of our religion is great. God is revealed in the flesh and John says in chapter 1 verse 14: And the word became flesh and dwelt among us. He was God and He remained God but with that he took our human nature out of Mary. He did not cease being God at the same time, radiant, glorious.

Your confession here battles two fronts. It fights against the error of the baptizers, who in reformation times strongly objected to the doctrine of the reformers. Christ became a human being out the flesh and blood of Mary? They rejected this strongly. Even as the gnostics in the first ages of the christian church they judged it to be impossible that God actually went to our world. It was to sinful for that. They set the world of God irreconcilable over against our earthly world. As a christian you have to avoid this human and sinful world as much as possible. This world is evil and as christian you have to break away from it. That is why they taught, that God already in heaven had created the human nature of Christ and He passed through Mary without actually touching her as a human. They taught, that He went through her as water through a gutter, without the actual incarnation of the Word.

The reformed people have fought against this with all their strenght. Your confession emphasize the true human nature of your Saviour and adds to that: that he is also the true seed of David. Imagine: Christ not a true human being? Only a semblance? How could He then redeems us? Your Saviour is truly

from the lineage of David. Gabriel had said this in the proclamation of his birth: He shall sit on the throne of his father David. Was that not the fulfillment of the prophecy in Psalm 132: 11 : The Lord swore to David a sure oath, from which He will not turn back: One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne. And Paul writes at the beginning of his letter to the Romans in which he will write so gloriously about Christ, that Christ descended from David according to the flesh.

Congregation, do not think, that here you are confronted with an error which is not timely in our time. Your salvation depends on this, that Christ actually took our flesh and blood and came into our world. He lay as a real baby in a manger of Bethlehem. He walked in the streets like one of us. He hung as a true man for you on the cross of Golgotha. He conquered as a true man death for you. The Easter King Jesus Christ is the great Son of David, set by God at his right hand on the throne over the world. He bought you with his true human blood free of the debt and the power of sin. In his true becoming human He laid the foundation for your redemption, and that of the whole world. The angels did not sing for nought: Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased. They only could sing this because the Child in the manger was true God and man. They praised God because of the worshipful wonder of incarnation of the Word. Every time that you confess with the holy catholic christian church that Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son and our Lord, is conceived by the Holy Spirit and born out of the virgin Mary, may in your heart rise up the praise for this worshipful wonder of God. Congregation, sing along with the angels, sing with them, and glorify and praise God.

2. Yes, this wonder is to be worshipped. It was also necessary. The new theology rejects this wonder because they do not find it necessary. They ask us: Why do you stand as orthodox believers so with all your might on this wonder? Why can God not redeem us by sanctifying the human Jesus to our Redeemer? Why could Christ not have Joseph as his human father beside Mary his mother? Why was it necessary that He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born out of the virgin Mary without Joseph's cooperation?

Here we touch on what you confess in the last words of answer 35 where the church of the reformation emphasized that your Saviour was without sin. Earlier you have confessed in Lordsdays 3 and 4 the reality of the original sin. You said there that we all fell in Adam. God counts to all men the sin of Adam, our father. We all stand guilty to the first sin of Adam. We all are conceived and born in sin. There, in our conception and birth we are joined to the rotten root of our human generation. That is why, says the apostle Paul in Romans 5 verse 12: Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin because all men sinned. Job lamented in chapter 14:4 : Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean, not one.

There, at the beginning of your life, at the root of

our origin, you begin to be a sinner before God. To that beginning, to the root of your life, did He enter, the Son of God. When Mary said : Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your Word, was He conceived in her through the Holy Spirit. Only for Him did not count what David confessed in Psalm 51 : Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. God took charge there, by this very first beginning of life, by pushing Joseph aside. Every human child is by his birth out of a sinful father and mother tied to that sinful root of the human generation. Through your father and mother you sprouted out of that deceased tree of the human generation. But here, here God broke through the chain that tied us to Adam. Here at the very first beginning of Jesus' life.

Our dutch confession of faith has expressed this in article 18 : being conceived in the body of the blessed virgin Mary, through the power of the Holy Spirit, but for a man. Here God alone is great. He rejected all human power. He broke the chain of sin through the Holy Spirit, that ties every one to his parents. He created out of Mary's flesh and blood a holy child. He sanctified the fruit in Mary's womb so that this not stood guilty in Adam's fall but also stayed free of the stain of sin, which we all carry with us through our whole life.

Congregation, here we think about what Isaiah says in chapter 43:19 about God: Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? Here God makes a new beginning in mankind. It is selfsame wonder what happened in the creation of the world and in the resurrection of Christ. God created a real human child out of Mary's flesh and blood, her child but at the same time God's child. This time it was not generated through two of Adam's children, but only out of one through God's wonderpower. Again is this not a mighty miracle? The whole human race of Adam was rotten and wicked. Every child carries with it the seeds of death and perdition. But when your Saviour was born He was a real new beginning. He was not subjected to Adam's sin. He was holy and undefiled and separated from the sinners.

He shall run the course, on which Adam failed. He went to redeem God's creation as a real and holy human being.

So you confess the necessity of this holy conception and the birth of the Son of God. So this third article of your confession becomes a song of praise on God's free sovereign favour. No, congregation, God did not give his creation to the devil. He did not throw it away the way you do with an old pair of shoes. He is going to renew it in Christ. He has made a beginning in this through his holy conception and birth. Satan does not have the last word in this world. The child that Mary in Bethelhem stable took in her hands, and wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in the manger, is the holy guiltless Son of God, A new beginning is a godless mankind. So he was of the true seed of David, and like His brothers in

every respect, except sin. This Son of David made his kingship true by taking upon Himself the guilt and the sins of his subjects and to redeem these with his precious blood. He could do this, because He , other than David, was Himself holy and undefiled. That is why the psalm can sing about Him: but the glory crown blooms forever on the head of David's great Son.

Your Saviour being born out of the lineage of David is very important to the gospel. Matthew shows you at the beginning of his gospel how Mary's child sprouted from David's generation. In the first chapter of his gospel he builds the family tree from David to Joseph, Christ's father according to the law. Luke shows you in chapter three that He through Mary is also tied to David's house. In Him that old king generation reaches its pinnacle and its end. God the Lord worked toward this through all the generations that followed David. And did not your Saviour climb the throne of David, that became the world throne for Him? Did He not proclaim with his ascension, on the way to the throne: To Me is given all the power in heaven and on earth? Did the angels not proclaim to the shepherds at his birth, that Christ the Lord was born in the city of David? Did the angels not sing their mighty song about peace, the sjaloom, that this Son of David would found?

You may think: we do not see anything of this in this world, of the peace this king from David's lineage would found? You see yourself confronted with wars, with terror and violence. And still, here in this confession, that He is the true seed of David , lies the great promise, that He will once bring the great peace over this world, about which John speaks at the end of his Revelations: a new heaven and a new earth.

There is yet another point which we will show you. We spoke earlier in this sermon about the Reformation having to make a front to two sides. In the first place she made objections to the glorification of Mary as Redeemeress through Rome. It is good to underline this again. Lordsday 14 maintains that your Saviour is born out of the virgin Mary. However it does not glorify her at all. The church of Rome does this. In 1854 it even proclaimed as dogma, that she, Mary also was conceived immaculate. With that she shoved the miracle back one generation. Why? You cannot find a trace about this in the Scriptures. Mary came into this world as a sinner and was that till her death. Also she was saved through the blood of her Son. Also you cannot find a trace in the Scriptures that she remained a virgin. Th Scriptures certainly do not teach us, what Rome claims, that Christ at his birth as through a miracle from Mary's womb would have gone outside. He would have been born with "closed doors". However it is stated so soberly in Luke 2 verse 7 : and she gave birth to her first-born Son. She did that exactly as every other mother that brings a child into this world: in blood and pain and anxiety.

In no way she remained a virgin forever. The gospel of Luke tells about in chapter 8 verse 20 that Jesus is told that his brothers and mother were outside and wished to see Him. Why

should not Joseph and Mary, after the birth of their first child not have known each other? Behind this idea of the roman catholic church is the depreciation of the married state, it is to be less holy married than unmarried. Congregation, you may reject this with all your strength. Let marriage held be in honor among all, and let the bed be undefiled, says the Scriptures in Hebrews 13:4 and it continues: for God will judge the immoral and adulterous. Marriage is a holy state. We may as married people love each other and know each other. Your children are sanctified through the Child of Bethlehem. Just because of that holy Child there is God's smile over the cradles of your children. The sexual life of you as men and women is a gift of God the Creator. You may speak openly about this with your children.

3. Now we come to the second question and answer of this Lordsday. You may again think about that grand song of the angels in the fields of Efratha. The angels began: Glory to God in the highest. They also were filled by the worshipping part of this miracle that the church confesses in Christ's conception and birth. They continued: peace on earth. They had seen the necessity of this wonder. God's sjaloom came over this world. God's Son in his holy conception and birth laid the foundation for this., They ended with: among men with whom He is pleased. That is the rich fruit of this wonder and about that answer 36 speaks to you. Very personally this answer addresses you: that He is our Mediator and with his innocence and perfect holiness covers, in the sight of God, my "sin", in which "I" was conceived and born.

Your confession follows the trace of our Lord Supper form. This also time and again lays the connection between the suffering of our Saviour and the fruit we personally receive from this.

There He was bound that he might free us from our sins. He suffered countless insults that we might never be put to shame. He was innocently condemned to death that we might be acquitted at the judgment seat of God. This is the way your confession sets itself over against your sin, in which you were conceived and born, His innocence and wholly holiness. With that He covers my sins. So He is our Mediator. So God's pleasure in people touches the origin of my life. There, at the very first beginning there at the dirty spring of my unrighteousness, God's pleasure starts to work. We are inclined by our sins, only to think about our sinful deeds. Your confession takes you to the origin of our lives : the sin, in which I was conceived and born. There already He is our Mediator. In Lordsday 6 your confession spoke detailed about his Mediatorship. Here it points to the very first beginning. To the dirty spring of your life itself.

Your confession here speaks fully assured. What a treasures are laid up in this third article. You may be happy about the birth of your children, The Mediatorship of your Saviour began to work already at their very first beginning. You may be happy about your own existence in this world. Your life here on earth

is not without sin. It is a life in Christ from the very first beginning. Young people often have so many questions. Why am I in this world? What is the use of my life? About these questions there is a lot of worry, more than we think. Now you may accept your life in faith as a life, in which this Child of Mary, this Child of God, also has gone in to the very first beginning. I may happily celebrate my birthday. My life is redeemed to the root and sanctified through Him. That is why the angels closed their song with that joyful: Among men with whom He is pleased. Glory, glory to God.

Amen.

Lordsday 15

SEE, THE LAMB OF GOD.

Sermon by the late
Dr. R. H. Bremmer,
Enschede,
The Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton, Alberta.

Reading Isaiah 53,
Hymn: unknown
After the law: Psalm 40: 4,
After the creed: Hymn: unknown,
Psalm 69: 3, 5, 12,
Hymn: unknown,
Psalm 22: 9.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Unimaginable things happen in this world. You would think them to be impossible. Only think what our generation already has experienced in this century. Two world wars, in which millions lost their lives. The horror of national-socialism with its concentration camps. How many wars have been waged since 1945 in this world? Daily we are confronted via television, with what there in countries as Ireland, Lebanon and South Africa and others is poured out in blood. It is a miracle of God that we in our own country have been living in peace since 1945. Yet also we in the Netherlands (Canada) meet horrible things I think about the killing of budding and of old lives. The use of drugs that threatens the young and has ruined many young lives. In what kind of world are our young growing up? Is it strange that our young people wrest with these problems and ask themselves: For what do I live? What is the use of life? Besides this large-scale violence there is also so much small-scale misery in this world. People hate each other. Marriages are disjointed and broken. Anarchy wants to overthrow authority and preaches hate against it. Society is being upset by this. Still this is nothing new. The apostle Paul in his time also experienced such things. He has summarized this in a few words, in Romans 8 verse 18. He speaks there about the sufferings of the present time. And with that present time he means the time between Christ's ascension and return. He also calls this, that the creation is subjected to futility and to the bondage of decay. He explains that the whole creation groans in travail.

And still, congregation, there is in the midst of this world in distress a mighty perspective. He says that too. The suffering of the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. In the middle of that in travail wresting world has stood the cross of Jesus Christ. Christ has on that cross, taken upon Himself, the distress of this world. And about this your confession speaks today. It puts the suffering of your Saviour on Golgotha in relation to the whole world. Christ has, it says, born and carried away the wrath of God against sin of the whole human race. He has redeemed us, through his suffering, as the only atoning offer. Your

confession points the finger to the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.

CHRIST SUFFERS AS THE LAMB OF GOD FOR THE SINS OF THE WORLD.

That suffering is:

1. Substitution
2. liberating,
3. redeemed us from the curse of God.

Have you ever noticed, that the 12 articles of the birth of your Saviour immediately jump to his suffering and death? After the third article about his holy conception and birth, right away follow his suffering and death in the fourth article. It goes directly from Christmas to Good Friday.

Has the life of your Saviour than no meaning for our faith? Is there nothing to confess about that? The four evangelists did they for nought so extensively paint Christ's life on earth for us? Can't we gain any fruit of this for our faith? Certainly. But you have to consider that the 12 articles only formulate the main points of Christ's work. You also could say it this way; It rushes from the beginning of Christ's life to the end of his life on earth. The drafters of your catechism were aware of this. Look at the answer that the catechism gives to that sober question: What do you confess when you say He suffered? It is like the catechism wants to say: It is such a little word. The old text of Lordsday 15 even spoke of the little word "suffered ".It is such a little word. But what treasures are locked up there for our faith. What a height and depth is in that word. Then answer 15 develops in two sentences what there is locked up for our faith. It does that real fine. Immediately with the first word, it sets our Saviour in the centre. It says: Christ has suffered for us " all the time He lived on earth"especially at the nd of it". It that not a beautiful formulation? If the 12 articles do not do it themselves, your confession definitely pays attention to the whole life of your Saviour. It sees his whole life in the light of his suffering and gloryfication.

It joins here the imposing sentence in the Lord Supper form namely that Christ from the beginning to the end of his life on earth the wrath of God, under which we should have perished eternally, has born for us. It began with his becoming flesh out the virgin Mary. There already began the long, long suffering, all the way to his cross. The story of his birth already spoke of his suffering. There was no room for Him at the inn in Bethlehem. Later He would say about Himself about this: Foxes have holes and the birds of the heavens have nests, but the Son of man does not have a place where He can lay his head. He, who was God out of God and Light out Light was swaddled in cloth and laid in a manger, a feeding trough for animals. He had to flee from Herod to Egypt. He served his father Joseph in his youth in full obedience. There is a very old picture, and on

it you can see your Christ at work in the carpenter's shop of Joseph. He carries a big toolbox on his shoulders. The shadow of that box falls on the wall of that room in the form of a cross. It is only a picture but it shows us that the suffering of your Saviour already started. Nowadays we often speak about dirtying the environment. We think about the smokestacks of the factories and automobile exhaust. But the worst filthy environment is spiritual: it is there where people through their trespasses and ungodliness poison God's world. Into this filthy and poisoned world He entered. He, the innocent and holy Son of God. He breathed the poisonous smoke of our sins. He was continually eye to eye with the power of the death. Yes, and he did this the whole time of his life on earth. With these few words your confession spans that whole period which the 12 articles left open and which the gospels tell us about so extensively. And after that the confession concentrates our view on what these gospels inform us about his suffering and death. There at the end lies the main point of his security. "But especially at the end of his life" says answer 37. With these words it fixes our attention on the bitter suffering and death of your Saviour. It is like that at the end of the gospels the storm of God's judgment gets more intense. The shadow of the cross on that picture of a little while ago becomes hard reality. The waves of God's wrath are hitting against the Saviour. All of a sudden He is in the middle of it. After the rest and peace in the Passoverroom, all at once He is in the midst of the wrestling at Gethsemane. The one moment He gives his apostles the bread and the cup, the next moment announces the betrayal of Judas: What you are going to do, do it quickly. Singing a hymn they went up out the mount of Olives.

And then, suddenly there is the rage of God's wrath. He separated Himself from the disciples about a stone's throw. They heard Him call in the night. They saw how He was sweating blood. Father, they heard Him call, Father if thou art willing, remove this cup from me ;nevertheless not my will, but thine will be done. He is a worm, not a man. Now there is no stopping. It is like all the gates of hell were opened. He was dragged along from Annas to Kajafas, from Kajafas to Pilate. There He stood: crowned with thorns. Crucify Him, crucify Him they called. Then He goes through the streets of the holy city, carrying his cross, nearly collapsing under it.

What do you confess with the word suffering? That Christ, especially at the end of his life on earth, bore the wrath of God. Who shall penetrate in the depths of this suffering? Who shall gauge this?

The evangelists tell it to us in sober words but in that glows the suspense of Psalm 22: Thou laid Me in the dust of death. Thou. The Father. His hand pushed the clouds before the sun on Golgotha. Someone has put the horror of the suffering in the three hour darkness in these words: God was deserted by God. We sometimes think that in a certain situation of our life we are deserted by God. But never takes God the Holy Spirit totally from us. He , Jesus Christ, He has been totally deserted

by God. He has screamed at the cross in the darkness of those three hours: My God, my God, why has Thou forsaken Me? The hot breath of hell brushed past Jesus Christ.

The whole time of his life on earth, but especially at the end of his life. Again, they are only a few words, human words, but they confront us with what He there suffered for you and me. And then says your confession, He bore the wrath of God. The wrath of GOD. Congregation, words cannot express what that contained for your Saviour. Moses already knew this when he asked in the 90th psalm: who considers the power of thy anger, and thy wrath according to the fear of thee? The wrath of God: that is the holy God Himself, as He in the holiness of his being God gets up to avenge the violation of that holiness.

We realize this: It is not popular to speak about the wrath of God. The newest theology does not want to hear about it. God's wrath? But God is love, it says, God suffers along with the people in their suffering. In that refusal to speak about God's wrath it reflects the spirit of our time. It speaks of co-humanism and it wants to see God that way. A God, who suffers with us people. But is this right? Does a human not get mad, when he is confronted with falsehood, meanness? May a man or a woman not get up in anger when iniquity happens? Should He, the holy God not get up in anger when his holiness has been violated? Should God in holy wrath not turn Himself against all the atrocities committed in this world? Does not God's wrath against sin belong with it being God of God.

Congregation, certainly, God, your God, is love. The apostle John emphasizes this in his first letter (chapter 4: 16) but he also shows that God's love is not without responsibility. For, he continues, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. God's love wants to be taken in faith and wants to be part of your life. Otherwise God's love does not stay with us. Certainly, God is love. But love which is trampled on, turns into anger. That is why the Scriptures can say: God is a righteous Judge and a God, who is angry every day. (Psalm 7: 11) God's love is not a pale, weak love. It is a strong godly, sovereign love, which cannot be trifled with. O, congregation, what do you have a holy and great God. Also in his love and anger. We people always try to understand things putting them all in a row. We cannot speak about God's glorious surprising attributes by putting them side by side:

God's anger and God's love. But let this be certain for you: God is "one". He is God in all his attributes. So it is also with his love and anger. The bible speaks very concretely about our Lord. Habakuk prays to the Lord: In wrath remember mercy. (chapter 3:2) Is that not concretely associating with God?

Calling on Him and amid his anger to think about his mercy? Davis says in Psalm 30 verse 5: For his anger is but for a moment and his favor is for a lifetime. Or take Psalm 103 where David struggles with God's mercy amid his wrath to say:

He will not always chide, nor will He keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor requite us according to our iniquities. These words sound very special in our hearts after the celebration of the Lord Supper.

Congregation, here you are at the heart of answer 37. Here you confess in that one word suffering, that God in his wrath turned against his own dear Son Jesus Christ because of our sins. He, the church confesses, He has born the wrath of God. Just because God is love, did He rage his anger against his own dear Son because of our sins. What is there a depth in that word " bore ". He was done with it. He bore away God's anger from your guilt. He did not leave that load of guilt. He did something, yes everything about it. He bore it away forever. Behind that that word bearing you may also read the sixth word on the cross: It is finished, once and for all. Read it also against the background of Isaiah 53, the chapter of the Man of Sorrows: But He wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. Consider how the prophet involves each one of us with this substitute offering. You cannot get away from it when he says: Like sheep we have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way. "Everyone", certainly, "everyone". But, continues the prophet, and this 'but' is worth gold: and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Who can be finished thinking about Isaiah 53? What are there depths of godly pity in this gospel of the substitution. Isaiah had seen the sacrifice of the Passover lamb very times. Hear how he points with this holy act to the suffering servant of the Lord, on the coming Messiah. Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter and like a sheep that dumb is before its shearers, he did not open his mouth. It is the prophesy of John the Baptist when he said: Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.(John 1; 29) With that you are in the second sentence of answer 37: Thus by His suffering, as the only atoning sacrifice, He has redeemed our body and soul from everlasting damnation, and obtained for us the grace of God, righteousness, and eternal life. Again with these words you are in the heart of the gospel. As the only atoning sacrifice, says the confession. Golden words. There is only ONE lamb of God. There is only ONE Saviour in this world. There is only ONE who at the same time is priest, sacrifice and altar: Jesus Christ. There are no other sacrifices possible, no roman catholic sacrifices of the mass, no priests who dedicate that mass sacrifice for us. There is only ONE: The Man of Golgotha and the King of Easter. Your confession emphasizes here the point of the gospel of the atonement for us all on the word "as". As the only atoning sacrifice our body and soul, us as a whole human being, as humans of flesh and blood, redeems us. Again we know it: the gospel of the substitution, of the only atoning sacrifice of the Saviour, is an offence for the people of these times. The cross of Christ would only give a shock effect that would lead us to conversion. Another would not suffer for our sins. How can God punish some one else for my trespasses? So ask today's theologians. How God can do this? Well, because God's pleasure is eternal. How this is possible? Because God in his sovereign eternal love assigned in his council that lamb to suffer for our sins. In the resistance against the gospel of the substitution, modern

men puts itself haughty and proud against God. What is being asked from you and me, is to capitulate for God's love who in the gift of his Son shows our failure. Calls us to admit this failure by depending on this only atoning sacrifice. There is no other way to atone for our trespasses.

And now the last part of this first answer. We showed you that your confession puts the gospel of the substitution on a worldscale. It is about doing away with the wrath of God against the whole human race. This gospel could not be shown roomier or more embracing. The canons of Dort have in stately and at the same time in emotial words shown when it confesses in chapter 2 article 3: This death of the Son of God is the only and most perfect sacrifice and satisfaction for sins, of infinite value and worth, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world. There are critics of the catechism who say: this is impossible. God only atoned for the sins of the elect? How then can the catechism here speak about the atonement of the sins of the whole human race? Well, it does that because your confession puts the work of Christ on a world scale. This gospel may be proclaimed to all men with the command of faith and conversion. No one, regardless of how great his sins are, how heavy his guilt is, may doubt that this gospel is for him. The only condition is that he feels sorry and and in faith goes to this Saviour. In the beginning of this sermon we pointed out what horrible things happen in this world: on a large scale and on a small scale among people. Congregation, now there has stood a cross on Golgotha and He who died on that cross, died there for the atonement of the sins of the whole world. Amid all the horrors of this world sounds a voice :let yourself be atoned by God through this Saviour. Than also in your own life this gospel will give you strenght and live in reconciliation with your neighbour. The gospel of the substitution has a world renewing and atoning power. It is being proclaimed on a world scale. Don't forget this for a moment.

2. Your confession still has to answer two more questions in this Lordsday 15. In the first place the question why Christ had to suffer under the judge Pontius Pilate? For the second time here in the confession of the old church a name is mentioned the name of a human. The first time was in the previous article. There the old christian church mentions the name of her, who brought your Saviour into this world: born out the virgin Mary. Now, in the fourth article, you hear the name of a man: Pontius Pilate. She, Mary, the woman, stands in the christian confession as the mother of the Saviour, who in faith gave Him life. Him, Pontius Pilate, the christian church included in her confession as the man who send Christ to his death. Why? That asks the church in question 38 very empatically. Why does he have to be named, who condemned to death the innocent Christ? Why is he always, whenever the church confesses her faith in the church services, mentioned by name? There are various reasons for this. In the first place the old church wants to show through this, that the suffering of Christ actually happened.

You hear in the gospel not an invented story, it is not a fable.

It can be dated. Then and then did it happen, when Pontius Pilate was governor of the Roman ceasar. It can be pointed out as an historic fact. Pilate is just as an historic figure as August or Julius Ceasar. Do not forget that this was the time of martyrdom. The christian church kept its martyrs in remembrance. Polycarpus, Cyprianus, the died as martyrs under this or that proconsul, the governor. And before all of them: Jesus Christ, under Pontius Pilate. There is still another reason and your confession underlines this. And see now, your Saviour was condemned to death by Pontius Pilate, innocently judged in that righteous court of law. Five times Pontius Pilate witnessed that he could find no crime in this a man. Still he condemned Him to death. He handed Him over to be crucified. No, He was not killed in a riot, He was not in a forgotten corner of the world lynched or stoned. He received a trial that was written down in the annals of history. But in that trial he went to his death while innocent. It is only ONE moment in the suffering of your Saviour: that going to death innocently. But it is the most important moment: He was the lamb of God that holy and innocently went to the cross.

The catechism would not be the catechism, if it did not made an application on us believing. It does this and very direct. It declares, so he freed us from the severe judgment of God, that was to fall on us. Congregation, in that is a liberating power in that innocent suffering of your Saviour. You do not have to be scared for the judgment of God. O, what can our sins seize us. What can that guilt stand before us as large as life. Who does not shudder, when he thinks that once he has to appear before God, before that holy Judge? Now hear the gospel: So He freed us from the severe judgment of God that was to fall on us. Contrary to Pilate's godless judgment, God freed you from your guilt. With his innocence the Saviour covers the your guilt before God. You may appear in God's judgment, clothed with Christ's righteousness. I think here about what Paul asks in Romans 8 verse 33: Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? This apostle of Christ knew the deep shudder for God's judgment. Did he not know himself to be the greatest of all sinners? He had persecuted the God's congregation. And still: Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? And then the answer: It is Christ Jesus who died-through that godless judgment of Pilate-yes who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. See there the fruit of your Saviour's standing before Pilate. You do not come alone before God's judgment seat. Your Saviour stands there before you and frees you from God's judgment. Who shall accuse God's elect?

3. And now we come to last point. We saw a moment ago, after explaining the meaning of the suffering of Christ, the catechism has two more questions on the order paper. First that one about Pontius Pilate. After that the last one namely if it has a special meaning that Christ is crucified and not died in a different way? Yes certainly, answers your confession, thereby I am assured, that He took upon Himself the curse which lay

on me. In those last words the confession alludes to the word of Paul in Galatians 3 verse 13: Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us - for it is written: Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree. With the last words of Galatians 3 verse 13, the apostle cites Deuteronomy 21 verse 23b: for a hanged man is accursed by God. It is a touching light that your confession lets fall on Christ's death on the cross. It places us in God's association with Israel in the Old Testament. We saw this already before: In the Old Testament the Lord shows how visible and tangible, perhaps you could say: realistically shows how great the gravity is of his judgment. In simple cases, some one in Israel who deserved the death penalty was killed by stoning. Here you should think about the fire of God's anger against Israel when it whored with Baal-Peor at Sittim. Then the Lord commanded Moses: Take all the chiefs of the people, and hang them in the sun before the Lord, that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel. (Numbers 25:4)

There was a deep symbolism in that hanging before the Lord. Israel declared with this: Lord we have brought these godless men to death. We cannot further execute your curse on them. We shove them now to you. We hung them before your face, so that you deal with them in your eternal judgment. So Israel has hung your Saviour on that tree. It has put Him in God's hand to deal with Him in the eternal death. And He let Himself be hung. He is at the cross, during the three hour darkness, gone through the depths of the eternal death. That is the deep meaning of hanging on a tree. Again your confession sets, as in the previous question and answer, this being crucified of the Son of God, in the light of our situation of guilt and death. He does that now very personal, Up to now He has not spoken this personal till in this Lordsday. It says: thereby I am assured that He took upon Himself the curse which lay on me. Yet once more the gospel of the substitution stands before you as large as life. There on that rough wooden, clumsy cross, Jesus bore the curse for me. Sometimes they make out of the cross a beautiful symbol. But the reality is horrible and at the time in its horridness atoning. In the cross I shall eternally praise and no law shall condemn me. Christ bore the curse for me. Horrible things happen in this world, on a large scale and on a small scale. There is not a more horrible thing that happened in this world than the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. And still: that is why the apostle only could write that the sufferings of the present time, are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. Through that cross I am free from death and sin.

Amen

Lordsday 16.

Three times "WHY" and the only comfort.

Sermon by the late
D.R.H.Bremmer,
Enschede,
The Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton, Alberta.

Reading: John 19: 28-42
Text: Lordsday 16,
Psalm 16: 1,4,5
After the law: Psalm 19; 6
After the creed: Hymn unknown
Psalm 103; 1,6,7
Hymn: unknown
Psalm 23: 2.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lordsday 16, the one we are now thinking about is one of the longest Lordsdays in the Catechism. No less than 5 questions and answers. And not only that: what is there much in this Lordsday directly aimed at you. All those 5 questions and answers circle around one topic: death. But not only around your own death, your own dying. These 5 questions all at the same time speak about Christ's dying and Christ's death. Here it is about the fourth article of the Creed, in which you not only confess that Christ is crucified, but also died and was buried, descended into hell.

With this Lordsday about death it is in the centre of your life. Whom among us has not been confronted with dying and death? With the death of those who were dear to us and whom we, for all the money in the world, did not want to miss? And still the Lord calls them away. Who among us does not think about his own death? How do we answer our children's questions when they talk about death? Who dies at home? I know modern men tries to push death away. Most of the time dying has become something that happens in a hospital. And then the talk about euthanasia, the so called soft death? Is not the true nature of death not camouflaged in many different ways?

Congregation, your confession here in Lordsday 16 speaks emphatically about death, your death, your dying. Lordsday 16 reaches back to Lordsday 1. It does this in a very special way. It asks three times the question WHY. WHY did Christ humble Himself unto death? WHY is Christ buried? WHY follows in this article about His descension into hell? And in the answers on that triple WHY, your confession proclaims to you the only comfort in life and death. It proclaims to you the assurance of your Lord and Saviour who went through the temporary and eternal death for you. So only, from Christ's death, we can be comforted when we speak about our own death or about that of our loved ones.

Today we speak to you about

THREE TIMES "WHY" AND THE ONLY COMFORT.

1. Why did Christ have to die?
2. Why is He buried?
3. Why did He descend into hell?

1. There is much thought by people about death. What is it really and where does it bring us? The most comfortless answer gives the modern existentialism. It says, death is the burning of the human into nothing. As a meteor burns when it touches the atmosphere, that is the way it is with a human. He is thrown into this life. You are just there, and from where you came, no one can tell. As a leaf whirls from a tree, that is how a human is thrown into this world. You just have to accept this life in freedom. And then suddenly you are dead. Then you are burned up. A human has to accept, that he is thrown into existence and this can end at any time. In reality that is a hard doctrine without any comfort. The christian faith is very different over against death and over against dying. In modern thinking there is no true redemption of death. This is only there for us through Jesus Christ and through his dying. He has died for us and so He comforted us truly. Your confession says, that He has humbled Himself for us into death.

During his life He was confronted with the horror and seriousness of death. Think about the resurrection of the daughter of Jairus. Then He saw how death could strike a young life. And think about the raising of the young man of Nain. Also the gospel tells very extensively with his confrontation with death at the resurrection of Lazarus. Jesus wept at the Lazarus' grave and at the same time he became deeply moved in the spirit and troubled. John 11: 33,34. No one ever gauged the horror of death more than Him, your Saviour. Their deaths spoke to Him about his own dying that was to come.

And then Gethsemane. How did the horror of death come to Him in its reality in that night on the mount of Olives. The Father gave Him there in that garden the cup of his suffering. And He knew: He had to drink that cup to the last drop. That was into death, into the eternal death. The gospel says in Mark 14: 33: And He began to be greatly distressed and troubled, and He said : My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. He knew how death would come to Him and He wrested with it in anxiety and distress. No one has to feel embarrassed if he is scared of dying. Our Saviour was a true human and He also has known the fear for death. He has prayed the cup of death away from Himself: My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. But the Father kept on handing it to Him and He drank all of it till the last drop for you, till into death.

Congregation, see Him go, from Gethsemane to Golgotha, carrying his cross. With every step He came closer to death. How He has wrested for you at the cross with death. Think about the three hour darkness. From the sixth to the ninth hour He penetrated into the realm of death. There on Golgotha was fulfilled to your Saviour what David said in Psalm 22 verse 15: in the dust

of death thou hast laid me. No, not the timely death, the taking away from this life, came there first to your Saviour. In that three hour darkness period God brought over Him the eternal death,,being forsaken by God for eternity. Who shall express this in human terms what that contained? Already in paradise God had spoken about the horror of the eternal death. God spoke there: Adam when you eat of the forbidden fruit, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die. Gods means with that death in its horrible totality: the opposite of eternal life, abandoned eternally to God's curse. O, congregation we speaak here about matters which we can hardly understand. We can barely describ them in human words. Your Saviou was confronted with that on Golgotha. God pulled a curtain for the sun. God withdrew his life connection from his Son. It made your Saviour cry out: my God, my God was hast Thou forsaken Me? Some one expressed it this way: God was deserted by God.God pushed his Son away into the depths of the eternal death. And yet: He wrested Himself through all that. He kept on holding on to the Father.He kept calling: my God, my God. And when the three hours were gone by He could cry out triumphantly: It is finished. The cup of suffering and death was emptied to the last drop. His guaranty was assured.

Yes, and why did still have to die? He had conquered death, the eternal death? It was all done, finished? Why did he then call to drink some to strengthen Himself to die? Was that necessary? Why? Congregation, the first christians had a lot of difficulty with that question. There was a tendency among them, that did not want to know anything of the dying of the Saviour. Did He not finish everything at the cross? There were some that say that he straight from the cross ascended to heaven. According to them dying after the cross was not needed anymore. Because of that the old christian church added on purpose:to the words that Jesus is crucified: that He died and was buried. The gospel spoke for them , and I add: for us, also to clearly about the dying of your Saviour. Weren't his last words at the cross: Father into Thy hands I commit my spirit? Did not Mark write: And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last.(Mark 15: 37) What a tremendous happening that must have been, congregation. Your Saviour, the Son of God, the man of two natures, God and man in one, died. Yes, He had to die.He had to after having wrested the eternal death He had to go through the timely death. That could not and that was not allowed to be different. Your confession expresses this by saying: it could be made in no other way. It could not be in another way because of the righteousness and because of the God's truth. There is in that; no other way,an unmoveble earnestness. Did not God spoke so about it in Paradise? Adam had to die because of his fall and rebellion against God. That encompassed everything: the timely and the eternal death? He, Jesus Christ, did take Adam's place? The old invoice of Adam was still there? Certainly, all those old patriarchs reached high ages: Adam, Methusalah: they became hundreds of years old. But none of them had conquered death. Not one of them had wrested through death in

its full extend. About all of them it is said: and he died. If death had to be conquered in its full extend than there had to be one, who went through all of it, to the very end. Congregation, your Saviour did this. He did this for you. Bowing his head He committed his spirit. He paid for you, for all of us, who find in Him their guarantor and mediator. He satisfied God's righteousness. He bore the by God threatened punishment. So He satisfied God's truth. Congregation, see the answer to the first question about the WHY. It could not be nor was it allowed to be any other way. So we proclaim to you the only comfort in life and death. Your Saviour, He died for you, to free all of us from death.

But now the confession connects to that question about the WHY an urgent question with an eye on our own dying. Look at question and answer 42 which we will look into right after question and answer 40. Since Christ has died for us, why do we still have to die? Do you hear the impatience of the faith ring through in that question? Why does it not happen to us, as to Enoch or as to Elisha? If He really died for us and indeed paid the outstanding invoice for us, why do we have to through the dark tunnel of death. Could He not have nullified death for us with one stroke?

Unbelievable nice is the answer of your confession to this question. No, not with brainy reasoning. There is no comfort in that for you. It answers us with a vision of faith, in a few precious words. Listen. The answer says, our death is not a payment for our sins, but it puts an end to sin and is an entrance into eternal life. Pay close attention to that word "our". Here it is about our death and our sins. Your confession does not speak here about the death of the unbelievers. No, it sees before it, those many, many children of God, who through the ages went the way of death. For them death is not a payment anymore for their sins. Has there not been made a payment for them? There on Golgotha a Man died who at the same time was the Son of God? The invoice which was open since the first man has been stamped, Paid. There is in our dying not a spark left of God's anger.

Congregation, there is something else going on. For Christ's sake, because of his dying and death, God now controls your death. With it He cuts us off from the body of sin. In it He frees us from what we bore in us as sins and guilt. Did not your Saviour say to the murderer on the cross: Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise. Is God's forgiveness of our trespasses not radical? For Christ's sake. Did not Paul write in 1 Corinthians 15 verse 50 : flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable? God liberated his children in their dying with one stroke from everything that was still sinful in them. Your confession says: but our death puts an end to sin. That word "but" is saying: Do away with the thought in your heart, that in your death there still could be an element of curse and punishment. It is the redemption out of grace by your Father from what was in you as unrighteousness since your conception and birth. Then your confession says: and is an

entrance into eternal life. Here that little word "and" is worth gold. For now follows the other side of the death of your sins. Now falls a glorious light over all the deathbeds of God's children. O, yes, you and I, we have to die. About your death this answer 42 speaks in its beginning. That death, that dying is a stone hard reality. The confession does not take anything away from that. But at the same time: entrance into eternal life. Angels waited and carried Lazarus to Abrahams bosom. At the end of the dark tunnel of death shines the light and the glory of eternal life. WHY did Christ humble Himself unto death? Here you have the answer: to make your dying an entrance into eternal life. There, in the house of the Father are the holy angels. There are all those who went before us. In my Fathers house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. A place has been prepared, through Him. John 14 :2. These words of your confession are often confirmed at the deathbeds of God's children. I know this, not all deathbeds are the same. There are many children of God who in an instant are moved into glory. There are others who for days lie in a coma waiting at the gate of Fathers house. There are also deathbeds over which the light of these promises visibly falls. The Scriptures speak about this. We name the dying of old Jacob, surrounded by his sons and what Simeon says when he saw the child Jesus: Now let thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy Word; for my eyes have seen thy salvation. John in Revelations 14 verse 13 testified: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, from now on. Death of sin and entrance into eternal life: what are you here comforted by your confession.

2. Now we come to the second WHY at Christ's humiliation into death. Why is Christ buried, says question 41. You should notice, the confession now speaks in the passive form. With the previous question Your Saviour handled Himself. He has humbled Himself into death. Now He is being handled. He is buried. With this the catechism has come to the very last step in the state of Christ's humiliation. He was buried, carried to a grave. In all this a human is only passive. A lot of criticism was voiced about this answer 41. It was to sober. Yes, it is also sober. But only, to give witness that he really had died. Ach, say some explainers, that Jesus really had died we knew through the spearthrust in his side. We also know through that for none of his bones were broken. Indeed, John in his gospel supplied all the facts as proof of the real death of the Saviour. The dying of the Saviour was real death, of that already spoke the blood and the water after the spearthrust. But this now, in Christ's burial, gets its definite end, and it was made public to all. With that He gave a testimony, says your confession. There is in the burial of your Saviour a proclamation. There Jesus came to the very edge of his humiliation and at the beginning of his elevation. The burial of your Saviour again gives reason to contemplate how rich and conclusive the guarantee of your Saviour is. He has been buried. In that he was wholly passive. They have carried Him away: Josph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, to the Joseph's new grave. Iw was not

a great distance from the cross to the grave. John says in chapter 19 verse 41:

And now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden and in the garden a new tomb, it was close says verse 42. But still as God's children are carried to their grave, so He was carried. We bury our dead. There is humiliation in this. A dead person cannot be in the society of the living. He has to leave, to the grave. God spoke in paradise: you are dust and to dust you shall return. That was also valid for his Son He was laid in the grave. However at the same time of the deepest humiliation of Christ you can already see the light of his elevation breaking through. They had spices with them, these two men, who buried Him: a mixture of myrr and aloes, about a hundred pounds. That was not a small amount. They honoured him with this.

Ursinus in his explanation of the catechism also shows that Christ's burial fulfilled the word which He Himself had said to the Pharisees and Scribes in Matthew 12 verse 40 : for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Ursinus ties to that a real fine comfort. Indeed our Saviour lay three days and three nights motionless in the grave, buried as we will be buried. But through that He sanctified our grave. Ursinus says, our graves because of this, are the place in which we rest till the day of th resurrection. Is this not glorious, congregation? How often have we not been at the open grave of one of our loved ones? From an open grave a moving sermon is preached: In it man returns to dust.

At the same time you may see over an open grave the glory of Christ. He has been in the grave. He took away its horror. He was raised from it. Calvin says: out from the grave reaches us the life fragrance of Christ. Only faith can say that. That is why we bury our dead. We do not give them to the destruction of fire. We lay them to rest in Christ. in Him who has been their only comfort in life and death.

And yet, congregation, yet your confession is not finished speaking about Christ's dying and our comfort. Read question and answer 43. In a penetrating manner your confession asks: what further benefit do we receive from Christ's sacrifice and death on the cross? It is as if your confession wants to say: Look at the inexhaustible spring of comfort the gospel wants to be for you in the dying and burial of your Saviour. Through his power our old nature is crucified with Him, put to death and buried with Him, so that the evil desires of the flesh may no longer reign in us, but that we may offer ourselves to Him as a sacrifice of thankfulness.

The Catechism joins to what Paul says in Romans 6 about the unbreakable tie between our baptism and Christ's death and burial. The apostle in that chapter, verse 3 asks: Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in the

newness of life. A little further the apostle speaks about that our old self was crucified with Christ. As we in the baptism go under in the water and come out of it washed clean from our sins, so Christ went into the grave with our sins. Forever He left them behind. As Christ was nailed to the cross, so is our old nature, once and for all, nailed with Him to the cross and broke through that its power Your confession says, that there is a benefit in the consideration in faith of the crucifixion of your Saviour, of his death and burial. It unchains a battle in your life, the never ending battle, against the evil desires of our flesh. As my Saviour is crucified, has died and has been buried for me, can I then remain in my sin?

Does the old nature then not loose with its evil desires its power over me? Won't its power not be broken? Pay attention here to the word "so". Your confession does not proclaims a new law, no, it proclaims a promise. So that the evil desires of our flesh may no longer reign in us. That is the fruit of the death and being buried of my Saviour. And then, that we offer ourselves to Him as a sacrifice of thankfulness. In the association of faith with you, for you, crucified and buried Saviour, powers of love and thankfulness are loosened in you. Then in you will live what a wellknown hymn put into words: Take my life, and let it be, consecrated, Lord, to Thee.

3. Now we have come to the third and last WHY. So says question 44: Why is there added : He descended into hell? There is a little amazement in that question. Was that really necessary that your Saviour descended into hell? With his death and burial the state of his humiliation was completed? Why then follow the words about his going to the place of the outmost darkness? Here we touch upon a piece of history. The old christian church included Christ's descension into hell in the fourth article, because it thought that indeed Christ descended into hell between his burial and resurrection, there defeated the devil and triumphantly took with Him to heaven the believers of the Old Testament. They founded this on 1 Peter 3: 19; in which He went and preached to the spirits in prison, and also Ephesians 4 verse 9 where the apostle writes: that our Saviour also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? The reformers have done away with this view of this article in imitation of Calvin. There is no truth in speaking that Christ after his death and burial bodily descended into hell. They had to decide if they should scratch out this part of the fourth article from the Creed of the church. That they did not do. They wanted to maintain the whole 12 articles and so show clearly their tie with the old church. However they have given it a different meaning. Some viewed these words simply as an explanation, that Christ after his burial has been in a state of death. Calvin himself went deeper. Here your confession takes his explanation. At the cross Christ endured all His sufferings. He held fast amid all the temptations of the devil. Actually this part of article 4 should be read after the words: is crucified. But the men of the Reformation just left it in its old place, but with a different explanation.

Answer 44, the last of this full Lordsday 16, lays the suffering of your Saviour once more close to your heart. It speaks to you very personally: In my greatest sorrow and temptations I may be assured and comforted that my Lord Jesus Christ has delivered me from the anguish and torment of hell. Indeed your Saviour has been in the hell. But not after his dying and burial. On the cross He was in the hell. He has believed Himself through this and in that faith tied to Him, you also will come through all the temptations. So we have also considered in the third WHY the connection to our Saviour in this Lordsday. WHY did He die for us? WHY was He buried? WHY did He descend into the sorrows of hell? There is only one answer: so that we all may be comforted by this assurance in life and death. Praised be Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Jesus, life of my life,
Jesus, death of my death,
which You have given for me,
in the anguish of my soul,
so that I know when dying,
that I may inherit life,
Thousand-, thousand times, o Lord,
Thy be thanks and honour.

Lordsday 17.

A horn of plenty.

Sermon by the late
Dr. R. H. Bremmer,
Enschede,
The Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton, Alberta.

Reading: 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11
Text: Lordsday 17
Psalm 118: 7,8
After the law: Psalm 119: 1
After the Creed: Psalm 117.
Psalm 21: 2,3,4,
Hymn: unknown
Hymn: unknown.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Man of these times struggles with the questions of life and death. On the one side he like life very much. He is very careful with life. Think about the great care given to the environment, to our lifeworld. Billions are spent on healthcare. To save one life, sometimes the best doctors and the most advanced instruments are being used. Millions are spent in the fight against cancer, life's enemy No 1. The opposition against atomic power also has the background in taking a stand for life and in combatting the threat of it. That is the one side of the thinking of death and life by modern man.

On the other side this man cuts off the edges of life and death. Think about abortus provocatus, the killing of unwanted still unborn life. Then carefulness in the social intercourse with human life has disappeared. Also think about the propaganda for euthanasia. The same doctor, who perhaps for years fought for the preservation of the life of his patient, now takes the liberty to end this life. How come that modern man is so uncertain and thus at one time is positive and then again negative over against the questions of life and death? How come that today's man is so dupolistic? That is because he does not look for an answer on these questions in the gospel of Jesus Christ. In that we find the only true answer to the questions of life and death. Christ is risen. He has conquered death. His resurrection is the assurance of our resurrection into glory. Death does not have the last word in this world. Only your risen living Saviour has this. And when you believe in the resurrection you have a different view of life and death. Then over our whole life falls the light of Christ's victory over death. That light falls over the early beginning of life, and it falls also over the sometimes so difficult ending. It falls over our whole life, from beginning to end.

Lordsday 17 of the catechism speaks about this. One of the shortest Lordsdays. It does not ask to the WHY of the resurrection of Christ. It does not mention a word about the resurrection story itself. No, it steers straight away to the meaning of the resurrection of our Saviour. Short and powerful, in three points. How does Christ's resurrection benefit us? Now, a lot can be said about this.

It is simply a horn of plenty: first, second and third. What these 3 points contain we will discuss together. We speak about:

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION: A HORN OF PLENTY

because:

1. He guarantees through his resurrection the redemption of our trespasses.
2. He renews through his power our lives.
3. He guarantees our resurrection into glory.

Congregation there are those catechism distinctions, which after you have left the catechism class, are still of good use. They enlighten your faith knowledge. I think here by name about the distinction which the reformed doctrine makes between the state of Christ's humiliation and the state of his elevation. The word "state" describes some one's legal status.

When someone is suspected of having committed a crime, he is put in a state of indictment. Even if he is totally innocent of the fact for which he is accused, as long as his innocence is not proven, he is in the state of indictment. When the Dutch queen Wilhelmina fled in 1940 to England, she was exiled for 5 years away from country and throne. And yet she remained in her legal status, the state of queen. This was not taken away during her exile. These examples can help us to understand when we speak about the state of Christ's humiliation and of his elevation. About the state of his humiliation we have dealt with in the Lordsdays 14, 15 and 16. Certainly, our Saviour was and remained the eternal Son of God, also when He was born out of the virgin Mary. Lordsday 14 made a powerful testimony about this. But at the same time He was from his conception and birth in the state of humiliation. He was and remained an innocent man but God counted Him to be accursed, one driven away from his favour. According to his legal status He was guilty before God: for He had taken our sins and our guilt upon Himself.

Very extensively the Lordsdays 15 and 16 showed us how He still further ascended in that state of his humiliation. He bore the heavy anger of God since the beginning of his stay on earth, declared Lordsday 15 to us. He was condemned by the judge Pontius Pilate. As an accursed person He was led to the cross and died on it for us. At the cross He went through all the sorrows which we should have suffered. After all this He was buried in the garden of Joseph of Arimathea. That was the deepest point in the state of His humiliation. He shared in the shame of us having to be buried. A dead person cannot be part of the society of the living. He is put away in the grave. Like this He has been in the grave for three days. From the Friday evening of his burial and the whole following Sabbath. The day of the Sabbath was a high day, says John (chapter 19:31) meaning the Jewish Passover. That was that Sabbath indeed: The Son of God who at the same time was human, rested in the grave on that Sabbath. He was, as Jonah in the belly of the whale, three days in the heart of the earth. (Matthew 12:40)

The old church has confessed its faith in the resurrection of

your Saviour not for nought with the words: and on the third day He arose from the dead. Those three days in the grave were actually the seal of his being dead. The state of humiliation was suddenly disrupted by God. He suffered it to the last humiliation into the grave. And all that time, from his humble birth to his burial, He was an accursed and humiliated man by God. In all that time He remained in the state of his humiliation, as a quarantor, for you and for me. He was counted by his Father as the greatest of all sinners for us and in our place. This cannot penetrate deep enough into us. The apostle Paul expressed this in a few terse words by calling us to place our faith in God, who resurrected Jesus from the dead, who was delivered up for our trespasses. In that one word "delivered" Paul summerized the whole state Of Christ's humiliation. All that time He is delivered to the curse of God. In that He bore our sins away, to the very last one.

There the apostle adds a few more words: triumphant words, glorious words. And he continues: He is resurrected for our justification. Do you hear this well, congregation? Resurrected for our justification. When he had been in the grave for three days, came the great turnaround, the great turningpoint. It became Easter, the day of the resurrection, the day of the conquering of death. You cannot disconnect Golgotha, to summerize this in one word, not for a moment from Easter. Good Friday without Easter does not mean anything, Someone once expresed it this way: Good Friday without Easter is as a beechnut without a nut. Absolutely worthless. You also could say: a light without light or a battery without power. Easter is the crown of Good Friday. Your church confesses in the fifth article; On the third day He arose from the dead. Your confession summarizes in that FIRST of Lordsday 17 the whole resurrection story. It confesses first by His resurrection He has overcome death. Yes it is there only in a few words, but what a powerful happening that must have been. God Himself is the centre of the Easter story. In that FIRST your confession puts up front what happened on that early Easter morning. God moved. God laid his hand on the earthcrust and made it tremble. God send his angels to the garden of Joseph of Arimathes, God commanded them to to roll away the stone from the grave. God broke the seal that Pilate had put on the grave. God through his angels made the guard of Roman soldiers run away. God had another honour guard ready; his liturgical spirits who carefully put the burial cloths together. God commanded one of his angels to set itself triumphantly on the stone.

The state of Christ's humiliation was at its end. Now the state of elevation began. Through God's power his Son had not seen destruction in the grave. Now God resurrected Him to life; glorious and triumphant. The way Lazarus came out the grave so arose the Son of God to life. Only: the resurrection of Lazarus was childsplay compared to the resurrection of your Saviour. Lazarus rose to die later again. Your Saviour rose once and for all to life. He had conquered death. There is a depth in that word "conquer" which we can never gauge.

Congregation think here at the beginning of Christ's state of elevation again about the words of Paul of a few moments ago. Christ was delivered because of our sins, but also, resurrected for our justification. God shows us in the glorious resurrection of his Son, that Christ has paid the debt including the last penny. What do you think? Would God have resurrected his Son from the dead, if there would have been one unredeemed sin? Would God in the resurrection of your Saviour put the crown on his work, if that work was not totally completed?

Your confession here shows in a beautiful way what in this FIRST the deep meaning is of the resurrection of your Saviour. This Lordsday says: He has conquered death, so that He could make us share in the righteousness which He had obtained for us by his death. Congregation, it is not an easy word, that word righteousness that your confession here uses. The catechism pupils sometimes have difficulty with it. Also their teachers as they have to explain this clearly. And yet: there is no better word to express the meaning of the resurrection of your Saviour. There is in that word right that we already met when we spoke about Christ's legal or right status in the state of his humiliation. Everything is now right between God and us, that is what this word is saying. God's justice has no more claim on you. Christ has paid your debt in full. It is even again between God and you, just as even as it was between God and man in paradise. Again if there would have been one more sin to redeem, if there would have been one more unrighteousness not covered and washed away by the blood of Christ, then God would have left Him in the grave. His triumphant resurrection is the proof, the public proof, that Christ has paid for us to the very last cent.

You may see it this way: God took the sixth word on the cross by his Son: that regal "It is finished", and sealed it in his resurrection. God lets that conquerers word sound through the hell and through the whole world. The devil and death: they thought to drag your Saviour into the grave. Now God opens that grave and shows to the eyes of humans, angels and devils, how powerless the devil and death are. Congregation, that is why it also of the most importance to maintain with all your power this fact of sanctification of the resurrection to all sides. God has in Christ's resurrection broken death into pieces, the same as we can brake a board on our knee. For that stands God's church in its confession, also today. There are enough wandering spirits today, who want to tamper with this. They say: we have to unmythologen Easter. That means: that whole Easter affair is only a myth, an old story. They claim that modern man, who turns on the television and oversees the whole world, and who when he is sick, goes to a modern clinic, cannot believe this anymore. That belongs to those old times, when people still believed in the myth of the resurrection of the dead. The Easter story, they said, is born out of the conviction of the apostles that it could not be finished with Christ's death and cross. He continued to live for them in his message of the forgiveness of sins. And that conviction that Christ continued to live in his message, they have made concrete by claiming that he was

resurrected from the dead. Congregation, as if the men and women who were the first witnesses of Christ's resurrection, did not have difficulties with it. They themselves had to be brought to believe in his resurrection by your Saviour. Think about the two from Emmaus. They had received the message of his resurrection, but they had to be brought to believe this message by the resurrected Christ. And hear Thomas: Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe. So much difficulty the first witnesses had with it. It is nonsense to argue that they had it easier than us. Therefore you may and must keep on confessing this fifth article: I believe in Jesus Christ, on the third day risen from the dead. When at home read the fifteenth chapter of the first letter to the Corinthians. In that Paul names a long list of witnesses, to whom the resurrected Saviour appeared. Paul wrote: Then He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. The Corinthians could inquire by asking them. And how central the apostle Paul puts the belief in the resurrection of your Saviour: If Christ had not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. Indeed your Saviour has conquered death. That is the very first your confession brings to the fore. However it does not stay there. There follows one more sentence in which the fruit of Christ's resurrection is proclaimed to you. The horn of plenty, which is locked up in his resurrection, continues here to flow. You confess here: He has conquered death so that he could make us share in the righteousness which he has obtained for us by his death. Before we spoke about that word righteousness. Now the confession shows us what Christ 'does' with this righteousness. That word "so" is worth gold. Christ has done something with that righteousness, which he obtained for us. No, the Saviour did not rise to rest on his laurels. He did not rise to continue his work as before. Someone said: to live in a little street in Jerusalem. He did not rise to continue his work in the villages and cities of Galilee. No, He is risen to share with us the righteousness, to make us a sharer of it. Now He is going to give us the treasures, which He brought along for us out of the depth of death and hell. He is like a general, who has defeated his opponents and now surveys his booty to distribute it. He is going to give us the gold of the forgiveness of sins and the renewing of our lives. See Him being at work in the resurrection stories at the ends of the four gospels. He goes as the Resurrected after his disciples to make them sharers of his righteousness. He asks Peter, who had denied Him three times: Simon, son of John: Do you love me? and so reinstated him in the office of apostle. He brings Thomas to the Easter confession: My Lord and my God. Congregation, He still does this today. You do not have a Saviour only on the paper of your bible. The righteousness, which he obtained for you, does not only exist on paper. He shares this. He is continually busy with this. To again cite that word from Paul: He is resurrected for our justification.

He comes to you with the living proclamation of his resurrection gospel. With that He wants to touch your heart. He shows you in that gospel the treasures which He obtained for you and calls you to believe in Him. Believing in the resurrected Christ is at the same time believing in what He obtained for you.

Lord's Day 23 says: our conscience accuses us that we have grievously sinned against all God's commandments, have never kept any one of them, and are still inclined to all evil. Now the resurrected Saviour proclaims to you: Here I am, Jesus Christ, your Saviour. I know that you are depraved in the root of your life. I know that you daily increase the debt. I atoned for that debt. I will be your advocate before the Father. Do you remember what Paul wrote in Romans 8 verse 34: Who, he asks there, who is to condemn? Paul answers: It is Christ Jesus, who died, and then goes on in the same breath, what more is, let this penetrate in you, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. From the resurrection of your Saviour here flows the horn of plenty of the resurrection gospel.

Now think about what we said in the beginning about man of today, who wants to cut away the ravels of life at the beginning - abortion - and at the end - euthanasia. Modern man can only want this because for him dead is dead. He does not see the shine of the light of Christ's resurrection from the dead. But the church, which proclaims with all its power about the resurrection, knows that Christ has conquered death. In that it sees the early beginning of life and it includes the sometimes difficult end in that victory. Because of that it fights for life at the beginning as well as for the end. Does the beginning of life have to be cut away from the proclamation of this gospel, of this good tidings? And does this gospel not give the strength to finish the very last and sometimes so difficult dying, in the power of the risen Christ as our only comfort?

2. A horn of plenty: first through Christ's resurrection our debt has been reconciled. But also the second: through Christ's resurrection we are raised up to a new life. Congregation, there is a fine wordplay about Christ's resurrection in that word "raised". With this, Lord's Day 17 puts Christ very central in your life. You confess here: we are by his power, that is through the resurrection power of your Saviour, raised to a new life. And to prevent all misunderstandings as if the Catechism here means the resurrection of the dead on the last day, the new "Churchbook" added the words "now already" We too are raised "now already" to a new life. Christ is risen: that is one. You are raised "now already" by Him to a new life. That is two. Congregation, pay close attention. it does not say; you have been raised by his power to a new life. No, it says: you are raised. That is the present tense. There flows action from your resurrected Lord in heaven. There are Christians who do not think it is necessary to lay such a strong accent on that "are" raised. They are raised in Christ, they say and with that you are there. With this Lord's Day they work so easily with the row: justification, sanctification and glorification. By itself there

is no objection about this row, but not if you think that there will not be anymore struggles. Just that expression that we will be raised by Christ's power to a new life shows us, that here is a mention of a continual battle. No less than the power of your risen Saviour is needed to keep you upright in that battle. Does not our old nature sometimes bestir itself from time to time? We have already struggled against a character sin for so long. We have really put a lot of effort into this, and still, so often we are weak, we suffer a defeat.

Don't underestimate the power of the old nature in your life. Even Paul found this rule in himself: I want to do right, evil lies close at hand; for I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind. Wretched man that I am. Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord, that is to say: through our resurrected Saviour, who with his power Paul and God's children are able to stand up in this battle. (Romans 7:21)

Your confession also points to Romans 6 verse 4 where the apostle speaks about the same struggle. He says there: We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in the newness of life. What lays this reference a comforting tie between your struggle in life and the power of Christ in our baptism. It is about the baptism by immersing, as it was done in Paul's time. We are, when we were immersed in the water of baptism, buried with Christ in his death. We got up out of that baptism water to a new life. The resurrected Saviour works powerfully in your life, congregation. He breaks the power of your old nature in your life. You may time and again experience this power. A child that does not have a big lip to his mother, A businessman who is honest in his dealings with others. An officebearer who in a conversation with churchmembers keeps down his aggressiveness. A man and a woman in a ruined marriage, who reconciled. Again and again we experience that the resurrected Saviour takes us by the hand pulls us up and keeps us going in the struggle. The poet of Psalm 119 was ahead in the prayer: make me alive according to thy Word.

You may pray for resurrected new life in Christ. That is also valid in our churchlife. Those two; our spiritual life and our churchlife are very close. What do you think? Would a powerful and resurrected life out of the power of Christ's resurrection not work through in our churchlife? We sometimes are full of criticism on what happens in the church. Sometimes you meet some sourpuss faces in the church. Critics sometimes ruin so much in the church. But over against this; when you through Christ's power as a resurrected live in the deepest meaning of the word, this also works through in your association with your brothers and sisters. It also works through in the association of officebearers and churchmembers. What is this a reason for thankfulness when Christ will work among us a resurrected church life. And you shall see it; in turn it works through in society. From Christ's congregation goes a great

power for renewing and restoration on all of society.
Think about what we said about the beginning and the end of life.

3. And yet, congregation, the horn of plenty was not emptied by Christ's resurrection. Your confession comes with the third point: it says, Christ's resurrection is to us a sure pledge of our glorious resurrection. You have to remember what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15 verse 20. Looking back on his fiery defence of the resurrection of his Lord he writes there: but in fact, do you hear the coercive conclusion in these words?— but in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. This is an image taken by Paul from the old testament worship services. When an Israelite had reaped the first fruit of his crop, he brought a sheaf of it to the priest, who moved this first sheaf before the face of God. It was a pledge of the whole crop, which was to follow.

Well now Christ became the First Fruits of them who are asleep. God the Lord moves this First Fruit over the field of the world. That field in which so many dead are waiting for coming of your Saviour in glory. He, Christ, the First Fruit, He is the pledge, that once all those who are in Christ, will be raised from the cemetery of the world.

One more point: Christ's resurrection, says your confession, is a pledge, a guarantee of "our" resurrection in glory. Your confession in this Lordsday continually speaks about of "we" and of "ours". The horn of plenty streams empty for all who confess with the old christian church: I believe in Jesus Christ, who on the third day arose from the dead. I believe, we believe: for us Christ's resurrection is full of glorious promises. We may see life from its first beginning to the sometimes difficult end in his light. Let that faith live in your hearts. Let this "we" and "our" hold good for "you". Do not stand outside of this through unbelief. Live out of Christ, your resurrected Lord. Stand up and fight in this only comfort. With this stands or falls your resurrection in glory. Praised be Jesus Christ, your resurrected Saviour.

Amen.

Jesus lives, and we with Him:
death, where is now your terror?
Jesus lives, and His voice
calls us again to life,
will cloth us with honour:
this is our only comfort.

Ahasverus van de Berg (1733–1807)

V P

Page 6
L.D 16
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into
unseparable

Lordsday 18

For our good.

Sermon by the late
Dr. R. H. Bremmer,
Enschede,
The Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton, Alberta.

Reading
Text I
Psalm
After
After
Hymn
Psalm
Hymn:

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The painter Wilbrink once made a very moving painting of the wellknown pillar saint Simeon Stylites. That name Stylites shows exactly who this Simeon was. He lived around 400 after Christ in the neighbourhood of Antioch a life on top of a pole. He was a "pole sitter" but in a different manner than the foolishness of today's pole sitters. He went to live on top of a pole to withdraw himself from this evil world. Because of that soon he became for the people of that time a call to holiness. From that pole he spoke to them and wrote them messages. For years he led this life. Wilbrink personated him for us, on top of that pillar. On the background of this man on the pillar he painted a city going up in flames. But this did not move Simeon. He had withdrawn himself from this evil world. In quietly worshipping God, the hands folded, he sat on his pillar, far from the turmoil of the world.

Do we as christians have to lead our lives like that in this world? Do we have to, as so many christians did, withdraw ourselves from this world? With a little book in a little corner, as the people of the middle ages used to say. Is that the message of the ascension of our Saviour? Down here it is not? Only heaven is important?

Congregation, this is not the way it is. Your confession shows you in this eighteenth Lordsday that Christ ascended to heaven for us, who live on earth, to be there for our benefit. Not to call us to withdraw from life on this earth, Certainly not. No, but so that we should fulfill our calling on this earth under an opened heaven. That is the greatness of this confession. From the gospel of the ascension into the heaven ascended Christ a powerful encouragement emanates to us. Our confession: I believe in Christ's ascension to heaven, is a part of our only comfort. Not for nothing does your confession ask in question 49 ;" What is the benefit of the ascension of Christ? What do you do with it in every day life? About that we think today as we speak to you over:

OUR COMFORT IN THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST

We discover this comfort in;

1. The fact of the ascension,
2. the promise given by it,
3. the calling that flows out of Christ's ascension.

Congregation, there is something amazing friendly in the gospel of the ascension of our Saviour. Compare it with the other salvation facts. The Christmas gospel confronts you with the great antithesis between the the glory of heaven which shone over the angels with their message "Glory to God" and the grievous poverty of the Child in the manger.

Easter makes a great impression on us because of the majestic revelation of Christ's resurrection. Angels descend in lightning light and rolled the stone from the grave of your Saviour. The earth trembled and the guard ran away. The ascension story in contrast is full of friendliness. The Saviour walked with his disciples from Jerusalem to Bethany, to the Mount of Olives. Together they were talking about the coming of the kingdom. Lord, asked the disciples, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? The Lord answers, it is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. And suddenly, while He was speaking with them He was lifted up, says Luke in Acts 1 verse 9, while they were looking on. What a tremendous moment this must have been for the disciples. Luke also says, that a cloud took him out of their sight. In his gospel he says something more. There it reads: He lifted up his hands and blessed them. (Luke 24: 50) And while He blessed them, He parted from them.

What an impression those blessing hands must have made on the disciples. For the last time He showed them those hands, which were drilled through on the cross and still showed the scars. Streams of blessings flowed from these hands over the apostles. Then a cloud took Him out of their sight. He was taken up into the house of the Father. There is nothing of the force of the majestic revelation in the ascension gospel. Only friendliness and loveliness.

On two points in this gospel your confession is very emphatic and brings them to the fore. Our Saviour "was taken up" from the earth to heaven, says answer 46, "before the eyes of the disciples". In the first place here is the action by the Father. He lifted up the Saviour. In a manner of speaking He took Him home. And in the second place: it happened before the eyes of the disciples. Luke writes: as they were looking on. Here the church of God has nothing to do with a fable in the ascension gospel. No, there were eyewitnesses, who informed the church of all ages about its truthfulness. The Catechism sets great value to this. The disciples did not imagine it. You can check it, answer 46 wants to say. It is the gospels of Mark and Luke and in the Acts. There were reliable witnesses.

Congregation, in our time it is of great importance to pay attention to this. Nowadays even as the resurrection gospel

so also is the ascension gospel being contested. There are many theologians who content that this gospel is not acceptable to the people of today. His world picture does not know heaven or hell. It only counts on things which you can observe scientifically. Also the gospel of the ascension of the Saviour has to be unmythologized. That is to say: it should be in this mythologic story only about the message that God is close to us in Christ. But that Christ really ascended into heaven? Imagine. That is an obsolescent fable. You don't have to try to sell this to today's people.

What is it beneficial, congregation, that your confession over against this totally objectionable notion takes a strong position. Only by putting the emphasis on that God took our Saviour up into heaven " before the eyes of his disciples". The bible speaks unconcerned about the heaven and the earth. It does this already in the first words of the beginning of the Scriptures. In the beginning God created heaven and earth. In those beginning words Scripture shows you already the oneness of heaven and earth. Heaven: the dwelling place of God and his holy angels. Earth: the dwelling place of men. Between the two there is definitely no antithesis. If Adam and Eve would have remained faithful, then the distance between these two, the dwelling place of God and the dwelling place of men, also would have been abolished once and for all. That is the great significance of the doctrine of the work covenant also for the ascension gospel of our Saviour. Adam fell, but Christ in all his temptations remained faithful and now the Father gives to Him what was promised to men in the beginning.

Your Saviour with his ascension did not go to a strange world, to a world in a sharp contrast to ours. No, the Father took Him up to his dwelling place till heaven and earth will become united. On the last part your confession in answer 46 also fixes your attention. The answer says: That Christ was taken up from the earth into heaven till He comes again to judge the living and the dead. His ascension is not the last thing. God was with the ascension of Christ on the way to the uniting of heaven and earth on the last day. Both heaven and earth are God's creation and are inter connected. Here the end of the bible reaches back to the beginning. John sees in Revelations 21 the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. Where is heaven? Congregation, we do not know. But it is there, somewhere, in the great creation of God.

What had it to be a great moment for your Saviour, when He, with honour, ascended to heaven. About this the Scriptures of the Old Testament had spoken. The ascension gospel does not only lean on what the gospels and the Acts report to us. It is rooted deep in the Old Testament. This speaks to us already of God's kingship in Christ. It ties that to the going up of the ark from the tabernacle to Jerusalem in the time of king David. In the Scriptures the ark is the symbol of the throne of God. When the ark was carried up the temple mount, the psalmists see in that the prophesy of the ascension of the Messiah to his throne in heaven. Psalm 47 sings:

God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises. For God is the king of all the earth. And then hear Psalm 68 sing about this:

God's chariots are twice times ten thousand, thousands upon thousands, Thou did ascend the high mount; leading captives in thy train; Thou hast received gifts among men. That is how the psalmists already sang of the regal glory of the Saviour in his ascension to the high. And now He ascends to heaven, to his royal palace, now that He has finished everything. Thirty-three years He has been on this earth, the from flesh becoming Word of God. It was a totally different world than the one the first man had lived on in paradise.

Thirty-three years He had lived on this by sin polluted earth. He had worked among people who hated Him and who nailed Him on the cross and on this earth of God brought Him to death. Now the Father took Him up to the pure and clean sphere of heaven. There is no sin or death, no lamentations or mourning, there God lives in his shining and unapproachable light. There are the holy angels who surround God's throne and sing of his glory. There are all the saints who God already called into his glory. Into that the Saviour entered. What have the angels cheered when the Son of God, who also was human, entered. I think that they took their cithers and played a song of joy and sang to the honour of the Lamb that was slaughtered and came alive again and now took the place of honour on the right hand of the Father.

Yes, those holy angels also with the ascension of your Saviour come into action. When the disciples in amazement gazed at the heavens, when your Saviour was taken up suddenly two men in white clothes, two angels, stood by them and said: Men of Galilee why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way, as you saw Him go into heaven. Immediately with his ascension is already the promise of his return.

So your Saviour returned to heaven after He had completed his work here on earth. He came back different as when He left heaven thirty-three years ago. Then He went to the earth as the Son of God, the second Person of the godly Being. Now He returned as the flesh becoming Word. God and men at the same time.

It is of significance to pay attention to this. Here we touch a point that in the age of the reformation that drove the reformers and lutherans apart and still separates them. Your confession has seen a motive in this, in the questions and answers 47 and 48 to be strongly opposed against the lutheran vision about the ascension. We know it, these two questions and answers of Lordsday 18 don't say much to us today. We are not speaking to lutherans on a daily basis. Yet they help us to see clearly the significance of this salvation fact of the ascension. The questions and answers 47 and 48 touch the point if our Saviour ascended to heaven "as a human being". Luther thought: when Christ ascended to heaven He ceased being a "human". Christ would have taken off his human nature at his ascension and would only be God again. So also became omnipresent. Luther came to this thought in relation to his Lord Supper

doctrine. He insisted over against the reformers that our Saviour at the celebration of the Lord's Supper went into the bread and wine. And that of course is only possible if Christ was omnipresent. Calvin and the reformers strongly objected to this. Christ ascended to heaven as "a human being". In his after the resurrection glorified human nature, but still in that "human" nature.

You see the Catechism take a strong position in question and answer 47 over against the lutheran view when being asked: Is Christ, then, not with us until the end of the world, as He has promised us? In that question you can hear the words of the Saviour which he spoke shortly before his going: See, I am with you always, to the close of the age. Matthew 28:20 See, says Luther, there it is. Christ is still after his ascension always with us and that is only possible if He is omnipresent? Very nicely the writers of the catechism answered: Christ is true man and true God. And then follow the resolute words: With respect to his human nature He is no longer on earth, but with respect to His divinity, majesty, grace and Spirit He is never absent from us. Your confession here says: it come to sharply distinguishing. There is no way that the Saviour is not in heaven in his human nature. He "is" there. And at the same time He encourages and comforts us here on earth by his divinity, majesty, grace and Spirit to work among us and to reveal Himself to us. That does not mean, continues answer 48, that we by confessing Christ has two natures: his godly and human nature, His really being God and His really being human, play against each other. Certainly not: the both natures stay united in Him "personally". In heaven He is at the same time God and glorified human. Congregation, you may think is it really necessary to put this all so extensively and sharply? Perhaps some may think: is this not an old matter? That is not so. For, says the confession, just because Christ "as human", in his glorified human nature, is in heaven, He is there, in heaven, for our benefit.

What can some words in the catechism have a deep content. In those few words, that Christ is in heaven for our benefit lies the treasure of the ascension gospel. And your confession in answer 49 picks up the thread again with that benefit of our Saviour in heaven, by again saying, that He is our Advocate in heaven before the Father. You could also say it like this: because Christ is in heaven in human nature, through that the gospel of the forgiveness of sins becomes visible and tangible for us.

It can also be said like; Now Christ is in heaven as our Advocate now the devil, satan is out of there forever. That may sound strange but that is the truth. Scripture shows us that under the old covenant the devil, still had free access to heaven. Think about the story of Job. The devil got the opportunity to accuse Job before God. Does Job fear God for nought? But put forth thy hand and he will curse Thee before thy face. Job 1:9-11. Then God gave the devil a free hand to touch Job in his possessions. Congregation, think about the prophesy of Zechariah Satan gets the opportunity to accuse the high priest Joshua

and point to his dirty clothes, symbol of the sinfulness of God's people. (Zechariah 3:1)

Congregation, that is after the ascension of your Saviour no more. Finished. Christ already saw this during his walk about on earth.

He said in Luke 10 verse 18 to his disciples: I saw Satan fall from heaven as lightning. In that your Saviour saw what a tremendous meaning his ascension was going to have. For now He has paid our debt to the last cent on Golgotha and has atoned for our sins by his bloodshed, now once and for all it is over with those accusations of the devil. John has put this into words in his Revelations: for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. (Revelations 12: 10, 11)

Is this not glorious congregation? Perhaps sometimes you doubt if you are a child of God. How can I exist before God with all my sins and unrighteousnesses? We can, in connection with this and the guilt of our lives, sometimes have a tremendous fear of death. Congregation, now, we proclaim to you the friendly gospel of the ascension of our Saviour. Forever the devil has been thrown out of heaven. He simply does not get an opportunity to accuse you anymore. Your Saviour stands as true man, who as our Guarantor has paid for our trespasses on the cross. He will take up your cause. He is there for your "good". He is there your Advocate. He says: Father, I want, that where I am also those be, whom Thou has given Me. So you may live under an open heaven. Your Saviour has opened the way for you to the heart of God. Just his dwelling there is a pledge for you that you shall come where He is.

2. Yes, not only about the comfort which lies there in the ascension of your Saviour, speaks this Lordsday 18. It also puts in front of us the promise contained in it. Because of that pay attention that "second" of answer 49: Second, it says, we have our flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that He, our Head, will also take us, His members, up to Himself. Your confession here uses an image to make clear to us, the promise which lies in the ascension of Christ. He is as "our flesh" there for us as a pledge. You know what a pledge is. Pledges are exchanged between lovers. I think here about an engagement or wedding ring. These are given by two lovers to each other as a pledge of their trust and of their love. Even if one, for business or for military service, has to go to other side of the world, that wedding ring is a sure pledge that the other will be true to him and that the other will be true to her. Such a pledge you can see and touch. It makes all doubts disappear. So now you have, in your to heaven ascended Saviour a pledge that you will come, where He is. Do you now understand why the reformers contributed so much value to: that Christ went to heaven as a real human being? So as He is as a human being with the Father, so shall you and I, all who believe in Him, also come, where He is. The gospel speaks about this in John 14, when your Saviour says: Let not your heart be troubled.

Now there were a lot of reasons for this. He just told them about the betrayal by Judas and of Peter's denial. But still: Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in Me. And then follow those unspeakable tender words of your Saviour: In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. But it is so, it is as firm as a rock. There above is "one home", the house of the Father. Think about a senior citizen home. That is "one" building, but there are many homes in that one building. There is room for many. The gospel of Christ is not narrowminded, it is ample, it is generous. There is ample space for many. And then hear the motive of the Saviour, the reason why He speaks of the house of the Father with its many rooms. If, says Jesus and in that "if" lies the motive of his speaking about the house of the Father, I go to prepare a place for you. What does He proclaim a glorious promise to us which lies locked up in his ascension. He has for you and me prepared a place. Your place has been reserved. And when you somewhere have a reserved seat, you will sit there, that is certain. He has prepared that place with his precious blood. And then follows: And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also. His presence in heaven is for us the pledge, that no power of the world, death nor devil, can rob us of that place, It has been reserved for us.

Congregation, the Catechism here also points to John 17 verse 24 and also upon this we draw your attention. Christ says there: Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou has given Me, may be with Me where I am, to behold my glory, which Thou has given Me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world. Your Saviour says: Father I desire. What lies an unbelievable strong power in that word; I desire. It is the will of Him, our Guarantor, our Advocate. Who will take on this graceful and holy will? Who will stop this work? He will take "His" home. If they now die old and sated with life or in the prime of their life, or as children: He takes them home. And his stay there in heaven as our flesh, in our human nature, is the pledge for that. What does the confession here comfort you with the promise which is given to us in the ascension of our Saviour.

3. And now we get to the last point. There is not only a promise in the ascension of our Saviour. The comfort which is determined in it, lays also a calling on us. That lies in that "Third" that answer 49 gives with it. Read it over: thirdly He sends us his Spirit as a counter pledge; by whose power we seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God, and not the things which are on earth. What is your confession here in stride with that: First, second and third in answer 49. What is there much to say about the comfort of Christ's ascension. That also shows here. For again this answer uses the image of a pledge. But now in a reverse sense as earlier. In that "second" your confession spoke of Christ's being in heaven as a pledge for us, that we also shall come there. Now it turns it around. Now it says to us, that He from above sends us his Spirit as a counter pledge.

We have in Jesus being above, our pledge. Now He gives us from his side also a pledge in his Spirit, in the Comforter itself. Pledges are exchanged. The man gives his pledge to his wife. now in turn she gives a pledge to her husband. Pledge and counter pledge belong together. And now as He in heaven is our pledge, He in turn gives us from above his Spirit as a counter pledge. He Himself had spoken about this in John 16 verse 7 Christ says there: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He did send that Counselor. On Pentacost. He poured out his Spirit over all flesh. And now aims that Counselor, the Holy Spirit, our hearts to Him who is above. Answer 49 nearly copies what Paul writes in Colossians 3 verse 1: If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things which are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things which are above, not on things which are on earth.

Does this apostle of Christ call you to avoid the world, congregation? Some have tried to seek this in these words. Once again I think about Simeon Stylitus of the beginning of this sermon, that pillar saint. Do we as congregation of Jesus Christ have to avoid the things of this world? Certainly not. The seeking of the things which are above, is to direct your life to the ascended Christ in heaven. The Spirit of Him who entered heaven, directs our hearts to Him above so that we here on earth fullfill our calling. Your Saviour Himself has said this when He was close to ascend to heaven. He then said to his disciples: But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all of Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. And what have the Acts of the apostles shown to us how these apostles as witnesses of Christ have fullfilled their calling in the world of that time, including Rome. Congregation, seek the things which are above in the fullfilling of your task here down on this earth. Live and work under an open heaven. In that seek the purpose of your life on earth. Seeking the things which are from above is not to turn your back to the world. Professor Holwerda wrote once: The church sometimes looks like an army that in a closed line marches backwards. Let that not be said about you. I think about what Peter said in his Pentacost speech right after the ascension: and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Get to work in Christ's power. So we proclaimed also in this Lordsday the only comfort in life and death. In the fact: Christ is our Advocate for our good in heaven. In the promise: I go to prepare a place for you and in the calling: Seek the things which are above. What a friendly but at the same time an activating gospel, this glad tiding of the ascension of your Saviour. Congregation: Sursum Corda, Raise your hearts aloft.

Amen.

Lordsday 19

What is the use of it all for me?

Sermon by the late
Dr. R.H. Bremmer,
Enschede,
The Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton,
Alberta.

Reading: Psalm 118.
Text: Lordsday 19
Psalm 2: 1,2.
After the law Psalm 5: 4
After the creed Psalm 48: 5
Psalm 110: 1,2,4,6.
Hymn 2: 4
Psalm 98: 2,4.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

What is the use of it all or I do not see it anymore, you can hear today's young people say. They mean with this; it is such a chaotic world today, there is so much misery in this world we do not see any purpose in our lives. There is no more perspective.

Why do we live? You could also formulate this question like this: What purpose has history exactly? Does it have a purpose? Does a stone hard fate sometimes reign all things? The old Indians used for history the image of a Djaggemaut cart. This is a huge cart, which pulled by elephants, rolling over people and crushing everything in its path. Then history does not have any meaning. Pure fate reigns over everything. Do we have to see history this way?

Congregation, you confess in this Lordsday 19 your faith in Jesus Christ, who sits at the right hand of God, the Almighty Father. And also: He will come to judge the living and the dead. Fate does not govern history. It is also not pure chaos. Christ keeps the reins of world government in his hands. Him is given all the power in heaven and on earth. He leads history to its great objective: his return on the clouds of heaven to give all his and our enemies over to the eternal destruction. But at the same time to take us with all the elect up into the heavenly joy and glory. Is that not special? If you believe in Him, who sits at God's right hand and governs all things, then you cannot say: what is the use of it all for me. He is with us, and with the whole world, on the way to the eternal glory. About that we will think today when we speak over

THE GLORY OF OUR HEAD CHRIST COMES APPEARS IN:

1. God governs all things;
2. His glory has great value for us
3. He leads history to its close.

1. Question 50 is sharply formulated. The pupil asks: Why is it added, And sits at the right hand of God? That is a pointed question. The pupil means: in the previous Lordsday we have confessed that Christ ascended into heaven.

Was that not sufficient? Does something have to be added to this? Why have the first christians in their confession "added" this sentence about Christ's sitting at God's right hand? Because there lies the origin of our apostle's creed and so also of this sentence: at the baptismal font of the old christian church. There men and women who let themselves be baptized, confessed their original christian faith. They have immediately added that sitting at God's right hand. We have found it already in the oldest formulations of the 12 articles.

Why? Well, congregation, because they were fascinated by Psalm 110. There David says: The Lord says to my Lord: Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool. So David showed prophetically the glory of the coming Messiah. He also did this in verse 4 of this Psalm: The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. That is how David saw the coming Messiah: God gives the place of honour at his right hand and lays his enemies as a footstool for his feet. Is that a speaking image? All the enemies of the Messiah are swept up together on a pile. And on that the Messiah regally and triumphantly puts his feet. Pictures have been saved from the old eastern history, that were on the walls of Egyptian and Babylonian palaces, on which you see a king, who puts his foot on the neck of defeated kings. They lie on the ground before him. So the Messiah sets his foot on the neck of his enemies. Our Saviour Himself cited this Psalm when He stood before the high priest Kajafas and he asks of Him if He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Your Saviour answered: But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven. (Matthew 26:64) As a red thread runs this Psalm 110 through the whole New Testament. Mark finishes his gospel with it by writing that the Lord Jesus was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. (Mark 16:64) Congregation think also about Romans 8 where Paul writes that Christ is the resurrected one, who is at "the right hand of God", who indeed intercedes for us. And in Ephesians 1 verse 20 the apostle speaks of the Gods great power, which He accomplished in Christ and made Him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places. The confession of your Saviour's sitting at the right hand of God has an effect on our christian faith.

Of course: Scripture uses in all these places a likeness, a speaking likeness. The seat at the right hand of the king is a place of honour. The crown prince or someone honoured by the king will sit there. You will find a beautiful example of this 1 Kings 2. There Bathsheba, the queen mother, asks for an audience by king Solomon. She will speak to him about the conspiracy of his brother Adonijah. When she come to the king, he had a seat brought for her and , says 1 King 2 verse 19: and she sat on his right.

No, for those first christians it was not enough to confess that your Saviour ascended to heaven. They also knew Him to sit at God's right hand in glory. That must have been a mighty moment for your Saviour when He sat Himself at the right hand of the Father in glory.

Here on earth He did not have a place to put his head. Here He walked around as the humiliated Son of man. Here He even had hung on the cross. He was laid in the grave, the greatest humiliation. Then on Easter morning the Father raised Him from the dead and with his ascension took Him up into heaven. And there He sat Himself in glory at the right hand of God. And with a fine touch that old christian church added: of God the Father almighty. So they had already confessed the Lord God in that first article, where they said: I believe in God the Father the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. Now, then Christ has set Himself glorious and triumphant at the right hand of that Almighty God and Father.

There is also a dynamic force in that word "and sits", congregation. It expresses that He from there exersizes his kingship over heaven and earth in the rest of his victory. Your confession expresses this also in its explanation of those words. He proves there, it says, that He is the Head of His Church, through whom the Father governs all things.

How great is here the glory of your Saviour. Through Him the Father governs all things. He is the centre in God's world government. Psalm 110 does not proclaim Him for nought as the our Priest-King. The psalm says, He is a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Who was the king of Salem. Abraham gave him the tithe of the booty, which he took from the kings of the East. At the same time he was priest of the God most High. Now, so your Saviour is Priest-King. He has acquired the sitting at God's right hand, the governing of all things, by giving Himself into death for them, which are His.

Also the prophet Zechariah shows so beautifully to us that glory of our priest-king Jesus Christ in Zechariah 6. The prophet has to make a crown of silver and gold and place this on the head of the high priest Joshua as an image of the glory of the coming priest-king. (Zechariah 6: 11) Now God governs all things through Him, Jesus Christ. God sees through his eyes. God hears through his ears. God speaks through his mouth. God governs through Him. God has given Him all authority in heaven and earth. (Matthew 28: 18)

Yes certainly, the Son of man, the "man" Jesus Christ, went to heaven a "man", we saw this in the previous Lordsday. Now God the Lord governs through this glorified Son of man all things in this world. You may see Him, his crowned head, his royal glory, above all the newsreaders on radio and television, above all what the newspapers report to us about chaos and terrorism in this world. No stone hard fate governs this world. No chaos makes it disappear into nothing. You do not see the use of it all for you? Look than up to Jesus in glory at God's right hand. We know it: what we see and experience every day in this world often contradicts this. It seems unbelievable, that there is a God's plan with this world and that Christ will execute thatplan. And yet so it is. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews

has written about this glory of Christ contrary all things we can see: As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to Him. But we see Jesus, crowned with glory and honour.

(Hebrews 2: 8,9). No, history is not a quiet small creek. The waves of violence and chaos, of terror and war, sometimes can go very high. That you can see today. The twentieth century is full of wars and rumors of wars. And still Jesus Christ has all the world happenings in his hand. Congregation, you may think here about what John saw at the opening of the book of God's ordinances in Revelations 5 and 6. He, Jesus Christ, the Lamb that stood before God's throne as slain, took the book of the history from God's hand. He only is worthy to open the seven seals. He does this, the one seal after the other. You then can see come into the open: the horses of the judgment-day. In front the white horse of the victory. Christ Himself goes in front. After Him follow the red horse of war, the black of hunger, the pale horse of death, one by one. God governs through the Lamb the disasters and horrors in the history of men. God is not outside this history. He leads it through Christ to its end. You certainly may have use for it all, under this Christ government.

Congregation, now pay your attention to how your confession describes this Christ government. Answer 50 says, God reigns over all things, by Christ as the Head of His Church. Just that sitting at the right hand of God shows Him to us as our Head of the church. Is He not King-Priest? Did He not buy you with his precious blood? Did He not as priest go into death for you? Because of that He now governs all things with an eye on his congregation. Now He works out royally in his world government what He as priest has obtained for you. He wants to have the gathering of his holy catholic christian church through all the ages. There is in that emphasis, which answer 50 puts on Christ being the Head of his christian church a piece of controversy against the roman catholic church. That has an earthly head, the pope, the so called successor of Peter, He does speak a lot, that earthly head of the roman catholic church, pope John Paul the second. He travels over the whole world for it. Congregation, you do not have an earthly church head. Your Head is in heaven, in the throne of God. From that headquarters He governs all things for the sake of his through blood bought church. The men who drew up the Catechism and the church at that time, assailed in persecution and oppression, found great comfort in this. You also may find this in these times. What is the description of Christ as "our Head" a speaking image. Certainly, your Saviour is also the king of his church, But your confession here uses the word Head. In that lies the tie which there is between Him and us as his body. The Head is already 'above' congregation. When a man falls overboard and seems to sink in the waves, but if his head is pulled above the water, then the waves may hit him as hard as they can. The head is already rescued. The body follows the head. Let the waves of today hit against the by God bought church, your Head is above. Your head is in glory. No power or devil can tear you away from Him. He brings his christian church to safety.

2. With that we also have come to the second question and answer

of this Lordsday 19. Your confession now asks in question 51 what is the benefit of this glory of Christ, our Head?

What are you going to do with it, the question wants to say.

How is that confessing of Christ's sitting at God's right hand now in the centre of your life of today? The answer to that question is twofold. It is a rich answer. Two trains of thought bring it to the front. It says, in the first place; by his Holy Spirit He pours out heavenly gifts, upon us, his members. in the second place: by His power He defends and preserves us against all enemies. Beautiful, that question about the benefit of Christ's world government is no less wonderful then the answer. It says, it pours out the heavenly gifts upon us.

Congregation, do not belittle the treasure of gifts which the Saviour has ready for you. That word pouring speaks here of abundance. His heavenly gifts pour over you as congregation.

Psalm 23 speaks about this: Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows. Is this not a beautiful image of the abundance of gifts, which are there for you in Christ? Does not the Pentacost speak about the outpouring by Christ of his Pentacost gifts? You know the Pentacost prophesy of Isaiah in chapter 44: For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your descendants.

This prophesy sounds through in this answer. Do you have an eye for these promises of God? You wonder: what is the use of it all for me? Sometimes christians see no solutions, closing their eyes for the abundance of Spiritgifts with Christ.

The apostle Paul speaks in his letters about charisma, the gifts, which Christ gives to his congregation. He names a whole row of them: gifts of healing, to help, to govern and different tongues. Some of these gifts the risen Christ gave especially in the beginning for the foundation of his church. There are also gifts today.

Do we have to leave, the charisma, the gifts of the Spirit, to the Pentacostals? Not so. Ursinus, one of the makers of the Catechism, set them in his Treasure book, in which he explains the Catechism, in a row: intercession of the believers, gathering of Christ's church, preaching the gospel. Do not think small of the gifts which Christ gives to his congregation. He does not mete them out. He is not scanty with them. Congregation, you have a Saviour at God's right hand, who pours his heavenlygifts in us. Heavenly gifts: they find their origin in Him, in heaven. Paul says it this way: But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. (Ephesians 4:7)

There is so much to do in Christ's congregation: to be an elder or a deacon, study societies, visiting the sick. For that Christ pours out his gifts over us. It is like a shower: you have to stand under it.

Answer 51 continues: in the second place, the sitting of Christ at God's right hand means: that He by His power defends and preserves us against all enemies. You have to read this against the background of the time when the Catechism was written. God's church was threatened from all sides.

The Inquisition gave thousands to the government to be be put

to death. The power of Spain and of its king Philip the Second turned against the reformed protestantism. In those circumstances our forefathers clamped themselves to this promise: Christ defends and preserves his church against all enemies. Is Scripture not full of this? Did God not, because of the coming Christ, take care of his church in the ark of Noah? Did not the Israelites go safely through the walls of water of the Red Sea? Those Egyptians whom you see today, you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you only have to be still, said Moses to Israel. So the Lord preserves and defends his church through all the ages. Think about the first christians. The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church. The ceasars could not defeat God's church. Christ preserves his church, so hell may rage freely. What has become of the men in power of this world, Napoleon, Hitler? Sitting at the right hand of God, Christ will protect his church.

So here you confess the Christ government from his ascension till his return. Therefore as reformed people we totally reject a doctrine of the thousand year kingdom. The chiliasts, the followers of this doctrine, teach wrongly that there will be a Christ government before the last definitive return of your Saviour. They take this from Revelations 20 where John saw an angel tying Satan for a thousand years and saw him being thrown into a pit. They enjoin to that the return of Israel to the holy land and the re-establishment of the temple. In that peace kingdom the faithful would govern the world for a thousand years. It is a dream image, which time and again has dragged along christianity. Also today you hear this thought being propagated in the media. Do not let yourselves be conceived congregation. Indeed, Satan is bound. That means: Christ governs the world and preserves and defends his congregation. He lets this being seen by John and his congregation in that eloquent evidence of the binding of the devil and it being thrown into the pit. You may see it like this: Satan still has a certain latitude in this time between ascension and return. Not him, but your Saviour has all the power in heaven and on earth. Presently, at the return of your Saviour, satan will be thrown for eternity in the pool which burns of fire and sulpher.

3. Once more: history is not a stonehard fate that as Djaggemaut cart that crushing, travels over this earth. It is not abandoned to chaos and decomposition. You may see the use of it all, that shows your confession in question and answer 52. Christ works from heaven towards the end of history. No power on earth can halt the Christ government. You do not have to be scared for this magnificent ending. Look at question 52. There the Catechism comes to you with the question: What comfort is it to you that Christ will come to judge the living and the dead? Your confession places with this, the seventh article about the return of your Saviour, in the light of the only comfort in Lordsday 1. It " from there He will come to judge the living and the dead " should not scare you. On the contrary: it is full of comfort. With that powerful accent on the comfort of Christ's return

your confession fights against the representation of Christ's return in the church of the middle ages. It saw the return of your Saviour as a matter of fear and anxiety. Dies irae, day of wrath, the church of the middle ages named that day. It showed the last day in the most horrible pictures. There lived among the church people a great fear for the return of our Saviour. Answer 52 puts over against this, that in Christ's return on the clouds of heaven, there for the believers is a great comfort. Again the time is reflected in which the confession was written, in the first words of the answer: that in all my sorrow and persecution I lift up my head and eagerly await a Judge from heaven the very same person who before has submitted Himself to the judgment of God for my sake and has removed all the curse from me. Words full of comfort, congregation. With my head up I may look forward to my Saviour. I do not have to, I may not be scared for this. Certainly, He comes as Judge. But as a Judge that first has taken away the curse from me. He went and stood before God's judgment seat in my place in his bitter suffering and death. You are as an acquitted and redeemed congregation awaiting the coming of your Saviour.

Will he come unexpected? Certainly. Of that day or hour no one knows, says Christ Himself, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. No men can predict the day of Christ's return. And yet Christ's congregation does not have to meet the return unprepared. In the same chapter of Matthew 24 which we cited, your Saviour also says: from the figtree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. Your Saviour adds: You know that he is near, at the very gates. Once comes the great summer. But that day and hour remain hidden. There are signs: wars and rumors of wars; most men's love will grow cold. Christ makes through those signs history ripe for the end. False prophets will rise up and they shall do signs and wonders.

Congregation are you looking forward to the coming of your Saviour? Do you live for this? The congregation of Christ, if all is well, is an eschatologic living congregation. That means to say; a congregation living towards the eschata, the last things. You also may think about the parable of the wise and foolish girls. The last did not have oil in their lamps. For them it was about the party, the wedding party, but not about the bridegroom himself. How shall we meet Him? Is it risky for you to see Him on the clouds out of heaven? You cannot escape from that coming, certainly not. John says in Revelations 1 verse 7: See, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, also them, who have pierced Him.

Indeed, his coming shall be surprising and totally unexpected. He also shows you in Luke 17 how his coming will be sorting and judging. Two will be in the field, one will be taken and the other one left; two women will be grinding together; one will be taken and the other one left. Watch then, your Saviour says, for you do not know on which day your Saviour will come. So we come to the last part. In a beautiful and at the same

time an emotional perspective, your confession shows you the return of your Saviour. At his return He will cast all His and my enemies into everlasting condemnation, but He will take me and all his chosen ones to Himself into heavenly joy and glory. The explainer of the Catechism writes with these words, that this last perspective for us today, before the last judgement will be very hard to come to grip with. Eternal condemnation for all his and my enemies. There are christians who do not want to know about this. Did not Christ Himself speak about this? The man without a wedding garment was thrown into the outer darkness, where there is weeping and a gnashing of teeth. We may not withhold from you the warning power of these words. They will push you ^{to} take your refuge in the mercy of God. There is something like a christian curse in those words: all his and my enemies. Congregation, God curses with these words all lukewarmness and pride and self-righteousness in his church. God would not be God if He did not curse his haters for eternity. God is not a kind hearted man who lets Himself be trod upon. Should I not hate who hate Thee?

But put beside these words which with your confession answer 52 finishes: He will take me and all His chosen ones to Himself into heavenly joy and glory. The Catechism is very sparing with the word chosen ones. It does not use it often, only here and in Lordsday 21. But pay attention how your confession addresses you personally: me and all his chosen ones. You may be there, with that huge multitude which no one can count. You did not see the use of it all? Take this wonderful promise and go to meet this great future with joy.

At the ascension of Christ the gate of heaven was opened for Him. One more time the gate of heaven will again be opened. Exactly as with the ascension. It will open to let enter the great multitude, which no one can count. Everyone, who believes in Him, who knows himself to be redeemed in that great Judge who also is the Saviour. It will an eternal wedding feast and celebration into eternity. If the gates are made of gold, how shall the halls be. You may through faith see the use of it all.

Amen.

Lordsday 20.

Also given to me.

Sermon by the late
Dr. R. H. Bremmer,
Enschede,
The Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton, Alberta.

Reading John: 16: 5-22
Text: Lordsday 20
Psalm 122: 1,3.
After the law: Psalm 51: 3
After the creed: Hymn 2: 3
Psalm 119: 62,65,66.
Hymn : unknown
Hymn : unknown.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the nicest parts of pastoral work is to catechize. Every week, on a fixed day, the catechist meets the young sheep of Christ, the lambs of the flock. You try to teach them, what is important in the church and in the gospels. And when they are grown up, they do confession of faith. Office bearers sometimes have very penetrating conversations with young church members about this. They will be on their own in the church. Sometimes you really worry about this. What will happen to their faith once they go outside the shelter of their reformed family? Or when they go into military service and are away for weeks at the time, or when they go to a university? Some of them make long trips abroad. Parents, quite often, have difficulty with this. The one child is different than the other. Some of them are children that need a lot of care.

Congregation. Here today you confess: I believe in the Holy Spirit. And your confession speaks in the heading above Lordsday 20 emphatically of " God, the Holy Spirit ". He is not a stranger to you? In his name were you and are your children baptized. Your Saviour has included the Holy Spirit in the baptism command to his disciples: baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Now you confess here that He, the Holy Spirit will remain with you forever. He has taken the reins of your life in his hands. He also takes the reins of the lives of your children in his hands. He leads and steers our lifeship through the waves of time. What is there in that direct confessing, here in answer 53, that He is also given to me, that He will remain with me forever, a tremendous piece of encouragement. Does this not concern young and old? Are we as older people not often in the storm of today's unbelief? Did not that storm of unbelief and the belief of "God is dead" not uproot many christians?

How shall we as congregation of God remain firm in these times?

Is it not encouraging, especially today, to confess:

I believe in the Holy Spirit? I do not believe about Him but in Him. He has seized my life. Pay attention how central Christ is in this answer 53. You cannot say a true word about the Spirit outside of Him. He binds us to Christ, He comforts us with the treasures of Christ. He holds unto us in Christ,

We speak about:

OUR CONFESSION CONCERNING THE HOLY SPIRIT.

1. The Holy Spirit ties us to Christ;
2. He comforts us with Christ;
3. He holds unto us in Christ.

1. Lordsday 20, congregation, is a very short Lordsday. It is even shorter than Lordsday 17 which we looked at not to long ago. There the Catechism has three points, here only in two, it cannot be much shorter than that.

Why is this Lordsday so short? Did the men of the reformation not consider the Holy Spirit to be important? Did they figure the confessing of God the Father and God the Son to be more important? Take a look congregation, what an attention they paid to those. About God the Father the Catechism speaks in two extensive Lordsdays: in Lordsdays 9 and 10. About God the Son, it uses no less than 9, the Lordsdays 11 including 19. Why now so short? Well you have to watch out for two things. In the first place your confession has not said everything it wants to say about the Holy Spirit in this Lordsday. Read the heading above this Lordsday: God the Holy Spirit and our Sanctification. In any case that heading comprises also Lordsdays 21 and 22 and we really could include Lordsdays 23 and 24.

God the Holy Spirit and our Sanctification touches also the gathering of Christ's church and no less the congregation of the saints. And even the last two articles of our faith: about the resurrection of the flesh and eternal life, fall under that heading. On the day of Christ's return the breath of the Spirit shall brush over this earth and resurrect the dead from its dust. He grants them the eternal and imperishable life. Congregation, even what your confession says in Lordsdays 23 and 24 about the justification through faith, is not loose of the Holy Spirit. He seals to our hearts the acquittal which God grants to us in Christ. In the second place how heavily charged this so short Lordsday is. The drafters of the Catechism knew the art of saying much with a few words.

Now take the start of this Lordsday in which you confess that the Holy Spirit together with the Father and the Son is true and eternal God. There are explainers who judge, that this Lordsday wants to bind once again on your heart that the Holy Spirit, like the Father and the Son, is God. The Father is God, the Son is God, here very emphatically it is confessed that the Spirit is also God. But then your confession would repeat what has been said in Lordsday 8. There it has confessed the trinity of God. But that is not the matter here. Answer 53 does not say that the Holy Spirit is like the Father and the Son true and eternal God, but together with the Father and the Son. That is a fine shade of distinction, which you should not miss. It is not so simple to explain where this in being God of the Holy Spirit comes in. Give therefore your attention to the headings with which your confession divides the 12 articles of faith. The first article reviews it under the heading: God the Father

and our creation. We can imagine what that means. We see, in a manner of speaking the creation before us. Take Genesis One and what the Scriptures show us there: the creation of light, of the firmament, of the animals and of man. Genesis One says: So the world was created. It all comes from the hands of God the Creator and Maintainer of all things. After that follow the articles 2 - 7 which all deal about your Saviour.

There the heading is: God the Son and our Redemption. We understand really well what the confession wants to say to us. We see the work of God in those articles as passing in front of our eyes. They speak to us about his humble birth, of his suffering and death, his descension into hell. They also show us How God raised Him from the dead, his ascension and his sitting at the right hand of God. At the end they open up the view on his coming on the clouds of heaven. It is all about God the Son and our redemption. We have studied this very extensively in the previous Lordsdays. In the Lordsdays 11 to 19 we saw this as it was before our eyes. But now the heading above this Lordsday 20: God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification. What does the confession mean with this? What is now the specific work of the Holy Spirit which is being expressed here? That word "sanctification" is not an easy word. Catechumen sometimes have trouble with it. What is meant by it? It absolutely does not mean that we through the Holy Spirit become holy people in the sense of sinless people. That we are not and will not become either. No, the word holy always has in the Scriptures the basis meaning of being separated from the world and being dedicated to the service of the God. Think about the first baptism' question: do you confess that our children are sanctified in Christ. That means being under Christ and his redemptive work, dedicated to his service.

Taken up in Christ into God's covenant.

This you have to think about when here it is, in Lordsday 20, about God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification. Here you can also think what is said in the baptism form, that the Holy Spirit imparts to us what we have in Christ, namely the cleansing from our sins and the daily renewal of our lives. Here you stand at the centre of the matter which you confess. All the treasures which Christ has obtained for us, which He has earned and paid for with his precious blood, the Holy Spirit carries them to you. That is also the background of that first compact sentence of answer 53: The Holy Spirit is, together with the Father and the Son true and eternal God. We do not confess that, to put it theoretically, o yes, the Holy Spirit is God as is the Father and the Son. No, we confess this to make clear that to the giving and sharing of salvation no one less than God Self, God the Holy Spirit, is involved. The Father created us. That He could and did as God. The Son redeemed us. That He can and did as God. The Holy Spirit imparts to us the salvation in Christ, carries it to us. That He does and that He can as God. He is together with the Father and the Son true God. To touch the corrupted heart of a sinner with the magic wand of God's grace and re-create only God the Holy Spirit can do this. No, the Holy Spirit is not only a power of God or only a holy

spirit with a small "g" as some liberals proclaim. If He only was a power of God, how could He penetrate to the inmost of a corrupted human heart? How could He resurrect the dead from the dust of the earth? Raising life on the cemeteries of this world on Christ's great day?

What is the confession of God's trinity a wonderful confession and the order of Father, Son and Holy Spirit meaningful.

It connects closely to what your Saviour says in his highpriestly prayer in John 17. I glorified thee, that is the Father, on earth having accomplished the work which Thou gavest Me to do. And on having his turn the Spirit glorifies the Son. The Saviour says in John 16 verse 14: He will glorify Me for He will take what is mine and declare it to you. The Father has send out his Son to perform his Mediator's work on earth.

At his turn the Holy Spirit takes it out the completed work of the Son and carries the fullnes of it to us. Not for nought the church of the reformation here confesses that the Holy Spirit is true and eternal God. The foundations for the work of the redemption were laid in the eternal deliberation of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit. There lies an eternal and indestructable foundation under your redemption.

After the confession has opened your eyes for the true and eternal God being of the Holy Spirit, together with the Father and the Son, it goes one step further.

Again it says it in a short and compact sentence, but which contains so much. Congregation, secondly you confess: He is also given to me. Is that not a cheerful confession? He, the Holy Spirit, who together with the Father and the Son is God, is also given to me.

Congregation, again you stand in the heart of the reformed confession in regard to your redemption. Let answer 53 be short and terse, it is a radical denial of the roman catholic idea of the salvation and the redemption. It is your confessing in regard to the Holy Spirit about the manner the treasures of Christ's redemption come to you. In the church of the middle ages, the roman catholic church, from which the reformation seperated, Christ came to his congregation through the administration of the mass. When you partook of the mass, and if you did not place an obstacle in the way of the grace of Christ, you received Christ. A certain automation had penetrated into the doctrine of salvation.

Over against this place the reformation. It took the gospel, as the old christian had confessed it in the 12 articles, from under age old dust. You confess here: I believe in the Holy Spirit, not about an Holy Spirit. And in that believing in the Holy Spirit contains, that He is also given to me. That you believe about the Holy Spirit.

What is there much in that one little sentence. We could say it this way: the whole Pentacost gospel is in it. Then the Holy Spirit is poured out in its fullnes over God's church. Remember those mighty Pentacost signs. First the sound like the rush of a mighty wind. Then the distributed tongues as of fire and the speaking in other languages. Then the Holy Spirit in his fullnes was granted to God's church. It is not right to have

these Pentacost forces and to have that Pentacost enthousiasme today, as with the Pentacostal groups. They belong to that first outpouring of the Holy Spirit with those signs once and for all marked.

It is, congregation, as with a river. When it rises from the mountains, descends to the plains, that goes together with waterfalls and roaring of fallen waters. After that the river flows quietly but powerful through the plains. After Pentacost you see the Holy Spirit flow quietly and powerfully through the ages. So He reaches you today. That expresses the confession here with: also given to me. Lordsday 20 here speaks personally and at the same time encompass the whole church. You declare that personally for yourself but at the same time you know that you are included in that "also me" in God's church. You may say as a living member of Christ's holy and catholic church. What is there a lot of amazement and humility in that one small sentence. You confess with a profound amazement, that you may belong to it. That God the Holy Spirit in the community of God's church also has taken you and has seized your heart. Is it notfitting to be in amazement and worship, that God us, conceived and born in sin people, elected and lets his salvation call be heard and to live in God's house?

It is that same amazement which sounds in Lordsday 7, where you confessed that God not only to others but also to me has given forgiveness of sins, eternal righteousness and salvation. Once again, what is the church of the reformation here in strong contradiction over against the roman catholic church. There is a near automatic receiving of salvation in the sacrament without personally being placed as a sinner before God's face. Here the strict personal confession that you out of grace belong. God the Holy Spirit seized you. I am allowed to be a child of God. The church of the reformation cites the apostle Paul who in Galatians 4 verse 16, cries: Abba Father.

Congregation, you may also say this. For this God Himself gives you the boldness. You cannot leave this to others. You can with God permission in faith repeat this as in Lordsday 20.

It is not only here on this piece of paper of the Catechism.

It wants to be the confession of your heart. O, perhaps you think, I would like to repeat this, but I do no dare. I fall over my evil heart and over my sins. On paper it all looks so nice, but in practical life: what do I make out of it? Indeed. Sometimes God's children are in the centre of temptation.

The devil will do everything to take from you the steadfastness of God's promises. Congregation remember once again what happened on that first Pentacost day. Peter there cites the promise of the prophet Joel: I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. He does not say that God pours his Spirit on flesh that is already half spirit, on cleansed and sanctified flesh. No, God shall pour out his Spirit on all flesh. On flesh that from itself is sinful and corrupted, but which God took in his sovereign grace on the foundation of the finished work of Jesus Christ And still your confession is not finished speaking about the work of the Holy Spirit. It confesses in answer 53: He is also given to me to make me by true faith share in Christ and all

his benefits. God works with the Holy Spirit. He is totally involved. He did not hide the Holy Spirit in a drawer of a cabinet, someone wrote once. God wants me through his Holy Spirit to become part of the Lord Jesus Christ and all his benefits. Your confession makes here an unseparable tie between Christ and all his benefits. These two cannot be separated. And you know what answer 53 means with all those benefits. That are the treasures, someone wrote "beatitudes", of God's covenant which Christ has obtained for us through his death and resurrection. Who seizes the person of Christ in faith as his Saviour and Redeemer, with that also seizes his benefits, his treasures. What are they? Congregation just name them, pass them on to them who do not know them: forgiveness of sins, crucifying the old and the resurrection of the new nature, eternal righteousness and glory.

Here you are confronted with what is actually the real work of the Holy Spirit. He lays the connection between Christ, your Advocate, above at the right hand of God and you down here. The Lord Supper form says, by the Spirit, who dwells in Christ as the Head and in us as his members, we have true communion with Him. Is this not glorious? Christ, our Saviour is not far away, unreachable for us. I am bound to Him through the Holy Spirit. Through his Spirit He renews my life from day to day. Congregation you know to what you have pay real attention to in this last part? It is this: the Spirit binds us to Christ through a true faith says answer 53. Every word in this short sentence is indispensable, also this pointing to the faith. The explainers of the Catechism quarreled about if first the Holy Spirit has to be given to us and after that we believe in Christ or that the faith comes first and then the Holy Spirit in the way of faith is given. But this is an unnecessary quarrel. These two: The Holy Spirit and the true faith go unseparably together. The Holy Spirit works the faith in our hearts through the proclamation of the holy gospel and hearing the gospel, I come to believe. Paul says in Romans 10 verse 17: So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes from the preaching of Christ. Without faith there is no connection between Christ and us and that believing is, at his turn, the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Here we think about the beginning of this sermon. We showed there our care for the young people of the congregation. These words are valid for old and young. To go to catechism class is not only knowing your lesson by heart. Also the young are imparted to Christ but only through a true faith and through the Holy Spirit. Christ wants to move them through the catechism work to faith. That is why churchgoing for young people is so important and we have to tune these two to each other: the catechism class and the going to church.

2. At the end, answer 53 indicates some major points from the work of the Holy Spirit. It could name many more. Later, in Lordsdays 21 including 24, there will be many more. Your textbook has in relation to the Holy Spirit many more things to say. That is why it is now limited. But what it names has

been chosen carefully. Take a look at your book of Praise. After the answer has said that the Holy Spirit shares in Christ all his benefits with us, it continues with the words "to comfort me". Has that been chosen with care or not? The Greek word that in the New Testament is used for the holy Spirit is the word Paraclete, it actually means Comforter. That is how the Lord Jesus names the Spirit. And if He is named Comforter then that is one of his most important activities. When you are at home you should read chapter 14 from the gospel of John. There the Saviour says farewell to his disciples and He does that with penetrating words. He says, And I will pray to the Father, and He will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; you know Him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.(verse 16,17) What a rich promise. He will give his apostles another Counselor says Jesus and in those apostles He spoke to the whole church, which is to come. It is clear what the Saviour means. He Himself is the Comforter, the Paraclete. A paraclete is actually someone you call when you are in trouble. It could even mean an advocate. You call on him when in dire circumstances. Now, Christ Himself is our Paraclete. He takes it up for us with the Father. He is with that heavenly Judge our Paraclete, our Advocate. He can point for us to his finished work. He is in a manner of speaking Paraclete number one. Besides that He gives us now another Counselor, a Paraclete number two. No, not to comfort us about the ascension of the Saviour. It means so much more. The Spirit comforts us here on earth with Christ, with his finished work. He lays the promises of the gospel on our hearts. He comforts you when you are in a doubting life situation. He shows you the only comfort base which there is in our lives: what Christ has finished for you on Golgotha. You could say it with an oldfashioned word: He served us with his comfort out of the sacrifice and the suffering of your Saviour.

Lord'sday 20 makes with these words "to comfort me" a masterly move. It goes back to Lord'sday 1, that hymn of the only comfort. There you have confessed that you belong with body and soul both in life and death, to your faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. Now answer 53 says this: that comfort is served to you, given to you by the Holy Spirit. Who seals in our hearts that we belong to Christ.

Congregation, the men of the Catechism knew how a christian can be tempted. The devil and our own flesh, to speak with the words of Lord'sday 52, do not cease to attack us. In this battle the Holy Spirit comforts and encourages you. How He does this? By sealing the promises of the gospel in your heart by the preaching of the gospel. We cannot emphasize enough how important church going is. On the pulpit, when the Word is being preached, the Holy Spirit is in action. What is it a comfort that we, in the middle of the streams of atheism and the "God is dead" theology, have a Comforter, a Paraclete, who comforts us with Him who above, at God's right hand, takes it up for us.

3. So now we come to the last point. Answer 53 still has one more small sentence to outline the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is given to me, says this answer, to remain with me forever. We saw how the Holy Spirit binds us to Christ and comforts us with Christ. Now we see how He us keeps us with Christ. The confession clearly goes back to the words which we cited from John 14 verse 17. There Christ says about the Holy Spirit; for He dwells with you and will be in you. Once the Holy Spirit has us in his grip, He will never let us go. Your confession here touches upon the doctrine of The Perseverance of the saints. Half a century later this was firmly established at the Synod of Dort in 1618/1619.

In chapter V the reformed church confesses the comforting confession of the perseverance of the saints with these words: But God, who is rich in mercy, according to the unchangeable purpose of His election, does not completely withdraw His Holy Spirit even in their deplorable fall. (Canons of Dort V art 6) The canons also name examples of this deplorable fall as: David, Peter, and other saints. (art 4)

What was developed in Dort against the remonstrants, you find here in answer 53 in sober words: to remain with me forever. Where would we be if there was no perseverance of the saints? If the Holy Spirit would not remain with us forever? I know this: That is it not happening outside our own responsibility. It is not without reason that the Holy Spirit stays with the church and with its believers. Think about the congregation at Laodicea. Christ threatens her: So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth. (Revelations 3 :16)

Jeremiah warns Israel not to put its trust on the deceptive words as: This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord. (Jeremiah 7 :14) God perseveres in his children in the way of their perseverance by God's promises. There are many examples In the Scriptures how God holds on to his children. Did not Jacob have a dream of a ladder on which angels ascended (first) and descended? God said through that dream: Jacob I am with you and I will keep you regardless of what you have done to your father Isaac. And think about the prophet Nathan who told David about his sin with Bathsheba and said: You are the man. Then David could compose psalm 51. Peter denied his Saviour. But Christ held onto him and re-instated him in his office in the appearance at the sea of Galilee. Yes, the Holy Spirit will remain with me forever. He also goes with you through the dark tunnel of dying and death. That is included in that remaining with me forever. Your confession will develop this further in Lordsday 22 where it speaks about eternal life and the resurrection of the flesh. Here it takes already an advance.

Congregation, short and powerful is this Lordsday 20 about the Holy Spirit and rich with contents. The Holy Spirit binds you to Christ. He comforts you with Christ and He holds unto you in life and death in Christ. Straight through death He takes us upon his lap. (to his bosom?)

Praise Him into eternity.

Amen.

Lordsday 21

The ark of God.

Sermon by the late
Dr. R. H. Bremmer,
Enschede, the Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton,
Alberta.

Reading: Psalm 48,
Text: Lordsday 21,
Psalm 95: 1,3
After the law: Psalm 32 : 4
After the creed: Hymn unknown
Psalm 87: 1,2,3,4,5.
Hymn 1 B :3
Hymn: unknown.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesu Christ.

There is in the last while a lot to do about the attitude of the young over against the church. There are great worries about this in various church denominations. I think about a booklet written by Piet van der Ploeg printed in 1985 with the title: The empty testament (or last will). The author testifies in that booklet, that leaving the church among young people is caused by parents who have, in regard to faith, nothing to say to their children. They still go in a routine to church but at home, in the family, church and faith are hardly discussed. The result is that children when they leave home, they turn their back to the church. They left their children an empty testament. There was a lot reaction to this booklet. There is also reason to take this warning to heart in our own "circle". What do you convey, as older generation as parents to your children? Does our association with our children, and with the young people in the church, speak of love to God and to his service? Do we speak with love about God's house, his church, in which we have received a place? Do our young people know they are involved in the service of the Lord and with the building up of his house? It is so very important.

Because of that, it is wonderful the our confession, here in Lordsday 21, speaks about the church. It does this by following the apostolic creed which very emphatically speaks in the 9 th article about God's church and about the communion of saints which it forms.

Lordsday 21 adds to that the 10 th article, about the forgiveness of sins. These three form a strong union: God's church, the communion of saints and the forgiveness of sins. We all may as believers, old and young, be involved with all three. And do you know to what you have to pay attention? Your confession discusses these three under the heading : God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification. The Holy Spirit involves us personally through the gospel in these three matters of faith.

Because of that we speak about:

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND GOD'S CHURCH.

1. Christ gathers through Him the church;
2. He founds in her the communion of saints;
3. He gives her the forgiveness of sins.

1. Once more we look at the heading above Lordsday 20. It says: God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification. Do you remember that the Catechism consists of 12 articles divided into three parts? It did this in Lordsday 8. There it confesses the 12 articles of the faith in the first place it speaks about God the Father and our creation, in the second place about God the Son and our redemption and in the third place about God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification. In the previous Lordsday 20, you have confessed your belief in the Holy Spirit. Now, in these last two Lordsdays which are about the 12 articles, in Lordsday 21 and 22 you confess your belief in regard to the work -the office said the old theologians- of the Holy Spirit. So, what He does. That also is expressed in the manner in which the 12 articles formulate our faith. Up till now they spoke to us about believing in God the Father, in God the Son and in God the Holy Spirit. Now they do not speak about us believing, in the church, in the communion of saints. No, now they say: I believe a holy catholic christian church; I believe the communion of saints and the forgiveness of sins. Our faith rests in God the Father, in God the Son and in God the Holy Spirit. In that triune God we rest with our whole heart. our faith does not rest in the church. What we now are going to confess about the church is the content of our faith. It rests upon what God has revealed about his church in his Word.

What is it important, that the old christian church in its confession about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit has added these articles about the church. These first christians were very impressed by the church as the work of God. They believed with heart and soul, God cares for his church, it is his work. Otherwise how could they have kept up in those hard times of persecution and oppression? It were only very small congregations, in those times. In Rome, in Corinth, in Ephese and in all those places of which we know from the letters of Paul and from the Acts of the Apostles. Churchfathers like Polycarpus and Cyprianus, and apostles like Peter and Paul gave their lives for that cause of God. Those first christians, they met in the catacombs and in open fields. If it had to be, they sacrificed their lives.

And now hear them confess in this article of faith: I believe a holy catholic church. The word christian initially was not in it. Through Luther this was added. Do you hear the enthusiasm and the profound conviction that reverberate in these words?

In the middle of an idolatrous and godless world God gathers, they confessed, a holy of the world separated church. It is catholic, common. That means God gathers it over the whole world. What Luther later sang, was written in the hearts of the first christians: Christ keeps his church, so hell may rage freely. They even spoke about the church as the ark of God.

Now you understand, that the reformers could repeat this article about the church with heart and soul. Weren't they in the midst of the battle? Did they not for the sake of Jesus go to the scaffold? Was it not for them a battle of life and death to remain church of Christ? Does not answer 54 speak about the faith the way it explains God's church, also not about their strong belief that the church is God's work, an indestructible work?

Pay special attention, congregation to, how the church of the Reformation its faith, in regard to the God's church, is founded in the election. The Son of God, says answer 54, gathers Himself a congregation, which is chosen to everlasting life. The Catechism does not speak very often emphatically about the election by God. Which is continually in the background of its confession. Here however it takes the election with power to the foreground. God's congregation is chosen to eternal life. What does your confession here speak unconcerned about the election. And why not? The Scriptures show us the way. How glorious and how believing the apostle Paul speaks about that in that great eight'th chapter of his letter to the Romans in the verses 29 and 30 : For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first born among many brethren. And those He predestined He also called; and those whom He called He also justified; and those He justified He also glorified. The apostle here links together the chain of the salvation : the from the beginning destined believers to and with their glorification. We also point you to the letter of the Ephesians where in the first chapter the apostle says: Even as He choose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. What is it deplorable, that God's graceful election in later times has become a matter of insecurity and anxiety. Many asked and ask anxiously : is this also for me? Am I a chosen one? Did the Lord write my name in his book? Many sought the comfort and security in themselves but not where you can only find it: in God's promises, in the finished work of the Saviour at the cross for us.

That is why it is exceedingly full of comfort, that your confession here in answer 54, that God's election is not for a moment separated from Christ, your Saviour Himself. It ties in to what we cited from Paul's letter to the Ephesians: He has chosen us in Him, that is in Christ. God sees us united in his graceful election with Christ, with his cross and his resurrection. The apostle says in Ephesians 1 verse 11 In Him according to his purpose of Him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will.

Answer 54 lays that bond between us and God's election very carefully. The Son of God, you confess there, gathers Himself a church chosen to everlasting life. Do not read over that word Himself, He, Christ is central here. From eternity God knows his sheep by name. But in time our Saviour gathers them to his flock, of which He is the good Shepherd. From eternity God knows the bricks of his great building, that is his church, but Christ

inserts them into that building. He chases them as fish into his net, that He throws out in the gospel into the sea of mankind. Answer 54 says: He gathers his church, but you also confess here: He also defends and preserves it.

He gathers the church. Your confession here uses the present tense. Do not loose sight of this. Christ is continually working on this. From the beginning of the world to its end. Is this not powerful and great? God already began to gather his church in paradise through Christ. Adam and Eve belonged to it. Noah and his family were added to it in the ark. Abraham at the woods of Mamre belonged to that church, as did Moses and the people of Israel in the desert. And now, you confess here, now in the new covenant, God gathers his church out of the whole human race. With these words you confess, that the church is universal, catholic.

We should not let the roman catholics take away from us that word catholic. They are through their institute bound to Rome as headquarters and to the pope as the head of that institute. We confess here that the church is catholic to show, that Christ gathers it from the whole world, from all the peoples of the world. The four creatures and the twenty four elders out of Revelations sing before the Lamb: By thy blood did ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. (Revelations 5: 9) The catholic church does not know apartheid (separation) It embraces white and brown and black, people of whole first world and the third world.

And still answer 54 is not finished speaking about God's church. Every word here is worth its weight in gold. We also confess here that Christ gathers the holy catholic church through His Spirit and Word. Now remember what we said in the beginning of this sermon. In this article of the church it is about Holy Spirit and our sanctification. On Pentacost the Holy Spirit is poured out over the church out of all nations. He does that via his Word. That is why answer 54 puts the Spirit in the forefront. After Pentacost the Holy Spirit drove the apostles into the world. He made them work through that powerful means of the preaching and through the sacraments. He calls, after the passing away of the apostles, his church together through the office of the ministers of the Word.

Yet, not everything has been said about the church. Answer 54 continues: Christ does that in the unity of the true faith. I believe in "one" holy catholic church which is christian, that is to say: In which Christ is central in that unity of the true faith. You have to hold on here that this unity of the church in the true faith is a faith unity. Through the ages what have there been breaks and schisms in that "one" church of Christ. What is her wedding gown torn and violated. That found its cause especially in the hierarchy. in ruling over Christ dearly bought church. The Reformation had to break with the hierarchy of the pope. Through the middle ages this was dominating God's church. The Reformation returned to the pure gospel of the free grace to the office that only lets itself be bound to the Word. What often has false doctrine and mutilation of the gospel driven

the church asunder. But in a turn around: what has the return to the pure gospel of God's grace worked unity time and again. The apostle Paul has fought with all his power against that tearing up of the church in the congregation of Corinth. He writes 1 Corinthians 1: 12 Everyone there had a slogan. The one said: I belong to Paul. Another said: I belong to Apollos. And a third I am from Cephas, that is Peter. There were even some who annexed Christ for their party and in their slogan said: I belong to Christ. The apostle Paul put a penetrating question over against that: Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? Christ cannot be a party name, nor can Paul. There is only "one" Christ and only "one" body of Christ: his dearly bought church. He, Jesus Christ has wrestled for the unity of his church by the Father in prayer, shortly before He went to Gethsemane. You remember that highpriestly prayer of your Saviour? He did not only pray for his apostles, but also for them that believed through their Word in Him, that they may all be one, even as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that Thou has send Me. (John 17: 20,21) Do you realize congregation, how much depends on the unity of the church? Your Saviour prays here: so that the world may believe, that Thou has send me. Breaking the unity of the church stands in the way of the faith in the Saviour, it blocks the road to Him.

We should not understand that unity eucumenical. In the sense of: all the christians together without a true unity in the true faith. Christ emphatically prays for all who through the word of the apostles believe in Him. The true christian unity consists of the binding to the gospel of the apostles and the prophets. That is why we reject also the doctrine of pluriformity as should all those different churches be a part of the so called invisible church. Our reformed confession about the church goes, as a manner of speaking, along abysses. On the one side there is the drive of the eucumenical unity and the doctrine of the pluriformity of the church. On the other side there is sectarianism, that, a for God not valid reason breaks the unity of the church. The holiness, the unity and catholicity of the church we preserve if at the same time we take a firm stand against both sides. Only so Christ gathers his holy church. There is in that answer 54 a powerful appeal for us to join that holy and catholic church, where ever Christ gathers it. You also may think about what you confess in article 28 of the Belgic Confession: that no one ought to withdraw from it, content to be by himself, no matter what his state or quality may be. This article says: in this assembly come together those who are redeemed and there is no salvation outside of it. That is why every one has to join and unite with it. Answer 54 underlines this by confessing at the end: And I believe that I am and forever shall remain a living member of it. Congregation, is that also your personal confession? A living member of Christ's church is: It means that you give yourself with body and soul to your Saviour and follow Him where He goes

before us. It also means that you love his congregation and that you will give all your strength to build it up. We think once more of what we brought to the foreground in the beginning of this sermon. We saw that many young people in all kinds of church denominations are leaving the church because their parents gave them an empty testament. They did not see that faith in the lives of their parents. It going to church did not have a real contents anymore. Let that be different with you. Let us older people show our young what it means to be a living member of Christ's church. Let it show in your really being a christian, in your doing your all for Christ's congregation. Than it is valid for you, that you will remain a living member into eternity. That is certainly not self evident.

2. Your confession adds to the faith of the holy catholic christian church something else, namely the words: the communion of saints. The holy catholic christian church is the communion of saints. That is an important addition to our confession about Christ's church. In the explanation of those words in answer 55, namely the church of the reformation has deepened the contents of these words compared to the old christian church. It has concentrated in Christ the meaning the old church gave to it. We will explain this further. The first christians thought with the communion of saints about two different things. They thought with the expression communion of saints about persons and matters. In the first place about persons. With this they had in mind the believers, the saints, who already have died and are above with God. They knew themselves united in Christ with those men and women who had given their lives for Christ and already are with the Lord. With all those others who died in Christ.

John saw, in Revelations 6 when the fifth seal was opened by the Lamb, the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They communed with the church on earth and prayed: O Sovereign Lord holy and true how long before Thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth? The church above communes with the church here below. We may know us to be united with those many, many believers who went to heaven before us.

The old church thought with its confession about the communion of saints especially about them. It understood something more.

It also viewed the communion of saints as a communion of holy matters. It thought namely with that about the sacraments. We as believers together take part in the holy baptism and the Lord Supper. We arrange ourselves in the church around the signs and seals of God's promises and together take part in it.

The first christians, in this manner, gave expression to their faith of the communion of saints. Now you have to see how in answer 55 the church of the Reformation has deepened this. Firstly it means, confesses answer 55, "that the believers all and everyone, as members of Christ have communion with Him and share in all His treasures and gifts". In that both meanings of the old christian church are in this. All the believers, above and below, have communion in Christ. In Him is our rallying-point.

And at the same time we share in all His treasures and gifts. The church of the Reformation does not limit the communion of saints only to the sacraments. I speaks about all the treasures and gifts of Christ. It points to Romans 8 verse 32: He who did not spare his own Son, but gave Him up for us all, will He not also give us all things with Him? In Christ we have, as believers, all communion in all the treasures which He has obtained for us through his death and resurrection.

You may see it this way: in the confessing of the communion of saints your confession points aloft, vertical, to Jesus Christ our Mediator by God. In Him lies our uniting bond. And what is this powerful. Is it not a great wonder that in God's church men and women, old and young , black and white, are one in Christ? We have been given to each other as brothers and sisters. We have received the same baptism. Time and again we arrange ourselves around "one" Lord Supper table. We know ourselves to be united in Him with all the living and dead members of the church. We all are saved through the "one" Saviuor. We all live out of the forgiveness of sins. Christ church is not a union of a loosely coherent people. It is his body, of which He is the Head. In Him we all are bound through a "one" brothers and sisters bond. From this flows the second part of answer 55. After first have shown to Christ aloft, vertical, now it shows us the horizontal calling which comes out of that vertical towards us. Answer 55 confesses: That everyone is duty bound to us his gifts readily and cheerfully for the benefit and wellbeing of other members. The answer says: everyone is duty bound. In that is a calling .You are all bound in Christ. You call each other brothers and sisters. This brings a powerful duty with it. You are called to serve your brothers and sisters with your talents.

You are called to do that for their benefit and salvation. What have small things here a profound meaning. We think about the word of the Saviour in Matthew 10 verse 42: And whoever gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water "because he is a diciple", truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward. "Because he is a diciple". What does your Saviour here lay a powerful bond between us all and what an obligation is included in that. How often do jealousy and selfishness in the congregation break down the communion of saints. How often do we seek our own honour and our own benefit in God's congregation. What is there a need in regard to this for conversion.

And what is there a lot to do in the church. You can use your talents in various ways. One is called to an office. The other sees himself confronted with the sick and the lonely in his surroundings. Often you are called upon to make sacrifices. How do you put your talents to work for Christ? Willingly and cheerfully? Do you give of yourrself to each other? That input of our gifts, which the communion asks from you, is valid for both old and young. Young people often critisize the church, sometimes correctly. The saints of Christ are sinners. But what do you do? There are also tasks for young people. Even if you

have not done confession of faith, you can from your wages, if you earn these, pay towards the church. And what are there a lot of possibilities in evangelization work, also for young people. And also for the seniors there are tasks, even if it is praying with and for God's congregation. Congregation, the input in the communion of saints is a graduated scale for your faith and for your love as congregation. Let not be said about you what the angel of the church at Laodicea had to hear; I know your works, you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth.

3. Now we come to the third question and answer in this rich Lordsday 21: the one about the forgiveness of sins. In the apostolic creed this is a separate article 10: I believe in the forgiveness of sins. In our confession it is, with our confession about the church and the communion of saints, under the work of God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification. The Holy Spirit uses the preaching of God's promise of guilt-forgiving as a means for us to appropriate through faith that forgiveness. God forgives totally, you confess here in answer 56. Listen: because of Christ's satisfaction, will no more remember my sins, nor my sinful nature, against which I have to struggle all my life. Is that not radical? God even forgives my sinful nature, out of which time and again my sins come from. He forgives to the root of my life. Your confession points here to Psalm 103 with those words with which after the celebration of the Lord's Supper sound as music to our ears: He does not deal with us according to our sins nor requite us according to our iniquities. (verse 10) In Psalm 130 the pilgrim calls out in the dismay of his heart: If Thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? The answer is already there: But there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou may be feared. (verses 3 and 4)

What is there in this answer 56 the powerful gospel of the Reformation. Luther fought with this the horrible practice of indulgences and confession of his time. God does not forgive my sins because of me giving a deed in return to Him, through good works or in a life of self punishment. You confess here: He forgives because of Christ's satisfaction. That is why the ending of answer 56 is: God will graciously grant me the righteousness of Christ, that I may never come into condemnation. To the church is given in the preaching of the finished work of Jesus Christ, the absolution, the remission of sins. We cited before from the Belgic Confession that there is "outside " of it, that is outside of the church, no salvation. That is not to say that whom is not a member of the Reformed church cannot go to heaven. But it will say that no where else the forgiveness of our sins for Christ's sake is proclaimed to us than in God's church. It does that through the gospel of free grace entrusted to that church. The old reformed people liked to use for the church the image of the ark of God. It floats on the waters of this world. The Holy Spirit gathers all God's saints to that ark through the Word. He founds in it the communion of saints. And He lets be preached in its midst the glorious gospel of the forgiveness of sins. There is, thanks to God, room in it for young and old. Seek there for your whole life your place. Do not procrastinate. Do not leave your children an empty testament.

Amen.

Lordsday 22

Amen and Hallelujah

Sermon by the late
Dr. R. H. Bremmer
Enschede, The Netherlands

Translated by
Ralph Winkel
Edmonton,
Alberta.

Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10
Text Lordsday 22
Psalm 30: 5,7
After the law: Psalm 31: 15
After the creed: Psalm 16: 4
Psalm 73 : 8,9
Hymn 43: 3
Hymn ; unknown.

Beloved brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

Our confession speaks about Lordsday 22 under the heading: God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification. Catechumens find this rather strange. What have the resurrection of the flesh and the life everlasting to do with the Holy Spirit and our sanctification? You can understand that this heading counts for Lordsday 20 which spoke in so many words about the Holy Spirit. But why does this heading cover also Lordsday 21 and 22? It however is not as strange as at first it may seem. You should not belittle the Holy Spirit and his work. In Lordsday 21 you confessed: Christ gathers his church through his "Spirit" and his Word. There you also confess, that you share in all his treasures and gifts. Who gives you that communion of saints no other than the Holy Spirit? Is He also not the one that imparts to you the promise of the forgiveness of sins, about which the last question and answer of Lordsday 21 speaks? And now here in Lordsday 22 it is about the resurrection of the flesh and everlasting life. Don't these last two Lordsdays join closely to the article of the forgiveness of sins? So radical does God forgive us our sins, that the Holy Spirit raises our flesh from the power of death. He grants us eternal life. God the Holy Spirit wipes out the last traces of our existence of sin by giving us a new, glorified existence in eternal life. The men who originally wrote the Catechism, appreciated this in a fine manner. They emphatically speak in questions 57 and 58 of the comfort in the resurrection of the flesh and everlasting life. They ask how can these articles comfort us. Lordsday 22 connects closely to Lordsday 1 with that very first question in regard to life and death: What is your only comfort in life and death?

The Holy Spirit sanctifies us from the through sin depraved existence to the glory of everlasting life. He renews it into the bone. Surely, congregation, God does not abandon the work of his hands. He closes it through the work of the Holy Spirit into everlasting life.

In that light we will think about Lordsday 22:

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT DOES A PERFECT WORK.

We see this in:

1. when dying;
2. with the resurrection of the flesh;
3. in the glory of everlasting life.

1. The article of the resurrection of the flesh belongs to the oldest parts of the apostolic confession. We meet it already in the second age after Christ. There is something triumphant in this article. I believe in the resurrection of the flesh, declared the first christians when they stepped up to the baptismal font. After that they let them selves be baptized and cleaned from their heathen existence. They knew the consequences of being a christian. Quite often they had to pay for it by dying. They took the risk to be torn apart in the arena's or be burned by the fire on the stake. But they confessed; Also death cannot part us from our Lord Jesus Christ. Polycarpus, the bishop of Smyrna, cried on the pyre; I see Jesus. They held on in the deaththreat: I believe that this my flesh will be resurrected. They looked forward over death to the great day Of Jesus Christ. They had confessed about Him: He shall return to judge the living and the dead. They were looking forward to his triumph.

With the church of the Reformation it was not any different. The men and the women for whom Ursinus and Olivianus wrote this comfortbook, also know of scaffolds and pyres. They went through the fire of persecution. That is why they spoke so emphatically of the comfort they drew from the last two articles. That comfort spoke to them with the eye on the return of Christ and the resurrection on the last day. They drew that comfort also on what immediately happens after dying. We could name that the nearest horizon of this confession. Answer 57 speaks about his. It draws that near horizon as well as the far away one to the return of Christ, in one faith perspective. It does that in one long sentence that through the words " not only".... " but also " is clearly divided in two. You confess here: not only shall my soul after this life immediately be taken up to Christ my Head, but also this my flesh, raised by the power of Christ, shall be reunited with my soul. Shall-what a glorious perspective- be made like Christ's glorious body.

There is congregation in that first part of that sentence a sharp piece of polemic against the roman catholic vision of dying and life after death. It is worth the effort to pay attention to this. That deepens our insight in what is confessed here by Christ's church. That polemic is in that one word "immediately" that your confession on purpose includes in answer 57. My soul shall after this life "immediately" be taken up to Christ, my Head. With this Ursinus and Olivenus settled the roman catholic doctirne of purgatory. Perhaps you may think: Is that timely today? Do we, as reformed people, have to be busy with this? Do not be miataken. It touches our faith vision on the work of our Saviour to the roots. We want therefore pay special attention to this. The doctrine of purgatory is not only an isolated part of the roman catholic confession. It is connected with the whole of it. And just through the rejection

of it, again shines for our attention the reformed confession about the finished work of your Saviour and Guarantor. The roman catholic church sees it this way: when someone dies, he is not cleansed enough of the sins which he has committed on earth. Because of that he cannot appear immediately before the holy God. Also Christ has atoned on Golgotha for the original sin but not for the sins we commit daily. These have to be atoned for through the sacrifice of the Mass. The power of the mass does not extend its power only to the living but also to the dead. So developed during the middle ages the concept that there is a place between heaven and hell, where the souls of the dead have to go through a last and total cleansing. Rome bases this on the apocryphal book of the Maccabee, where is written that Judas the Maccabeeer had sacrifices made for them who in the battle against the Syrians were killed and on whose dead bodies small idol statues were found. Therefore they could not go immediately into the eternal rest.

Purgatory is typified by the roman theologians through two things. In the first place there is that lack of the nearness of God, which is in heaven. The souls in purgatory yearn for this. In the second place there is the feeling of pain and remorse about the sins which they have committed here on earth. They think about, the souls, how easy it would have been on earth to make good those sins by good works. After they have spend a long time in purgatory comes the nearing to God and the entering into the eternal rest. Fortunately this process can be speeded up by bringing soul-masses and indulgences for the dead here on earth.

As you can see: it is a refined system in which everything with everything coheres. It darkens the view on the finished work Christ. That is most awful part of it. Congregation, the reformers have rejected with all their power that thought of a purgatory between heaven and hell. Perhaps this is one of the most radical and sensationel consequenses of the return to the gospel of free grace. Does not the church confess just before this confession about the last things: I believe in the forgiveness of sins? Don't you confess in that, that Christ has fully paid for us and God will never think about our sins anymore? Has Christ not borne for us the punishment to the very last? Do we have to, after this life, complete our cleansing? Did Christ not bear away our guilt at the cross? Did He not cry out: It is finished?

Indeed, we remain sinners till the last moment of our lives, We carry the remembrance of our sins with us to the gate of death. But at the same time: we have already confessed in Lordsday 16 that our death puts an end to sin and is an entrance into eternal life. God liberates us in our death of the last contamination of sin. Being washed and cleansed through Christ's blood and Spirit we may enter into the glory. What makes your your confession in answer 57 Christ the centre. We will be immediately taken up after this life to Him our Head. We will be resurrected through the power of Christ. We will be made like Christ's glorious body. Over dying and death shines the light of the for us finished work. Three times our glorious

Head is named here. That is the profound background of that one word "immediately". Scriptures spoke too strongly for the men and women of the Reformation, that they would take one step backwards. Your confession here points to Luke 23 verse 43, to that royal answer of Christ to the murderer at the cross: Jesus, he asks, remember me when you come into your kingly power. A murderer. A man with blood stained hands. What does your Saviour answer? Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise. It is an awful blunder, if people, as Rome does, draw the word "today" into it: I say to you. As if it was necessary that Christ had to assure that He spoke this "today". There is in that "today" the comfort, the royal assurance, that he now, through death, will enter paradise with Christ. Perhaps the man thought about an earthly Messianic kingdom. Jesus opens for him the gates of paradise of God. If there is one man who with a sinful past was coming to the gates of death, it was this man. But if there was "one" redeemed of his sins by dying it was him.

You may pay attention to the death of your Saviour. He died for us as man. He went through the gates of death just like everyone else. Now hear Him say what his faith perspective was on the border of life and death. Father, He cried out, in the last words at the cross, Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit. He saw the Father hands reaching out to Him on Golgotha. They took Him, the Son, home into the Fatherhouse. Would this be any different for all the other sons and daughters of God? Yes, you confess here, your soul shall immediately be taken up to Christ its head. Also in that "taken up" answer 57 connects closely to the gospel. Your confession points here to Luke 16 verse 22; to the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus. There is written, it happened that the poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. God sent out his liturgic angels, who are as always ready to do his bidding. They carried Lazarus out of the misery of earthly life to the glory of God. We have to be careful with this parable that we do not spiritualize every feature. But on this one point misunderstanding is impossible. Lazarus was after his death, above with God in communion with Abraham and all the other saints. He was taken up, brought home.

Your confession has chosen every word with the utmost care in this answer 57. So it speaks also of Christ, our Head. It also could have spoken of Christ our Mediator or of our Saviour. Here however it definitely choose the word Head. What does this lay a close connection between Him and us. Our Head, Christ is already above. He has conquered death and the grave. He is in glory at the right hand of the Father. Would He leave us, his members, in the power of death and the grave? Should the Holy Spirit not complete his work through the power of Christ's finished work to take up God's children into the Fatherhouse? Is here for God's children not a happy future? Think too, congregation, about what Paul writes to the Corinthians in that comfort giving chapter 2 Corinthians 5. He writes in verse 1, We know - what does this sound sure and trusting- that the earthly tent we live in is destroyed -and that can happen

anytime- we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. The house is out God it says there literally. It was thought out by God, created by God, brought into readiness by God, eternal and secure. Is our living in by Christ our Head, us being with Christ as Paul names it in Philippians 1 verse 23, a conscious living in? Certainly. God's children who here on earth in death close their eyes, they consciously open them by God and his angels. The Scriptures do not leave any doubt about this. For the thought that our dead remain in an unconscious state by God is, on the base of the Scriptures, there is no room. There is in our confession no single place for the sleep of the souls in which the dead would be till the resurrection on the last day. The taking up to Christ our Head is definitely not an unconscious taking up.

Men refers to the Saviour's own saying about the sleeping of the daughter of Jairus or to the sleeping of Lazarus. Jesus says to his disciples: Lazarus, our friend has fallen asleep, but I go to wake him out of the sleep. (John 11: 11) Your Saviour here means with sleeping the not-definitive of having died. That He points out with the image of sleeping.

Think here also about Jesus' conversation with the Sadducees in Matthew 22 about the woman who had been married to seven brothers. At the close of the conversation your Saviour refers to that majestic word of the Lord: I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. The Saviour concludes; God is not a God of the dead, but of the living. (verse 32) Luke then adds: for all live to Him. (Luke 20: 38) We may be thankful, that also these last words of the Saviour through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, have been preserved. There lies a great convincing power in this: for all live to Him.

Now. today.

Who still wants to doubt if our dead consciously are above with God, read Revelations 6 verses 9 to 12. John sees there sees the souls of them who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out : O, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before Thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?

They have fellowship with you congregation, those above, with the cause of God and of Christ down here. They fight the battle with you in their prayers. It is "one" church of God, above and here below. They both wrestle for the triumph of God's justice and of God's kingdom. How could the souls under the altar do that if they not with a full conscious were part of the battle of God's kingdom down here? They also received an answer: they have to have patience till the number of God's saints is complete. Does that patience not include consciousness? Certainly. They, above, are looking forward to the day of the endtriumph of the Lamb.

Now they refer to the point of view that the dead cannot consciously enjoy bliss, based on what the Old Testament says about death. Some point to the prayer of Hezekiah where he says: For Sheol cannot thank Thee, death cannot praise Thee; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Thy faithfulness. (Isaiah

38 verse 18). Hezekiah is very impressed by the power of death. Surprisingly, he then in this prayer, that at the same time is a psalm, puts the glory of life over against this. The living, the living, he thanks Thee, as I do this day. (verse 19) Does this prayer of Hezekiah mean that death in the Old Testament cannot be conquered? Does death in the old covenant put a limit to the power of life of the living God? Who thinks this way, does not know the prophesy. In that same book of Isaiah the prophesy opens up the view of God's victory over death. In chapter 25 verse 7 Isaiah shows that God's mountain becomes a place of festive joy. He cries out: He will destroy the veil that is spread over all nations, the veil of death. Isaiah prophesies, He will conquer death forever and the Lord God will wipe all the tears from the eyes. From that perspective Job could also say: and after my skin has been destroyed, then from my flesh I shall see God, my heart faints (yearns) within me. Job 19 vers 26,27b) So the Old Testament time and again opens as in a flash the perspective of God's victory over death.

2. On purpose we have stood still for a long time at the speaking of the Scriptures about the "immediately" taking up to Christ after death. Answer 57 does not stop there. It opens also, with great emphasis, the view to the day of the whole triumph of Christ over death. It speaks about this in a concrete manner also this my flesh, raised by the power of Christ, shall be reunited with my soul and made like Christ's glorious body. This my flesh: it cannot be said any stronger. The confessor points here as with his finger to his body. Your confession here goes back to what you confessed in Lordsday 18 namely that we have in Christ our flesh in heaven as a pledge that He our Head will also take us, his members, up to Himself. Indeed my flesh will decay when Christ does not return before my death. It decays into the dust of the earth. And still, it is as firm as a rock for my faith, that it will be raised by the power of Christ and made like his glorious body. He, our Saviour went into the grave Himself. He was truly dead. But as God's Spirit raised Him from the grave and clothed Him with the glory of eternal life, so it will be with us. The apostle Paul spoke about this in that comfortable filled resurrection chapter 15 of the first letter to the Corinthians. It shall happen in a moment, at the last trumpet, for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised. (verse 52) What will that be a mighty and triumphant moment. For ages the whole creation has waited for this. It seemed that death and hell had the last word on earth. For ages it seemed that the word of Christ: the meek shall inherit the earth, would not become reality. They were oppressed, these meek people, hauled to the scaffold, insulted and trampled on. Now on the last day, on which no morning will follow, will it be seen: God triumphed over the devil, sin and death. Luther wrote: On that day the devil will give a great scream. He has lost the battle forever. How will it be? The same Luther wrote: then there will knocking on my grave monument and Jesus will say: Dr Martinus, come on out and I will get up and will be forever in joy with the Lord.

Can the resurrection better be shown? God's Spirit will life givingly brush over this earth and raise the dead out of the dust. Ezekiel spoke about this in the thirty-seventh chapter, inspired by the Spirit; And I will put my Spirit within you, says God to his prophet, speaking about the dry bones, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken, and I have done it says the Lord. (verse 14)

Do we have to try to explain in specific details how this great day of the resurrection will be? The apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 cuts off all those inquisitive questions. In verse 35 he cites such a questioner. But some will ask, how are the dead raised? Paul immediately plugs the questioners mouth. You foolish man. But at the same time he shows faith in the way how to think about these things. He shows us how different the level is of this life and the future one. He does that with the speaking image of the seed that perishes in the earth and from which a stalk grew. Listen. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.

And summarizing it all he ends with the words in which lies the whole secret of the resurrection: It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. (verse 42-44)

Answer 57 speaks about the resurrection of the believers. Scripture sometimes speaks of the resurrection of the ungodly. It does this as a warning to us. Indeed, all men will be raised.

Christ shall judge the living and the dead. The books about the lives of all people will be opened. Daniel says at the end of his prophesies: And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake. He shows sharply that there are two types of resurrections. Some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt. What does a word like this push us to Christ. Only in Him God gives us resurrection and eternal life. Who as a modern being lives out of that awful slogan: dead is dead, shall experience that God in his judgement will bring to light the emptiness and foolishness of this saying.

3. Now we come to the last point. The last, twelfth, article of our confession is actually an elaboration of the eleventh. Who believes in the resurrection of the flesh at the same time believes in an everlasting imperishable life. The one includes the other. Answer 58 lays a connection between it "now", and it "after". The everlasting life in out of square in the life here on earth as God created it and through the Holy Spirit re-created. You confess in this answer: Since I now already feel in my heart the beginning of eternal joy, I shall after this life possess perfect blessedness. This binds the joy of now to after. God does not abandon the works of his hands. If He already lets me now feel in this life the eternal joy in my heart, will He not "after" let me have the perfection of joy? The Holy Spirit completes his work by giving me later the perfection of joy in the seeing of God's friendly face.

How will it be there? Shall we recognize each other? Does eternal life contain more than praising and lauding God? Luther said once: We will not have the time to ask Solomon if he wrote the Song of Solomon. He wanted to say with this: we as humans should leave those inquisitive questions alone. Answer 58 cuts off all those questions by saying that later there will be a blessedness such as no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived. It goes above all human measures.

Congregation, John has seen some of this in the visions giving to him by the Holy Spirit on Pathmos. They are wonderful images in which God showed him the coming glory. A new Jerusalem, streets of gold, gates of pearls. God will wipe all the tears from the eyes. What is overshadowing all this: "death shall be no more". There only will be pure overwhelming life. Sun and moon will not be there anymore, for the glory of God illuminates this city and the Lamb is its light. There also sounds a voice: See, I make all things new. And actually, congregation, really: all those who have loved Christ's appearance, will be there, will experience this. All the wronged ones and all those deprived of their rights will receive justice and for eternity all the debt is thrown behind God's back. The gala begins with the wedding dinner with God and with the Lamb. And all the saints who went before us and those who will come after us: they are the guests.

The church patriarch Augustinus said: In eternal life there shall sound into eternity the Amen and Hallelujah. Amen to the finished work of God and of the Lamb. Hallelujah because of the glory of the triune God.

Congregation. The twelve articles are now finished. The glory of the work of God the Father in the creation, of God the Son in the redemption and of God the Holy Spirit in the eternal sanctification of the creation has been shown to you. Who will not say about the work and the glory of this triune God Amen and Hallelujah?

Amen.

Lordsday 23.

Gospel directed straight to you.

Sermon by the late
Dr. R. H. Bremmer,
Enschede, The Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton, Alberta.

Reading: Psalm 32.
Text: Lordsday 23,
Psalm: 130: 1,4
After the law: Psalm 130:2
After the creed: Hymn 29:1
Psalm 32: 1,2,5
Psalm 89: 1
Psalm 103: 4,5.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

A while ago there was a radio program with a name: Direct to you. The meaning of this was a direct and concrete bringing of the message of the gospel. Please no fuss, but straight to the point or to you. Something like that you have here in question 59. The Catechism here comes with the question, which will touch you right away. Listen: what does it help you now that you believe all this? In the old text a real beautiful old dutch word was used many of you may still remember it. There was asked: What does it "baat" profit or benefit you now that you believe all this. Our reformed forefathers like to speak about the benefit of the faith. Really what does the faith give you?

That question, your confession aims to all of you today. It certainly also has in mind the young people here in the church. Perhaps there are some who will do confession of faith. Now, then this is a question you cannot ignore. You have to know the answer to it. What good does it to you, if you believe all this? Why do you do confession of faith? This question touches at the same time all those in our midst who a long or a short time ago have done confession of faith. Certainly you have not forgotten when it was and with which minister you did your confession of faith. The minister of your youth you do not easily forget. Also for you is it of the greatest importance to know why you still hold on to this confession. What good is to you today, in the concrete situation of your life "now", that you believe all this?

Pay especially attention to the words "all this", That is whole lot. It is clear that the Catechism looks backward. Come, it wants to say, we have in all these Lordsday discussed the confession with each other. We began with Lordsday 7, when we asked each other: what is a true faith? Then you answered: that is contained in the 12 articles of the faith. We spoke about God the Father, and of God the Son and of God the Holy Spirit. With God the Father we spoke about our creation by Him. With God the Son we confessed that we have been redeemed by Him. And with the Holy Spirit came to the fore our sanctification and everlasting life. Now the Catechism asks: what does it help you with all this? Well, the answer is, short, powerful, direct:

In Christ I am righteous before God and heir to life everlasting. And in question answer 60 the confession goes into this once more, broader, magisterial. Someone rightly wrote once: Question and answer 60 are a litany, a hymn of praise. Only a few times have the writers of the Catechism indeed reached the level of a hymn of praise. Think about Lordsday 1 about the only comfort: about the Fatherhood of God over his children. It is great, congregation, that we today are discussing this hymn of praise together. Listen attentively. We do this with the theme:

OF WHAT VALUE IS THE RIGHTEOUS MAKING FAITH TO YOU?

We pay attention to three points of view.

1. On a sharp legal demand;
2. A surprising acquittal;
3. The faith that accepts this acquittal.

1. The question what does that faith help you today, certainly fits in these times. That is the first question if you want to get somewhere in this life. Again we think about our young people. You can go and get a college degree. What can do with it? What kind of a job can you get with it? What further education can you get? And what can you do with a highschool education or with an university degree? If you are older and are contemplating to apply for another job, don't you ask yourself: what is in it for me?

Now, here such a question focusses on the faith. What can you do with it? What good is it to you if you do confession of faith? Perhaps you may think: can you ask a question like this? Does not the Catechism go to far? To find an answer to this you have to remember the place where the Catechism asked this question.

We saw in the introduction, that your Catechism is looking backwards. It includes in these words "all this", what you have confessed in the previous Lordsdays. But at the same time it looks ahead. In the Lordsdays, which now follow, your confession deals with the sacraments " one by one ". First they mean in general for you, then what the baptism has to tell you and the Lord's Supper. In the Lordsdays 7 including 22 we have looked through an open door into the palace of God. Soon, in the Lords days about the sacraments, we will see, what treasures are there prepared for us. But before the Catechism goes from one to the other, it halts for a while. It urges us, between the believing in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit to self reflection. Do you account for yourself, it wants to say, about what it is really all about? Is that not necessary once and a while? Don't, the old and the young in our midst of us, have a need for this: to reflect upon what the deepest meaning is of being a christian? Is your life only about getting a degree or a job or to get married?

Now, to this self reflection urges us question 58. Here it is about things which reach so far above degrees and making money,

above a house and above a car. Here it is about on what your life is based on and how you can depend on God's promises in your life and how you can die in peace with God. Actually the confession again asks the question of Lordsday 1. Only it does it now from the point of view of the justification through faith. In that the question about the only comfort is developed deeper for you.

Now, the answer to question 59 does not leave you one moment insecure what you can do with it, that you believe all this.

Is that not a glorious answer: that I, yes surely, me myself, am righteous before God and a heir to eternal life.

What is that a heavy loaded expression: Righteous before God.

In question 60 this expression comes back: How are you righteous before God? And again in question 61: why do you say that you are righteous only by faith? The Catechism in a manner of speaking lifts you to the highest level: before God.

No. not righteous for your own feelings. That level is not to hard to attain. Sometimes we are very happy with ourselves.

We are well-behaved reformed young people of good reformed parents. Sometimes we think we are not doing to badly in this life. But being righteous before God is absolutely not the same as: being righteous for yourself. It is also not the same as being righteous for others. It is not about how your parents think about you, or your colleagues, or your consistery and the minister. That in not at the order today. It is about how God thinks about you. How He, the holy, living God, judges you. In the original Latin text of the Catechism an expression is used, which literally means: how are you righteous before God? And when you ask this question to yourself, how does God see me and how does God judge me, than there is nothing left to camouflage.

Here we think about Isaiah in his calling vision in chapter 6: hears the serafs sing; Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory. Then he said: Woe is me, for I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. He saw the Lord of hosts on his high and holy throne. Whose eyes are like flames of fire and penetrate deep in behind the facade of your life. Before Him nothing is hidden. David says in Psalm 139: O, Lord Thou has searched me and known me. Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up. On that level we stand here with that righteous before God.

Congregation, here we come into a lawsuit with God. That image the Scriptures uses repeatedly to draw our relation to God.

You have to think here about the vision of Zechariah in the third chapter of his prophesy. He saw the high priest Joshua standing before God. He was clothed with filthy clothes. Beside him stood satan. Who pointed out to God the filthy clothes of the high priest, Imagine: that beautiful blue dress of Joshua with that shining efod, that vest with 12 diamonds on the breast plate that hung around his shoulders. And a bright white skirt which he wore under his blue cloak. They are now filthy, full of mud. So saw Zechariah the high priest standing before God. Joshua represented in that the people of God. That stood filthy

with sins before the holy God. So do I and you stand before God. Or is there someone who does not have any mud on the coat of his life?

To that the devil pointed to the filthy clothes of Joshua. Who shall win the lawsuit? I. the devil thinks, I. I accuse Joshua and in him all of God's people. Here he acts like the public prosecutor before God, the Judge of heaven and earth. Look God, what a dirty spots Joshua has on his coat, here is one and there another. Satan is not called for nought the accuser of the brothers, which he accuses by God, day and night.

Does only the devil do this? Is he the only one who accuses us before God? Now read what your confession says in answer 60. It is written here as a fiery accusation. Answer 60 says: My conscience accuses me that I, again that I, have grievously sinned against all God's commandments, have never kept any of them, and I am still inclined to all evil. No, that pointing by the devil to the sins of God's people is not fiction, the devil is not born yesterday. He is one of the most cunning creations of God.

He knows that he cannot come before God with some loose talk.

What also bad is, our conscience is concurring with him.

Congregation, look at the words which we cited out of answer 60. Do they go too far? Do they make it too flagrant? Has your conscience a problem in agreeing with these words? Haven't you sinned against all the commandments of God? No, it is here not about sinning against a single command of God, one here and another there. It is about sinning against all the commands of God, as they are summarized in the love command: love to God and love to the neighbour. Your confession puts the knife in a little deeper. My conscience accuses me that I have not kept any of God's commandments. Don't you get the shivers? And yet this is the truth. Earlier the old reformed people separated sins of action and sins of negligence. Sins of action: that are the sins with which I trespassed all of God's commandments. Sins of negligence are those of not doing God's commandments when I should have done them. They form a shortcoming of my life over against God and the neighbour. What do you make of this in your life: Loving God above everything and your neighbour as yourself? Not one of them kept: is that accusation unjustly? Are the sins of negligence sometimes not heavier than those of action? Does not the confession here rip off your mask of your life?

Perhaps you may think: with me it is not too bad. Yes, in former days, then I have sinned but which I now have conquered.

But now? Do you think this way? Then read on what your confession says about the accusation of your conscience. It puts the words in your mouth: I am still inclined to all evil. Did you think it will go better with you in the future? Also that excuse here is cut off at the root. Your confession here points to Romans 7 verse 23: but in my members I see another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. And then the apostle adds in verse 24: Wretched man that I am. Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Catechism does not say this, but Paul says this, the one on the road to Damascus converted apostle to Christ. Does the Catechism speak here a too heavy a language in this sharp demand? Is it not exactly the same when it says later that also the most holy ones still only have a small beginning of this obedience? Is it also not the same language David speaks in Psalm 51: Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done which was evil in thy sight. Indeed, the devil and conscience, both are accusing us before God. O, what lies in this accusation a warning not to forget your conscience. They are in the church; people who in their own conscience are branded, and who do not care about it. (1 Timothy 4 verse 2) Paul warns Timothy about it. Lord's day 23 has to warn all of us, not to withdraw from this sharp accusation in answer 60. It urges to humiliation.

2. Once more we remember the accusation of the devil out of Zechariah three. What will happen now, now that he points out to God the filthy clothes of Joshua? Now read the continuation of answer 60, that surprising and liberating sequel. After this accusation the answer goes on with the word which is worth its weight in gold, with that simple word "yet". In your minds congregation, underline that word. It is the hinge with which answer 60 makes a complete turn. It wants to say: as all the demands of the devil and of my own conscience are true, "yet" a radical new situation steps in. Because after that word is written: God grants me. God will give his verdict. God has heard the accusation of the devil. He also heard the accusation of my conscience. And instead of condemning us, He sets us free. God gives through the Angel of the Lord, other angels the command: remove the filthy garments from him. And then the Angel of the Lord says: See, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with rich apparel. Is that not surprising? God says: you are free. How is this possible? How can God do this? The continuation of answer 60 will tell you. What God showed in old testament images to Zechariah, now proclaims your confession in new testament language. God give me, it says, the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ. The writers of the catechism choose these words with care. We did not name answer 60 not for nought a litany, a hymn of praise. That you formulate very carefully. It is definitely not a piling up of heavily laden words. God imputes to me the perfect satisfaction of Christ, says this answer. Put that word satisfaction over against: have grievously sinned against all God's commandments from the accusation. And what God do, congregation? He slides over those sins of yours, the bearing of your punishment through his own dear Son on Golgotha. He, Christ, did enough. He did enough to God's righteousness. He covered your sins with his suffering and death. It is not written for nought in Isaiah 53: The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. And He was wounded for our transgressions, upon Him was the chastisement that made us whole. What gives answer 60 a fine image of the finished Assurance of your Saviour. For it does not stop with the satisfaction of Christ. God also gives us his righteousness, says your

confession. We did not keep one of his commandments? We are also sinning in negligence? It is not only about the trespassing of God's commandments but also of not keeping them? Now, because of that answer 60 speaks also of imputing to you of the righteousness of your Saviour. He kept God's commandments. He finished them on the cross. Also there He loved the God and his neighbour. We name that with a word out of the doctrine of faith "immediate obedience", his righteousness in keeping God's commandment. He even prayed on the cross for his murderers. Well says now the Lord, does it bother you, that shortcoming of your life in the negligence of my commandment? Listen: I lay over this the perfect righteousness of my Son. That I give to you and impute to you, just like that, out of free grace.

And still congregation not everything has been said about the assurance of your Saviour. God has still more for you. Indeed, your conscience accuses you because you are inclined to all evil. I know this very well, says the Lord, your good intentions always run into the obstacle of the evil in your heart. I know, says God, how it will be tomorrow and the day after in your life. But listen, I have for you the holiness of Christ, his sinless life on earth. This I lay over the future of your life. I cover this with the holiness of my Son. One more time we see the high priest Joshua standing before God. God had to sweep him away from before his throne because of his filthy garments. The devil had the right to demand this. God did not do this. God let him put on festive garments. Answer 60 says: God does that out of mere grace, without any merit of my own. They are the words which from our Catechism days sound familiar. What do they have a profound meaning. Only out of grace, out of mere grace. Mere, that is pure, refined, without having a trace of own work in it.

Congregation, you have already understood it. Here you are at the heart of the reformation. All their lives long Calvin and Luther have fought for this. Here you are in the midst of the gospel of righteousness of the sinner for nothing. Remember the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. I thank Thee O God, said the Pharisee, that I am not like other people, like that tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give a tenth of my income. That Pharisee was very happy with himself. What did the tax collector say? Only a few words. O, God be merciful to me a sinner. And what did the Saviour add to this? I tell you, this man went down to his house, justified rather than the Pharisee. That is pure grace. As water sometimes is very clear, without any muddiness, so is God clear as glass in his mercy.

How radical God's acquittal is, the last part of answer 60 shows you this. I am through that acquittal of God, which is full of grace, justified, just as if I had never had nor committed any sin, yes, as if I myself had accomplished all the obedience which Christ has rendered for me. Do you hear the joyous shout in these words? Is this not a beautiful effect of that one word "yet" of a while ago? Luther points to Habakkuk 3 verses 17 and 18. There the prophet shows the radical action of that

" yet " which is shown by images of his time. He says:
 Though the figtree do not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the
 produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock
 be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls,
 with other words, even if I was totally broke, "yet" I will rejoice
 in the Lord, I will joy in the Lord of my salvation.

In the middle of this total disaster the prophet praises God.
 So is it also with the justification. Even as we are without
 any earnings, poor and naked, in our guilt before God, "yet"
 you may have joy in the God of your salvation. He gives and
 imputes to you all the security of your Saviour. This answer
 preaches to you of what our fathers called the great exchange,
 in the security of Christ. God takes my black clothes and puts
 them on Christ's shoulders. He takes Christ's spotless white
 garment, his atonement, righteousness and holiness and lays
 them glittering on my shoulders.

What does it help you, question 23 began to ask, that you believe
 all this? Here you have the answer: you are righteous before
 God and out of that flows immediately: and heir to life
 everlasting. Yes certainly, it was a sharp demand with which
 answer 60 began. But it was followed by a surprising acquittal.
 Laud and praise God for this.

3. And so we come to the last point. The acquittal comes to
 you through the gospel, in a very glad tiding. It is the gospel
 of the faith. The end of Lordsday 23 puts emphasis on this.
 The last words of answer 60 say: you receive this gift only
 if accepted with a believing heart. Do you know what believing
 actually is? It is believing in Christ's finished assurance,
 you give your Saviour the hand, because He in the gospel of
 the justification gives you first the hand. He says with this:
 Come along, come along; together we go to God and I cover
 your guilt before Him.

In the beginning of the sermon we saw, that Lordsday 23 looks
 back on the Lordsdays about the 12 articles and looks ahead
 to the Lordsdays about the sacraments, towards baptism and the
 Lords Supper. Soon you will hear about this in Lordsday 26.
 There in your baptism, Christ already took you by the hand.
 The young people in our midst who sooner or later will do
 confession of faith, lay with their "yes" word their hand in
 Christ's hand.

When you come like this with Christ before God, He executes
 the great exchange of which we spoke before. The close of answer
 61 says: I can receive my Saviour, with the satisfaction,
 righteousness, and holiness and make it my own by faith only. What
 is that an eloquent word: making it my own. That is: bringing
 it towards you, make it your possession. You find that word in
 the baptism form. There the church proclaims: that the Holy
 Spirit will impart to us of what we have in Christ, namely,
 the cleansing from our sins and the daily renewal of our lives
 till we shall finally be presented without blemish among the
 assembly of God's elect.

Just a minute, said the the roman catholic contradictors of
 Ursinus and Oliveanus in their time. Just a moment. Are you

coming to agree with us? Is there in that faith of yours not the same merit, which we lay in our good works? Don't you also count with that faith on human achievements? The writers of the Catechism often were blamed for this. Because of that, this last question of Lordsday 23, question 61. There your confession asks: Why do you say that you are righteous only by faith? In that word "only" lies a powerful defence against the reproach those contradictors made. Do you think this, asked Ursinus and Oliveanus here. Do you really think that we made the faith into something deserving? Is it the achievement of man before God the ground on which He acquits us? Certainly not. Am I through the faith acceptable to God? Does He count this for a deserving deed on my part? It does not even look like it. It is only in the way in which I appropriate Christ. Achievements? There is nothing in this. If someone drives his car into the water and he seems to drown, does the man who gives him his hand through the window, take his hat off for the rescued one? Does he have to say: Thank you very much that I let you save me? No such thing. The rescued one thanks, he cannot find words for his thankfulness to his rescuer. That is the way it is here. When God puts out his hand in Christ through the gospel to me, what also can I do but grasp it? What else than letting me be saved by my Saviour through this glorious gospel? Does God have to commend me because of "my" faith? I cannot do anything else than laud and praise Him for his mercy.

In this way the church of Christ is, with this glad message of acquittal and forgiveness, in the midst of this world, in many respects a dirty society. It may in Christ's name, all those who have been dragged along in this society by sin and the ruining of their lives, call to them that there is acquittal and forgiveness by God for those who flee to Him through Christ. That is the message directed straight to you.

What does it help you now that you believe all this? That I in Christ am righteous before God and a heir to life everlasting. That is more than the best degree or the highest paying job. It is your only comfort in life and death. What a fine booklet, this Catechism.

Amen.

Jesus, not my own strenght,
nor the work done by me,
nor the sacrifice I bring,
nor the tears which I shed,
though I cry many nights,
can rescue-Thou alone.

See, I bring for my preservation,
You not any incense, myrrh or gold,
tired I come, poor and naked,
to the God who saves,
who clothes and feeds the poor,
who makes the sinner live.

Translated.

August Montague Toplady.

Lordsday 24,

Proof enough.

Sermon by the late
Dr.R.H.Bremmer,
Enschede, The Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton,
Alberta.

Reading: Matthew 20: 1-16
Text Lordsday 24,
Psalm 149: 1,4,
After the law: Psalm 119: 64,
After the creed: Psalm 148: 1,
Psalm 19: 3,4,
Psalm 34: 9,
Psalm 56: 5.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

You all know the story of the respect paid to our Saviour by the adulteress woman. You find this in Luke 7. The Lord Jesus was a guest of Simon the Pharisee. Then the antithesis between the Lord Jesus and the Pharisees was not that sharply defined, so that this still was possible. Simon proffered a dinner and the Saviour and his disciples went there. Suddenly there is a woman, who in that city was known to be a sinner. She had heard Christ proclaiming the gospel. It had struck her in her heart. Now she comes to pay respect to the Saviour. She had taken with her an alabaster jar filled with myrrh. But when she was close to the Saviour, she was so deeply moved that she started to cry. I think that her whole past stood before her. Her tears flowed over Jesus feet, she dries them with her hair, and anoints Jesus with the myrrh. Homage (respect) paid to Jesus by a sinner. You also know how the Pharisees find fault with this. Scornfully Simon remarked: If this man was a prophet, He would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner. Unimaginable fine the Saviour then reacted with that short parable of the two debtors. The one owed someone 50 denarii and the other 500. The creditor, in a generous whim, forgave them both. The Saviour asked: Simon which of the two would love the creditor the most? Simon could not get out from under. He had to answer: I suppose, he, who he forgave the most. Open handed Simon was not with that " I suppose ". But the difficult admission was made. Grandly the Saviour reacted to this, after having made public Simon's cool conduct. No, the woman did not do so, she came to the fore very differently. But she was forgiven very much. Therefore, said the Saviour, I say to you: her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much.

Congregation now pay close attention. Did the Saviour forgive her her sins because she loved Him very much? Certainly not. Her profession of love was not the ground for Jesus' forgiveness, but the expression of her faith and of her love for Jesus. Her profession of love showed that she had put all hope on Him. She knew that her sins were forgiven and because of that, her spontaneous action.

With this parable we are at the heart of Lordsday 24. The Catechism proves the truth of the previous Lordsday.

There you have confessed that only the faith in Jesus Christ acquits you before God. There was nothing in it from us. Even our faith was only an instrument, a means to take this free grace of the forgiveness. Jesus blood and righteousness, which are my ornaments, and none other, says an old song. And now your confession takes a whole Lordsday to explain this again very thoroughly. The justification through the faith is carried through in this Lordsday 24 to the root of christian life. There is really nothing deserving in my good works, not in my faith, not in my hope and not in my love. Not for a moment is any of this ground for my acquittal. They grow out of it. By emphasizing that in Lordsday 24, the Catechism once more powerfully rejects the whole roman catholic merit doctrine. To us much is forgiven, that we confessed in Lordsday 23. Because of that we love much and absolutely not the reverse. That is Lordsday 24. Today we speak to you about:

THE PROVING OF THE GOSPEL OF THE FREE GRACE.

We see that:

1. with our faith;
2. with our hope;
3. with our love.

1. Lordsday 24 begins with a penetrating question. But why can our good works not be our righteousness before God, or at least part of it? In those two first words lies the penetrating part of this question: but why? But father, listen, a child can sometimes ask. But father, why is that not allowed? The little word "but" is not there for nought. It makes this Lordsday very penetrating. If you read this first question of this Lordsday carefully, you also hear who asked this question. Here the Catechism lets a roman catholic contradictor speak. He may lay his criticism about the Reformation on the table.

Congregation, there is something special in this. A vehement opponent of the Reformation walks into the study and launches this question. You have to remember that in the 16 th century, in which the Catechism was written, the positions between Rome and the Reformation were not consolidated. The discussions about the central questions of sin and grace continued. It speaks well of Ursinus and Olevianus that they did not fear to let themselves be questioned by the roman catholic contradictors. In the question that starts with "but why", also shows a certain impatience. How is this now? asks the contradictor.

Does the christian life style than not at all count before God? Have our good works, and with that our whole christian life is meant, not have any merit before God? What is the reason of the reformed standpoint to exert oneself when God does not attach any merit to it? And if our whole christian life is not deserving to God, perhaps however for a part? It are cardinal matters in our relation with God which are here on the order paper. Do you know what is behind this? Congregation, there is between Rome and the Reformation a profounde difference in the vision on the human being. The roman catholic faith doctrine looks much more optimistic at man than the reformer. In the eyes of the roman catholic church it is not too bad with that fallen man. This is also in the roman catholic church- new style-, the one we have to deal with today. People say that the Catechism is not of much value in these times. It is not timely anymore. Whoever speaks like this is absolutely wrong. This question 62 goes four square against the horizontalism and the fellowship ethics, of which the roman catholic theology new style has been saturated. It hopes for a new society with a new human being who will bring peace to earth. If people are good to one another, we will get another world. This is definitely attainable, believe the roman catholic theologian Schillebeekx and other modern theologians. God's grace ties on to the good that has remained in the human nature. In reality with this point of view the church becomes a social institution that will make mankind better. It is asked, why does the Reformation looks so pessimistic at men?

Our confession lets the contradictor finish speaking. But as soon he is done, it powerfully goes against this. Congregation, look at that answer 62. Because, your confession says, the righteousness which can stand before God's judgment must be absolutely perfect and in complete agreement with the law of God. That is the first argument and the seconds is: whereas even our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled by sin. Your confession definitely does not take the easy way out. The arguments are piling themselves up and the most

important one is in the beginning of this answer. The issue is, says answer 62: which righteousness can stand before God's judgment. You have to pay attention the word "right" that is in it. It is about how we can stand right before God. Here the confession touches on the heart of the difference between Rome and us. A while ago we spoke about Rome's optimistic view of men. The confession here shows that there is also a profound difference between ours and their vision of God. In that lies our greatest difference.

How do we stand over against God? How does God judge us?

On that point the answer of the roman catholic theologians is the same as in the time of the Reformation. As a manner of speaking, they see God as a Notary, God has a weighscale in his hands. In the one scale God throws our sins. In the other Christ's cross earned merit. Alas, according to them this is not sufficient to weigh up against the scale with our sins. Christ's righteousness has to be supplemented with our good works. Rome does not pay attention to the quality of Christ's cross earned merit as being a before God finished work, but on the quantity of it. This is too small. Good works have to be added to this.

If there was someone who has wrestled with these things it was the apostle Paul. He had the same problem with the Pharisees of that time with exactly the same vision of men and God view point. They also saw God as a great Notary who on the one side noted all the good works and on the other side registered our sins. They figured that they could keep God's law out of their own strength.

What had Paul by God's grace a different vision about this, proven to him on the road to Damascus. God's law accuses us, he explains. God's law condemns. God's law discovers us to our guilt. God's law is not only a summing up of loose laws, no it is a fiery law, which demands that perfect love to God and the neighbour. In that law we are in the hands of the holy majestic God. He tests us with that law. In this He confronts us with his own godly holiness. Think about that mighty word

of Paul in Galatians 3 verse 10: Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law and do them.

The apostle means to say: If you want to keep the law, than you keep God's whole law. How does man come out of this confrontation with God's law? Paul answers: All who rely on the works of the law are under a curse. And what does James tell us, who more than any of the other apostles emphasizes the law? He says: For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.(James 2: 10) God's law is a oneness. That is why the righteousness which before God's judgemnt has to exist,has to be in unison with God's law on all points.

Still, congregation, answer 62 is not finished yet. It has more to say. It adds to the previous, that all our best works in this life are imperfect and defiled with sin. Your confession points to the moving word in Isaiah 64 verse 6. There the prophet confesses as the mouth of God: We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment, We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, takes us away. In Isaiah it says literally as a garment polluted with menstruation blood. So are our righteousnesses before God, says Isaiah. You throw them away, they are polluted, they cannot exist before God. But now we have some questions. If God through Isaiah judges so severely about our righteousness, what is then the use to exert oneself for the service of God? We maintain with all our power our christian life style. We resist with all our might the secularization of life. We have build up our own schools and own our own organizations. Does this not have any meaning? Is it not said in Luke 1 that Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous before God and lived blamelessly according to all the commandments of God?(Luke 1:6)

Does it have any merit? Sure, congregation, but never as a ground to come, because of that, in the clear before God. Could David lean on a lifelong service of God, when he sinned with Bathseba?

He had moved the ark of the Lord to the mount Sion. He had accumulated treasures for the building of the house of the Lord, so that later Solomon could build the temple. Do you know what he sang, when he had confessed his trespass before God? Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. (Psalm 51: 7) And then not to forget the the seventeenth verse: The sacrifice acceptable to God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God thou wilt not despise.

On what did Zechariah lean when he was hit with dumbness because of his unbelief after the message of Gabriel that to Elizabeth a son would be born? Did he lean on his blameless life as priest before God? He confessed his unbelief and took his refuge in God's mercy and spoke gloriously about it. In his hymn of praise he said that God brought his people salvation and remembered his mercy.

So the radical answer 64 pushes you to the only righteousness which can exist before God: The one from Jesus Christ. He alone is your righteousness before God. In Him you can take your refuge. This Lordsday 24 maintains that you are righteous before God only through faith. From that alone, out of the faith in Jesus Christ and his finished work, blooms your christian life. It can never be the ground to be able to exist before God. It lays over your life the shine and glow of the forgiveness of sins. As the Saviour says to the sinner in the house of Simon: her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. When we live like this out of the forgiveness of sins the tightness out of your life will go away. How is it that our christian life so often is stiff and without joy? Does this not find its cause in this, that it does not bloom out of the faith in the acquittal of our guilt for Christ's sake? Does not lay in this the proof of the truth of the life out of the justification?

2. Meanwhile: the contradictor throws again an argument at the church of the reformation only to combat the justification out

of faith. He again poses a question. Again he starts with that word "but". But have our good works than no merit? God will reward them in this and also in the future life? Listen now, I have the Bible on my side. Which proves that God rewards our good works. That you can read in many places in the Bible. Certainly, it looks like he is right. Read Genesis 15. God says to Abraham: Fear not, Abram, I am your God; your reward shall be very great. Can one imagine a greater reward? Take Psalm 19: 11 : in keeping God's commandments there is a great reward. And hear Christ say at the end of Revelations say: Behold, I am coming soon bringing my recompense, to repay everyone for what he has done. (Revelations 22: 12) Now, the contradictor says: where there is a reward, there is also deserving? In earthly business you get your salary, when you have worked a month. Is it not like that in the kingdom of heaven?

How does the Catechism counter this contradictor? Congregation, read answer 63. That has been very carefully formulated. Our reward, it says, is not earned; it is a gift of grace. Actually at first sight this is strange. The expression "out of grace" means to say, that there is no work involved at all. Out of grace means "for nothing". Yes, that is what it means and this answer would be strange, if we had to live with an iron wage law as in economic life. But here you are in the kingdom of heaven and there things happen not according to iron laws. Sometimes it seems very strange in our eyes, but not in the eye of God. And God wants that we see these things through his eyes. The Lord Jesus helps us with this in the parable in Luke 17. He says to his disciples : when a slave comes in from the field where he for his lord has plowed or herded sheep all day, does the lord say to the slave: come at once and sit down at the table? You have worked all day, now you have earned that you and me can have dinner together? No, he says to the slave, now you have to serve me and take care of my food and drink and after this it is your turn. When the slave has served his lord, does the lord thank him, because he did what he was

commanded to do? Everyone who heard this answered to himself: of course not. That was the way workrelations were in those days. A slave did not earn anything. His master had bought him with all his work power. The lord had in the relationship of those days, not one single reason to say thank you. That slave simply did what he was commanded to do. Did not his lord buy him for that? He was an useless servant. That word "useless" you should not take in the way that his lord was not getting any "use" out of him. The parable shows us, that he does what his lord commands him to do, even if he figured that he was all done. The South African translation here hits the bulls eye. It translates with: Us is only a slave and us do not earn anything. And that is the way it is with us. When we do what the Lord who has bought us with his blood, commands us, we do not have a single reason to be proud of ourselves. We are than only useless slaves of the Lord. Us do not earn anything. When we, as this slave, put out for this Lord, we do only that for what he has bought and paid for us. And when He then rewards us, with no less than everlasting life, - what a fantastic salary -, there are no earnings in this.

Congregation, we cannot refrain to let you hear another parable of the Saviour, in which He illustrates this grace reward to us. I think about the remarkable parable from Matthew 20, which we have read together. The explainers quite often have difficulty with it. But if we quietly contemplate it, it contains a penetrating gospel proclamation. It again is about a lord, now "one" who hired laborers to work for him for a denarius a day. They went to work early in the morning in his vineyard. The lord however did not have enough laborers. He needed more. So he hired some more at the third hour, - nine o'clock in the morning, and at the sixth hour, - at twelve noon, and even at the eleventh hour, - five o'clock in the afternoon, he hired some to work in his vineyard. When the day had passed, the lord called all the laborers together and paid them all one denarius. The laborers of the first hour became mad. We can understand this very well. They cried: we have borne the scorching heat

and we get only one denarius and those boys, who started to work at the eleventh hour, they also received a denarius. They figured this to be unfair. And again: we are tempted to agree with them.

Congregation, read this parable carefully. There are some peculiarities which we should not forget. The Lord took great care when He constructed this parable. In the first place you have to realize, that he only with the laborers of the first hour had made an agreement about the wages. He hired them for a denarius a day. With the others the lord agreed to pay them a fair amount. In the second place you must be aware that the lord paid the workers of the first hour last. That he did on purpose. They had seen what the others received. With that he put them to the test. He wanted to find out what made these laborers tick. Were they only wage slaves? Was it for them only for the money? Or did they have heart for the lord and they liked to work for him? They were caught. For them it was only for the money and nothing else. Now the lord pays them. They get the denarius for which they were hired and regally he now said: Take what belongs to you, and go: I choose to give the last as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?

Congregation, what kind of laborers are we in this parable? Workers of the first hour? Sometimes it looks like that. How do we judge sometimes about other christians? Do we realize sufficiently that it is grace to work in the vineyard of the master like the workers of the first hour? But let us not complain as the Lord and now with a capital L, gets more workers at the eleventh hour. Do we know how it will be in God's kingdom and who knows how many more the Master will go and get? Shortly before this parable in chapter 19 verse 30, Christ says: But many that are first will be last, and the last first. God sets our salary and He does it out of free grace. This parable shows us that.

Sometimes the last are rewarded more than the first. One more

thing. The reward with God gives out of grace, in not small. You have to do with a generous heavenly Father. Question 63 explains that God will reward us in this and in the future life. Christ speaks in the sermon on the mount even of a great reward in heaven. (Matthew 5: 12) Our forefathers spoke of degrees of glory. God does not reward everyone equally in the everlasting life, but that does not take away from the perfection of the heavenly glory. Someone expressed it this way: the glasses from which new wine is drank, are not all of the same size. But they are all filled to the rim.

So Lordsday 24 gives, also in the reward that is in view for us, enough proof. It is a reward of grace and our christian hope aims to the glory which is in view for us and given out of grace.

3. The contradictor has just about been silenced. But yet he has one more question. He asks: Does this teaching not make people careless and wicked? Your confession here answers with definite "no". For it is impossible, it argues that "no", that those grafted in Christ by true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.

You can feel the trembling of the indignation in this answer. Imagine: would the teaching of God's free and sovereign grace make godless people? Careless people? The Catechism does not say, that there are no such people in the church. An explainer of the Catechism from earlier times even wrote: there are lots of them. It scares you and you hope very much that this is not the case here with us. But in any case: that does not come out of this evangelical teaching. Indeed, once and a while you meet them in the church, people you not have a single worry about their eternal salvation. They should realize the sharp question of Paul: Are we to continue in sin so that grace may abound? (Romans 5: 1) We hope that each one of you will say to that a whole-hearted no. You confess here, that it is impossible that such teaching makes such people. That is not an

impossibility in the naturalness sense as, it is impossible that a stone falls upward. It is impossible seen out from God and out from the finished work of your Saviour. Do not those who are grafted into Him, bring forth fruits of thankfulness? Who in Christ as the true vine is grafted into it, brings forth out of his power, fruits, even many fruits. Think again about the woman who was a sinner. Her sins which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. Or to use an example: when someone drills for water in the desert and hits a waterlode, the water will spout out of it. Just like that. He touched a waterlode. Drill your pump into Christ. Who loves his Saviour heartely shall devote his life to Him. He says in John 15 in the parable of the true vine: for apart from Me, you can do nothing. So your confession in Lordsday 24 has delivered enough proof of Lordsday 23. The contradictor's mouth has definitely been shut. The Catechism continues cheerfully in Lordsday 25 by speaking about the means of grace, about Word and sacrament. The grace, free and sovereign, is safe. Out of the power of Christ's finished work and of God's free grace. Proof enough.

Amen.

Lordsday 25

The Holy Spirit works with means.

Sermon by the late
Dr.R.H.Bremmer
Enschede, The Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton,
Alberta.

Reading: Mark 7: 24-37
Text: Lordsday 25,
Psalm 106: 23,24.
After the law: Psalm 105: 15,
After the creed: Psalm 111: 1,
Psalm 127: 1,3,6,
Psalm 107: 1,
Hymn 65: 1,3

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

We just read in Mark 7 how the Saviour healed a deaf-mute man. His friends and relations brought him to Jesus so that He would lay his hands on him and heal him. What did Christ do then? First He put his fingers into his ears. Then He spat on his fingers and touched his tongue. After that the Saviour sighed and looked up to heaven. Then He spoke the word Eph-phatha an aramic word that means: Be opened. Mark tells of the effect: And his ears were opened, his tongue was released and he spoke plainly.

Why did the Saviour sigh? Some explain it this way: Christ sighed because He was very impressed by the suffering of this man. In a time when there were no means to help a deaf-mute, such a person was shut out from the outside world. Certainly Christ was moved about the fate of this man. Yet we are sure that the reason for this sighing has to be explained differently. Here your Saviour works by the way of means. He put his fingers in the ears of the man. That meant, man I will open your ears. Then the Saviour touched his tongue. That was meant to say, man I will give you back your speech. After that the Saviour looked up to heaven. At the same time He sighed.

What else could this be than that He prayed for this man to the Father? In that prayer Christ took this man with Him to God. He could not hear. But he could see. He saw the sighing and labouring chest of the Saviour. He also saw how He looked up to God. After that the Saviour spoke that regal word: Eph-phatha. Be opened. That did not only have meaning to the ears and mouth of the deaf-mute. It had meaning for this whole man. Through this power word Christ opened him for God and for the gospel, that He proclaimed.

Of course: Christ could have opened him without means by his Word. He did not do this. He went via the way of means. So He thrust through to his heart.

Congregation, today God works still works like this. He wants to reach your and my heart in the way of means. That is what it is all about in the following Lordsdays; about Word and sacraments. So also reads the heading above this Lordsday 25. Our forefathers spoke therefore about Word and sacraments as means of grace. God reaches us with the message of the gospel

through the gate of the ear. He does this also with the sacraments through the gate of the eye.

And so the Holy Spirit pushes through into our hearts by the way of the preaching and the sacraments. The Holy Spirit does not despise the way of the means. On the contrary: only in this way He wants to reach our hearts. And about that speaks Lordsday 25. Our theme for today is:

THE HOLY SPIRIT DOES NOT DESPISE THE WAY OF THE MEANS.

1. That is why the sermon;
2. That is why the sacraments;
3. That is why the concentration on baptism and holy supper.

1. Congregation, the Catechism with question 65 looks back and it looks ahead. The question is: Since then faith alone makes us share in Christ and all his benefits, where does this faith come from? Your confession clearly looks back with this question. It asks: where does this faith, as we have confessed in the previous Lordsdays, come from? Pay attention to the word "alone" The faith alone makes us share in Christ and all his benefits. That the Catechism confessed with all its power in the Lordsdays 23 and 24. We are only justified through the faith in Christ. But then the question becomes more ardent, where does this faith come from? Now it is certain that faith alone shares us in Christ, but how do we get this faith? That is a question of life and death. No, it is definitely not a theoretical question, like, where does coal come from or something like that. Our whole human being before God is involved in this answer to that question. How do you get the faith, through which you come clean with God, through which your sins are forgiven? It is a very exciting question and we look therefore ahead: to the answer that is of the greatest importance for whole our life.

Now, the Catechism does not leave you uncertain. It answers From the Holy Spirit, who works it in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel. There is something joyful in this answer. The Holy Spirit works the faith in our hearts through the holy gospel. That repeated word "holy" proclaims that God is here at work. Faith just does not bubble up from ourselves. It is not a product of ours. God the Holy Spirit goes to work here in the preaching of the gospel. The Catechism does show you only the gospel. No, it speaks emphatically of the preaching of the gospel. That is none other than the Sunday sermon, the partaking of the godly Word? Through that sermon, that quite common Sunday sermon, the Holy Spirit works in my heart. That sermon on Sunday is a matter of vital importance. Perhaps some may think: Is it only the Catechism. That is how they looked at it already ages ago. Is that Sunday sermon still that important? Do you have to go to church every Sunday to receive that faith? Congregation, good we agree with you, that is what the Catechism says here. But does it contrive this answer? Does it not repeat powerfully the Bible itself? Read the Scriptures.

We take you along to the first Pentacost day, to what Acts 2 tells us about the work of the Holy Spirit. If you ever saw the Holy Spirit in action, it is there. You know how mighty his action was. Think about the Pentacost signs. The diciples heard a sound of a mighty rushing wind. They saw tongues as of fire, resting on each one of them. On all those men and women together in a room of the templecomplex. It were the signs that the Holy Spirit was present among them.

And take another look, how He works there. The apostles go out into the streets and proclaimed to all in their own language the great works of God. They preached there the gospel to use the words of answer 65.

Yes surely, Peter, in the midst of those feasting Jews, delivers a sermon, a quite common sermon, and a long one. He preached that Christ Himself has poured out in what they see and hear there. He calls his hearers to faith and conversion. He opens for them the Scriptures of the Old Testament: the prophesies of Joel were opened and Psalm 16 was applied. And his sermon had a great effect. Luke said: on that day three thousand were added to the congregation. How? Only through that sermon of Peter. It did not happen in an exceptional manner, really only through that sermon of Peter. That whole glorious book of the Acts is full of the activity of the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel. Read Acts 16 where Luke tells us how Paul arrives in Philippi, the first city in Europe. There the heart of Lydia was opened so that she paid attention to what Paul said to her. (Acts 16:14) When Paul looks back in Romans 10 on his experience as preacher of the gospel, he writes in verse 17: So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ. No, it is certainly not only the Catechism which lets the faith work through the gospel. All the Scriptures of the New Testament are full of it.

Perhaps you may be a little surprised. Perhaps you think: but does the Holy Spirit really work only through the gospel the faith in my heart? Could God not do this in a different way? Could God the Holy Spirit not work the faith in our hearts immediatly? The Holy Spirit is God and God is powerful so that people without the gospel, outside the gospel, can be saved. Certainly, congregation, God can do this. Think about the little children, who die without ever having heard the word of the preaching. There are also people, because they hardly have any brains, who cannot understand a sermon. Only: that are exceptional cases. Here it is not about what God can do, but about the question how God normally deals with people who can hear and understand those sermons. The Bible shows us that: God works the faith in our hearts through the preaching of the gospel.

Is this not a great wonder, congregation, of which we speak? The mighty and holy God, who the things which are not, calls as if they were. Who spoke: Let there be light and there was light, who locked up the sea in her treasurerrooms, that God binds Himself to that very common means of the preached word.

Is it not amazingly great what God does here? He puts a plain common man on the pulpit with a common human voice.

He lets that man preach his glad tiding of forgiveness and atonement. There God binds you and me to this. So He works the faith.

Everything becomes so precise. God the Holy Spirit works the faith in our hearts, says answer 65. It does not say: in our brain. That is not to say that the faith goes on outside of our brain. You have to use your brains when believing. But believing is not only a matter of brains. The gospel definitely is not only a piece of doctrine, a theoretical explanation. It touches our heart, that is the deepest of yourself. I am by the gospel drawn in with my whole existence. My heart by nature is shut for the gospel. Of myself I do not want to know of God and his gospel. But now God comes to you with that simple means of the preached word. With that He breaks open that unruly heart of yours. He lets it be preached to you: the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour. Gospel means: Glad tiding and the whole Bible is full of that glad tiding of Christ. The Old Testament speaks about Him from the mother promise in Genesis 3 verse 15 to the last words of the prophet Malachi. In the New Testament you are informed about Him from the first page to the last. The Bible is a faithbook. It is full of Jesus Christ and of the glad tiding about Him.

Every word in that fine answer 65 is of great importance. It says: God works the faith in our hearts. Especially in the time of the Liberation attention is paid to "works" not "wake up". There has been a time, that people explained the word works in the sense of waking up. Then it was seen as this: the Holy Spirit first works in our hearts a seed of faith, a beginning of faith. That seed, that beginning, was already placed in our hearts before, through the Holy Spirit outside the means of the Word. Later on the preaching is added. In this way the Holy Spirit would, through the stimulation of that seed to a full-grown faith, work the faith in my heart. Congregation, answer 65 does not say a word about this. The Holy Spirit does not use the preaching to raise something that is already in your heart. Certainly not. Through the gospel He breaks open your heart. Notice that answer 65 clearly speaks in the present tense: God works here and now, through the preaching, the faith in your heart. Is not your faith often tempted by the devil? Is it not often weak and sometimes without courage? Now, especially in these times it is of great importance to go to church, to listen to the preaching. Open your ears during the preaching. Listen to the glad tiding of the gospel. In this way the Holy Spirit does his glorious work in your heart. During the preaching He is continually working to bind Christ, the Saviour on your heart. Like this He gives you his precious benefits of forgiveness of sins and everlasting life. Are you not allowed to criticize the sermon? Sometimes the sermon is quite long. Congregation, God does not put angels on the pulpit. A minister can be wrong in his sermon. He is not always in splendid form. But one thing the servants of the Word have seen, and that they announce to you in the instruction of their

Sender. They have seen that God forgives sins out of grace and renews your life through the Holy Spirit. That shines in their eyes and gives them ardour and strenght to preach the gospel from Sunday to Sunday. No, they do not grab a sermon out of the air. They study hard on it, every week again. They ladle the water of life out of that only spring: God's holy Word and with that they bless you as congregation.

Let the churchservice sometimes be long. How much time do you spend in front of your television when something is shown that is interesting to you? Does another complain about the strange words in the sermon? How many strange words don't we use in games and sport, in the economy and engineering? Does sometimes the sermon fall short? Is there no bread of life in it for the coming week? The Lord Jesus said after He has spoken the parable of the sower: He who has ears to hear, let him hear. (Luke 8:8) That is what matters to you. How do you listen? What do you want out of the sermon? Where are your thoughts? With your business, or with your girlfriend or with your hobby? Are you listening intently when the glad tiding is preached to you? One more time we take a look to that answer to the question where does faith come from? Does this make a person careless? Are those christians right who say: The Holy Spirit has to do it and because of that I am waiting till I receive a sign that God has begun his work in me? No way congregation. You cannot separate the first part of answer 65 from the second part. Sure, faith is a gift and it comes from above. We saw that God the Holy Spirit does not despise the means. It matters that you arrange yourself under the proclamation of the holy gospel. You know that perhaps becoming old fashioned word: salvation desire? Don't loose this out of your vocabulary. It describes exactly how we should arrange ourselves under the proclamation of the Word. Perhaps it cannot be better described than with the words from Psalm 130: 5 : I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope. When you go to church like that, the Lord surely will not withhold his word to you.

2. Up to now we have left the end of answer 65 out of contemplation. The Holy Spirit works in our hearts, says this answer, but He also strenghtens it. He does that with the use of the sacraments. There you are. The Holy Spirit has more than one arrow to touch your heart. Every week He encourages our weak faith also with the preaching. Luckily He does not leave it with this. He even has special means to strenghten that faith. That is why the question: What are sacraments? Ha, perhaps you may think: there you have another abstract question. Good for the catechumen some may think among you, but not for me in the worries and temptations in my life. What do you think, congegation? Is such a question on the same level as the question: what is an atom, or what is a crystal? Certainly not.

The answer shows you something different. With this question about the sacraments it is again about the gospel. God gives us, says the second part of answer 66, through the sacraments the promise to better understand the promise of the gospel. Through that He seals the promise. God knows you inside out.

Our whole being-human is open for Him. Article 33 of the Belgic Confession says: He is mindful of our insensitivity and infirmity of our faith. Think about Psalm 139 verse 1: O. Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me. Your heavenly Father knows how doubt and unbelief attack us. He also knows how the devil lays snares for us. That is why He as our "gracious God", says article 33 a moment ago, has instituted the sacraments. What has the Belgic Confession this clearly formulated.

Congregation, you can best understand the answer to the question what sacraments are, as you notice the difference between Word and sacrament. With the preaching of the Word it is about hearing. With that you open your ears. God the Holy Spirit pushes through to your heart through the gate of the ear. With the sacraments the Holy Spirit especially uses the eye. He penetrates with that your heart through the gate of the eye. So the Holy Spirit occupies us wholly with the giving of the salvation. You are there, when the Holy Spirit works in you through the sacraments.

We will try to show you this by way of an example. Remember the celebration of the holy supper. What is there a lot to see in this celebration. The table of the Lord is than in the centre of the congregation. A pure white tablecloth is spread over it. In the centre of it, there is the platter with the strips of bread. Around it the pitcher and the cups. Now come the guests and set themselves at the table. There they sit around the table. All those men and women who expect their salvation in Christ's death on the cross. They are all totally different, but they all expect it from one Saviour and from the only sacrifice of his body and blood. Now the minister takes the bread. Before your eyes he breaks this into pieces. He says: Remember and believe that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was broken for the complete forgiveness of our sins. He lifts up the pitcher and lets the red wine flow into the cup. He says: Remember and believe that the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was poured out for the complete forgiveness of our sins. We sing a psalm: I love the Lord, the fount of life and grace, He heard my voice, my cry and supplication, inclined his ear, gave strength and consolation, in life, in death my heart will seek His face..... So the Lord God lays in his great mercy the promise of the gospel in the sacrament of the holy supper on our hearts. And now look at the first sacrament: the holy baptism. In front of the church sit a father and a mother with a child. There is tension in the church and tension with the parents. The congregation wants to see. There is something going to happen at the baptismal font. The parents stand up. They answer the questions which the minister of the Word asks. The father or the mother carry the child to the baptismal font. The minister sprinkles the water on the little forehead of the child. He speaks the baptism formula which makes this child a possession of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The congregation sings: He will remember and uphold His covenant made in days of old..... Here God the Holy Spirit is working. It is making visible God's covenant grace.

Congregation, don't you have a reason to thank the Father of light that He through his grace brings the sacraments so close to you? Did He not make his promise, that He us, for the sake of the only sacrifice of Christ, finished at the cross, forgiveness of sins and giving everlasting life, for us visible and tangible? Do you now understand, why the confession speaks about the sacraments as holy visible signs and seals? God affixes in the sacraments his royal grandseal to the promise of the gospel.

Indeed, God meets us with this our insentivity and weakness of our faith. Don't we have need for this? Take Abraham, the father of all believers. If there was one man really great and strong in the faith, it was Abraham. Not for nought he is called father of all believers. When God promised him a son as his heir, God took him outside and said: Look toward heaven and number the stars, if you are able to number them. So shall your descendants be. (Genesis 15 verse 5)

Even as Abraham needed a sign, that God would give him a numerous issue, don't we have the need for such a sign?

Think, congregation, about the battle of Israel against Amelek in Exodus 17. High above the plain, on which the battle of Israel against Amelek seesawed, the figure of Moses was outlined, who lifted up his staff high to heaven. Did the Israelites not see the staff, their courage failed and it seemed they would lose the battle. If the staff rose, than they knew: there is being prayed for us and they took courage. So their faith in the battle was strenghtened by the sign God gave them.

So continues God's congregation its way in the new covenant, strengthened by Word and sacrament. What is the weekly meeting of the congregation, in which the Word is preached and the sacraments used, now a central part in your life. In our christian way of life we cannot do without it. Again you are here at the heart of the Reformation. Gospel, baptism and the holy supper: more you do not need for your salvation.

God the Holy Spirit does not despise the means. Should we not really appreciate them?

Now the questions about the origin of the faith and about the sacraments have been answered, the questioner still has a crucial question: question 67. To understand this you have to think about the roman catholic past of the questioner. He grew up in a church, in which the sacrament was more important than the Word. In the Sunday service of the roman catholic church the celebration of the mass is the central point. The sermon plays in this celebration a minor role. With Rome it is about the sacrament and the eucharist, the repeat of the sacrifice of Christ on the altar of the church.

The questioner in question 67 is certainly not stupid. He has listened closely and wants to check everything again. He asks: Are both the Word and sacraments then intended to focus our faith on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as the only ground of our salvation? He means: If I have understood it correctly; Is it in the Word and the sacraments both only about Christ, like He in one time, definitive, has been sacrificed for us on Golgotha? Is in the gospel and in the sacraments both

only the sacrifice of our Saviour central? Is that every reason gone to give the mass the central place, which it had up to now? Certainly, answers your confession. Only Christ's sacrifice is central in both, for the Holy Spirit teaches us in the gospel and seals to us with the sacraments, that our complete salvation rests in the the only sacrifice of Christ, that was made for us on the cross. To an intelligent person, congregation, half a word is sufficient. That is valid here. Not the sacrament comes first, says the answer, but the gospel. That teaches us that Christ's sacrifice is the ground for our salvation. The sacrament follows. It seals to us that the ground of our salvation lies in Christ's cross.

Is this not impressive? Through the ages Word and sacraments point as with a finger to the cross on Golgotha. Both say: that is where you have to go. There, on that hill of the cross, your salvation has been obtained. There the blood flowed that both Word and sacrament lay on your heart, as the only ground of your salvation. There is no other ground.

3. Now the last question and answer of this rich in content Lordsday 25. It seems to be a very simple question. How many sacraments has Christ instituted in the new covenant? I think you can dream the answer: Two: holy baptism and the holy supper.

There is a hidden piece of polemic in this end question. Rome has seven sacraments. Beside baptism and holy supper there are the confession, the ordination, the confirmation, the extreme unction, and marriage. The Reformation shoved five of these seven sacraments aside. They had a powerful argument for this. That already is shown in the question. How many sacraments has Christ instituted in the new covenant? You can point to where Christ has instituted the baptism, says the Reformed Church: in the baptism command in Matthew 28 verse 19. The same goes for the holy supper : Christ says in Luke 22 verse 19: Do this in remembrance of me. That cannot be said about those other five sacraments of Rome.

How closely ties our Saviour this to the old covenant. The bloody sacrament of the circumcision became through Him the bloodless sacrament of baptism. So ties the bloodless sacrament of the holy supper to the bloody Easter lamb. The two sacraments feed us in God's family. Baptism incorporates us into it. In all four, in the circumcision and baptism, in Easter and holy supper the precious blood of our Saviour is central.

We hope that you through this Lordsday 25 are yearning to hear more about baptism and the holy supper. This desire will be fulfilled in the coming Sundays. Thank God the Holy Spirit that He did not despise the means. Use them diligently in these grim times of unbelief and the obscuration of God. They bear the only comfort in life and death through ear and eye to your heart.

Congregation, what more do you want?

Amen.

Lordsday 26

Baptized in Christ.

Sermon by the late
Dr. R. H. Bremmer,
Enschede, The Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton,
Alberta..

Reading: Titus 2: 3-7
Text: Lordsday 26,
Psalm 81: 1,9
After the law: Psalm 119: 42.
After the creed: Hymn : unknown,
Psalm 71: 1,7,8,9,
Psalm 105: 15,
Hymn 40: 2.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

There must be some among you interested in genealogy. Genealogy: That is the tracing of your ancestry. Who your grandfather was and your grandmother, and your great-grand parents and if possible even further back. There is something fascinating in this. A person is not a loose individual, not a person on his own. You are in line with your ancestors. And it enriches your life when you know who your ancestors were. Who is busy with this, also becomes involved in the baptism-registers of God's church. Especially when you are looking for your ancestors prior to the French time (occupation) then you have depend on those old baptism registers. They are in the safes of our archives. When you get one of those baptism registers in your hands you look at them with reverence and amazement. There the ministers of the Word, from the earlier times, wrote down the names of the children they had baptized. With that beautiful old handwriting they recorded in those books: John the son of Egbert Jansz (son of Jan), or Alice daughter of so and so. Born on this date and quite often baptized a few days later. So the generations continue. Many of you may have a family-bible, in which family registers are printed, which your father and grandfather filled in and which now you fill in and carefully preserve. That shows how important the baptism is in the life of a human being. Baptism incorporates you into the congregation of Christ. He governs the ground situation of us being human. We are baptized christians. When someone in later life comes to Christ, then he desires the baptism as soon as he or she becomes a believer. Baptism binds us to the triune God, in whose name we are baptized. That is why our ancestors really took good care of those baptism registers. They were a tangible and visible document of their belonging to Christ's congregation and of their incorporation in God's covenant. What is baptism, of a child or of a grown-up, a cheerfull thing in the church of God. Well now, about this baptism speaks Lordsday 26 to you today. Lordsday 25 spoke with us in general about the sacraments, baptism and the holy supper. It showed us how the Holy Spirit strenghtens the faith in our hearts through these two sacraments.

In the now following Lordsdays the confession explains to you what each of these sacraments, baptism and the holy supper, mean to us. And just as in Lordsday 25 the cross of Christ is also central in Lordsday 26. He instituted baptism and of Him and our baptism this Lordsday speaks to us. Therefore we speak to you about

CHRIST AND OUR BAPTISM.

1. Through baptism we are washed in Christ's blood;
2. Through baptism we are sanctified through his Spirit;
3. Through baptism our faith is founded on his promises.

1. A real Catechism question, this question 69, congregation. Again it is directed straight at you. That is how the writers meant it to be. How are you, boy or girl here in this church, signified and sealed that the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross benefits you? We also could say: what good does it to you what does it mean to you?

The congregation of Christ bends itself over to the young people with this question. It confronts them directly with this question. Stop for a minute, it wants to say, with your schoolwork. I know that are very busy with it, with all those exams. And stop with the work on your motorcycle or car to get them ready for the holidays. Listen for a while. I want to talk to you about your baptism. Do not say: I don't have the time for it. You have to make time for it. For you it is of the utmost importance. And don't let the older members in the church think: O, what comes now is for the young folk, that is of no interest to me. It is of importance to you as well as the young. For believe it: you never will be finished looking at your baptism and never will be able to learn enough about it. Our Belgic Confession says in article 13 that we are pupils of Christ. We are all this and will remain so during our whole life. About the baptism you will never be finished learning about it. You have a few minutes ago, when we read Lordsday 26, realized what important matters are here on the order paper? The most central point of your life is here to be discussed. What brings your confession this to the fore in a powerfull way in question 69. The question says: You have a Saviour and He died for you on that hard cross on Golgotha. You know how much effort this was for Him. How does the baptism lay this close to your heart? How does it teach, how does it admonish you about it? No, you cannot get out from under. He pushes you, to put it plainly, with your nose on it. And not only that: He also assures this to you. in your baptism He puts a firm foundation under your life, on which you can rely in life and death. Once again the question is now: How does your baptism do this? How can benefit by it, spiritually benefit?

Pay attention to the answer, congregation. Also in this your Saviour is central. He is the subject of that first long sentence. Answer 69 says, Christ instituted this outward washing

of the baptism. People did not invent this.

This comes from Him. And not only that. He also added promises to it. I have been washed with his blood and Spirit of all my sins, as surely as water washes me of the dirt of my body.

With this you are already at the heart of the matter. When a child is baptized or when a grown up kneels at the baptismal font, this is not a solemn ceremony organised by the church. No way. Your Saviour is behind this. He has thought this out and instituted for his new testament church.

What has your Saviour kept close ties with the Old Testament. He knew the Scriptures by heart and He shows this. The whole Old Testament is full of washing and cleaning. When you really think about this, the profound meaning of the baptism lights up for you more and more. Water washes and it is in the holy land of great importance. It was and still is scarce. Still man cannot do without it. Especially when the eastwind from the desert started to blow, everything became dusty and was covered with desert sand. Wonderful if you could wash yourself with fresh water. The Lord has used repeatedly that cleansing and refreshing power of water in the Old Testament to show us the cleansing power of the sacrificial blood and of the Spirit. Think about that large copper wash basin that was in the court of the tabernacle. Aaron and his sons had to wash their hand and feet in it before they did service in the tent of meeting, lest they die. (Exodus 30: 21) So necessary was the cleansing power of water. A leper, who was cured of his sickness had to go to the priest and wash his clothes and bathe his body in water and then he was clean. (Leviticus 14 :9)

God the Lord is a great Pedagogue, also in the lawgiving to his people. With us water is so common. you open the tap and it streams out. When water is precious as it was in Israel, such washings have an important meaning. The Holy Spirit inspired psalmists and prophets to use that cleansing and washing power of water in their preaching. David prays to God: wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. (Psalm 51: 7) and he asks this tying it to his prayer : and blot out all my iniquities. (11B) The prophet Ezekiel proclaimed to Israel, after it had dirtied itself for years with the service of idols, the promise: And I will bring you to your own land, I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall become clean from all your uncleannesses and from all your all idols I will cleanse you. (Ez 36:24) The prophet Zechariah proclaims to the people, that still sighs under the sins committed by their forefathers prior to the exile: On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness. (Zechariah 13 verse 1) A fountain, a spring says Zechariah not a small little tap. No, a stream of cleansing and sanctifying water shall flow over Jerusalem. How much must these promise have meant to Israel.

So the Lord used the image of running water already in the Old Testament, to picture the washing away of guilt and sin.

In the New Testament it is no less. See John the Baptist standing in the water of the Jordan. He is standing in it up to his waist. From all sides the inhabitants of the Jerusalem and Judeah come

to him. They have heard his preaching and now they let themselves be baptized by him in the Jordan. They let their sins be washed away by that Jordan water.

Now it had become the custom in Israel, that when heathens wanted to join the Jewish people, they not only had to be circumcised, they also had to be baptized, the so called proselyte baptism. That totally cleansed them from their paganism, washed away that heathendom.

Congregation. Now what did John the Baptist do? He did not wash the heathens from heathendom. No, he called Israel to be baptized. You can believe the Pharisees were gnashing their teeth when they saw this. Imagine, they, the teachers of the law, to let themselves be baptized? They figured that is good for the heathens. No, said John, that is not only necessary for the heathens, it is also necessary for the children of the covenant. They are sinners just as well as the heathens.

Look, there goes a tax collector into the water. Head under the water. There also went a soldier and even a priest. They had understood John's preaching and converted themselves to God. They let themselves be baptized and had their unrighteousness washed away. So John used the baptism of conversion for the forgiveness of sins.

You know how suddenly the Lord Jesus himself stood before John to let himself be baptized by him. John did not understand this at all. Did he have to baptize Jesus? The Messiah? What a sharp insight John had in the situation that now happened. He said: I need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me? (Matt 3: (Matthew 3: 14) I am a sinner, not You. Ach, said the Saviour do not resist this John, it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness. Come, you have to baptize me. I know it, it is not for my sins but for yours and for those of all my people, which I take upon myself. So the Saviour went in under the water, for our sins. How this baptism of Jesus pictures the security for us. In Him we were all baptized. That one baptism of Christ represents to us the washing away of our sins. What a mighty moment was that in the salvation history. With that we also come to the heart of the matter. Once again: there is a child being baptized in the church. A grown up bends his knees before the baptismal font. The minister takes water in his hand, that fresh clear water we spoke about before. He sprinkles it on the head of the person to be baptized. When this happens in Irian Jaja, he immerses him under the water of the river. But if he sprinkles or immerses that in principal does not make any difference. The practical necessity of sprinkling in these cold areas does not take away anything of the cleansing power of the baptismal water. The minister baptizes. So has the Lord Christ himself instituted it. Just before his ascension He commanded his disciples: Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28 verse 19)

To that answer 69 ties when it says that Christ has instituted and to that added his promise that as surely as water washes away the dirt from the body, so certainly his blood and Spirit wash away the impurity of my soul. Of course, that cleansing

power of sins of the baptismal water is not in that water. The church of the middle ages made that up and the roman catholic church of today still sees it this way. The baptismal water then gets a magic power, which automatically takes away the original sin of the to be baptized person. It even teaches that a child that has not been baptized, for eternity remains outside the glory of the everlasting life. The Reformation radically broke with this teaching. The baptismal water is common water, right from the tap. But it brings us to the cross of the Saviour and to the blood that through Him was poured out. So, says your baptism, as the baptismal water cleans you from the dirt of your body, so cleanses the blood of Christ you of all your sins. That He promises you. That He assures you. With that he confronts you in your baptism.

Do you realize now, congregation, what a mighty comfort there is in this for you? The baptism asks of you that in faith you are busy with this, especially when sins are tempting you. Young people so often have tremendous problems about their own sins. The devil can make it so difficult: Are you a child of God? While you think such bad things or do? Also older people sometimes are bowed down by the evil which they earlier or later have done in their lives. does the devil tempt you about this? Then be present with your heart when someone is baptized in the church. Hear and listen to what happens. God says to you: here is a pledge and a seal of Myself, that wash away your sins in the precious blood of Christ. Do you have difficulties with your siin? Do you sometimes lose the battle? Here you have the the pledge and the seal, that the Spirit of Christ will strenghten you in that struggle and will break the power of sin in your life. You are BAPTIZED. Christ also for you has put the seal on his promises. He has affixed his royal grand-seal to the promise that He went for you to the cross and that God wants to be your God. Do you know who really understood this? The eunuch from Ethiopia, of whose conversion Luke tells us in Acts 8. He was reading Isaiah 53, that chapter with the rich proclamation of the assurance of your Saviour. Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so He opened not his mouth. Philip took this place in Scripture as his beginning point and in that preached Jesus. That eunuch understood his preaching. He understood: that lamb has been slaughtered for me and for my sins. And as they went along the way, Luke writes in verse 36, they came to some water, and now hear what the eunuch said: See, here is water. What is there to prevent my being baptized? He wanted to receive that royal grandseal on God's promises now for himself. Then Philip with him went into the water. As a heathen he went in, as a cleanly washed believer in Christ he came out of it. Lively preaching of the power of Word and sacrament. Congregation, here you remember the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea. The form of baptism has taken this story in the prayer for the baptism. What must those Israelites have shivered, when they went through between those walls of water. The water spattered and sprinkled on them. But they went through and then those walls of water fell behind them. They swallowed

the Egyptians, but the people of God walked through as on dry land. So the water rescued Israel and destroyed the godless world of those days.

So also streams the baptismal water all through the ages through this world. It saves who lets himself be washed by this water in faith. It accuses also to God and condemns those who pass up this water. Being a baptized christian places us in a great responsibility before God. For one whom much is given, of him much will be required. That is also valid being baptized in the name of the triune God. And it counts the more when you in unbelief should reject your baptism.

2. The churchmember that in Lordsday 26 asks for the meaning of the baptism, is still not finished. He has understood that the baptism pictures to us the washing in the blood and the Spirit of Christ. However wholly satisfied he(she) is not. He wants to penetrate into the root of the gospel in regard to the baptism. He asks once more: What does that mean, he asks in question 70: to be washed by Christ's blood and Spirit? Explain this to me. There is a certain challenge in that question and your confession takes on this challenge in answer 70. It repeats once again what also was said in answer 69 about the washing in the blood of Christ.

But it takes another step. It also explains what it means to be washed by the Spirit. The answer says very emphatically: To be washed with His Spirit means to be renewed by the Holy Spirit and sanctified to be members of Christ, so that more and more we become dead to sin and lead a holy and blameless life. Perhaps you may ask yourself: How does this happen? How can my life through Christ's Spirit be renewed through baptism? Well, congregation, pay attention to the formula which the church uses when a child is baptized. The minister then says: John or Janice, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

What does this formula really mean? There is a lot of misunderstanding about this. There are people in the church who think: o, that "in the name of" means: in authority or by the mandate of. So, namely by the mandate of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Like the way a judge who begins his judgment with: In the name of the queen, namely for the queen. Then you are mistaken. The formula does not want to say, that the minister baptizes this child for the triune God. He is empowered by the consistory to baptize and he baptizes a child or grown up with joy. He knows how deep the meaning reaches of the words which he uses. Congregation, that word baptize you have to take in its full deep original meaning. It means here immersing. Just like you immerse a brush in paint or as a pen in ink. Or as the brothers of Joseph immersed the cloak of Joseph in the blood of a slaughtered animal, so we baptize the child to be baptized, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. That name of the triune God is as a flood, a stream, in which this child is immersed. The to be baptized person (dopeling) is through this brought into the most tender bond with the name of God triune.

There lies a profound symbolic meaning in that word baptize. I am immersed in that name, when I am baptized. I am immersed with my whole old nature, with my whole sinfull being. That old nature of mine has to die. My sinfull existence has to die. The apostle Paul has expressed this in an amazing manner:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6: 3,4) Here we are at the deepest secret of our baptism. Let us explain these words of Paul further. The apostle says: we are baptized into Christ's death. Like as by baptism immersion in the water takes place, so have we died and have been buried with Christ. When He died, we died with our sins. When He was buried, He took our sins with Him into the grave. They are through his death and burial wiped away from before God. And when God resurrected Christ to a new life, He raised us up with Him. As the baptized person, after he has been immersed in the baptismal water, stands up, so we are resurrected to a new life.

Perhaps you have difficulty to picture all this for yourself, congregation. We are abstract thinking beings and we have a hard time to imagine plastic things. Still the apostle Paul's words invite you to do so. By way of speaking you have to see this before your eyes. Christ took your sins with Him into his death and into his grave. He rose from that grave to the glory of the new life at Easter. So you are raised in Christ to a new life.

Do you now understand, that the renewing of your life is a gift from God? You do not have to change yourselves, not to make yourself better by your own power. You may live out of Christ's death and resurrection. That is what baptism shows you. The confession says: we are renewed by the Holy Spirit and sanctified to be members of Christ. Through his Spirit He seizes you, so that you belong to Him and not to this godless world. You will become more and more dead to sin through his power. Sometimes you may think, for once I am going to do this different. But your life already has been steered into a different direction. Christ did this through his Spirit and that He shows you in the holy baptism. Christ's Spirit makes you live out of Christ's pouring of blood on the cross. That is where the baptism takes you, at the foot of the cross on Golgotha. Who stands there and lives out of the finished work of his Saviour, will lead a totally different life, in joy, through the power of faith. Baptism seals to you that Christ's Spirit took the rudder of your life into his hands. I do not have to take the rudder myself. He did this for me. My name is written in God's book under the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Now I am fighting in his power the devil and my old nature and against the evil that is in me. Through his power I will never discontinue the struggle.

Let this also encourage our young people. They live in difficult times, in which much comes to them. They grow up in world in which the use of drugs and crime grabs many young people. They

live in an oversexed society. From all sides they hear that there are young people who do not see any use of it all in this world and make an end to their lives. Is it not a miracle of God, congregation, that there are still young people who consciously choose for Christ as their Lord and Saviour? Teach them to understand their baptism. As parents speak to them about this. And let our young people, when they are tempted and have in a inner struggle, think: I am a baptized child of God. He has made a covenant with me. My baptism seals to me: I can depend on the Lord. He will not let me go. I have with Christ died of that sinful life of these times and I have been raised with Him to a new life. Let us as older folk pray for our young people. Do we do this? What a strong pledgebase we have in addition to their baptism.

3. Of these promises also question and answer 71 bear witness. You have said such great things about the baptism, this answer wants to say, but how do you know this? Is all of this really true? Yes, sure, says your confession and it points to three places in Scripture where we can find these rich promises. One of them we will underline. The one from Mark 16 verse 16. There Christ says, before his ascension: He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he does not believe will be condemned. You are baptized. Your parents have carried you to the baptismal font of the church. The minister baptized you in the name of the triune God. The congregation sang: His covenant in days of old, the steadfast words He did command a thousand generations stand. That happening, that baptism now will govern your whole life's history. You can always fall back on it.

Now hear the promise which Christ gives to you. Who believes and lets himself be baptized shall be saved. Take this promise to your heart. The Lord is waiting for your answer. And if you give your heart to Him, He will keep on going with you, through your whole life. What a perspective this promise opens up: You will be saved. After this earthly life awaits you the eternal life. Dead is not dead. Christ assures you eternal life through death. He gives to you in your baptism a comfort for life and death, which no power in this world can take away from you. No wonder that our fathers took such care in writing the date of the baptism of their children in their baptismal registers. One thing we still have to say to you. Christ has tied to this promise a warning, a strong warning. Who does not believe, He said, will be condemned. There is an eternal life, there is also an eternal death. There are baptized persons who will not be saved, because they rejected the God of their baptism. Let this not be the case for anyone of us who are here. The ante is high. Believe in your Saviour and are saved. A congregation, in which old and young understand their baptism, is a blessed congregation. Praise be to God, the triune God of our baptism.

Amen.

Lordsday 27.

God's congregation is a baptized congregation.

Sermon by the late
Dr. R. H. Bremmer,
Enschede, The Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton,
Alberta.

Reading: Genesis 17: 1-22
Text Lordsday 27,
Psalm 135: 1,2.
After the law: Psalm 25: 2
After the creed: Psalm 93: 4,
Psalm 105: 1,4,5,
Psalm 147: 6,
Psalm 22 : 4.

Beloved brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

It is a festive happening to speak together about the baptism and especially about the children baptism. Is it not always a feast for the congregation when a child is baptized in its midst? What happy we are with the parents, that God has given them a child. Everything went well, the Lord gave life and saved life. Then there is reason for thankfulness and joy. And besides: not only these parents, also the congregation itself is richer by one child. We are also glad because of that. Especially congregation, God's covenant is sealed anew, not only to the child that is being baptized, but also to you as congregation. That is why we sing: He is the Lord, our God unfailing - His covenant made in days of old - a thousand generations stand. Yet we have to watch out for one thing. We have to watch that we do not lock up the meaning and the power of the baptism in the moment of the use of this sacrament. This moment is festive, that is sure. But what happens in the moment of the baptism, extends itself over the whole life of this child.

It also touches your whole life as God's congregation. Every baptism of a child reminds you, confronts you, with your own baptism. You are baptized Christians. We especially think here about the first baptism question. In that the church asks the parents for two things. In the first place if they confess that our children - pay special attention to that word "our" - are conceived and born in sin and therefore subject to all sorts of misery, even to condemnation.

And then in the second place: if they also confess that our children are sanctified in Christ and thus as members of his church ought to be baptized. In this lies a deep meaning. God's congregation ought to be a baptized congregation. There in their midst you will not find an unbaptized child. The whole of God's congregation is immersed in the washing of regeneration and the washing away of sins, using the words of question 73. You know, congregation, the story of the lame man in Bethzatha out of John 5. For thirty-eight years this lame man has lain there on his pallet. Bethzatha was the name of that bath. That means; house of mercy. Only, for him it was a house of mercilessness. He did not have someone, who would put him into the water when the water came into motion. Nobody gave that glorious name Bethzatha meaning for him, till Jesus came. He raised that man.

He made for him God's mercy visible and tangible. That is also with you as baptized congregation. God's baptized congregation is his house of mercy for you and for your children. You are with your children thrown on God's mercy in your baptism which is shown to you visible and tangible before your eyes in that baptismal water. About this Lordsday 27 speaks very emphatically. Here it is about the meaning of baptism for you and your children, about the great reality of being a baptized congregation, a house of mercy in this godless world. We speak about:

GOD'S CONGREGATION IS A BAPTIZED CONGREGATION.

1. It is this because of God's command,
2. It seals God's promise to it,
3. Therein lies a powerful appeal to believe.

We begin this sermon about Lordsday 27 with the discussion of question and answer 74, the last question and answer of this Lordsday. It takes us direct into the root of this matter. Should infants, too, be baptized? says question 74. That seems a somewhat abstract and theoretical question. But who knows the history of the Reformation, knows that this in that time was a very exciting question. The baptism of children was then a fiery assailed cause.

On the background of this question is the struggle of the Reformation against the externality of the baptism sacrament of roman catholic church. Against this also the first question of this Lordsday fights. Question 72 states: Does this outward washing with water itself wash away sins? That how it was seen in the roman catholic church. Through the happening of baptism the child was born again. Unbaptized children according to the roman catholic sacrament doctrine cannot come into heaven. They die outside the state of grace and come into the heaven of children. That is the place in eternal life from where they from afar can see the glory of heaven, but never to reach it.

The church of the reformation resisted against this externality of the baptism. But now there originated, congregation, a trend within the Reformation that with the child also threw out the bathwater. Those were the anabaptists. They said: Baptize children? How can you even think about this? Do those children believe? Than you stay with externality of the baptism of the roman catholic church. Does it not say in the bible: He who believes and is baptized will be saved.

Where is that belief with such a small child? Let it first confess its faith. Then it can receive baptism. Never before. Do you know what they called the children baptism? A baptism for dogs. As a dog coming out of the water, it shakes the water from itself and goes on, that how it is also with a children baptism. A purely outside happening. Where is the faith that takes the promise which is sealed in the baptism? Nowhere? So away with that children baptism.

Don't today the baptist and some Pentacost groups reason the

same way? Don't come near them with children baptism. They want nothing to do with it. Of that they make it a cause with which the church stands or falls. There is even a trend in today's christendom to away with the childrens baptism. The well known theologian Karl Barth also was a fiery opponent of it. He used a remarkable and speaking image to clearly explain his feelings about this. He said: Children baptism is like an execution without a victim. He meant: if there is no faith, you cannot baptize. Perhaps some of you have discussions with christians who reject the children baptism. That is why it is important to know how the church of the reformation has defended the great value of the baptism of children.

In the first place we have to tell you that nowhere in the New Testament is an expressed word of God, in which the baptism of little children is instructed to us. But is this necessary? We do not have to use the Scriptures the way the Jehovah Witnesses do. They carry a binder with texts to answer each question with a bible text. It is here really not about a single bible text, here it is about the continuous doctrine of the Holy Scriptures. Which will give you many arguments to contradict the denial of the children baptism. That is why answer 74 begins with that powerful Yes, Yes surely your confession says, we shall baptize our children. It comes with good grounds for this. You have to pay special attention to the last sentence of answer 74. There the Reformed church confesses that baptism was instituted in the place of circumcision. Especially that argument was important. Think only about our baptism form that points to what God said in Genesis 17 to Abraham, and calls him especially father of all believers. Then follow those mighty words out of Genesis 17: 7, And I will establish my covenant between me and you and to your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. The form expressly states that this is also for us and our children.

You have to notice that Genesis 17 does not only contain the institution of the covenant but also that of the circumcision. This follows immediately in verse 10. And something else that should be paid attention to. This chapter 17 with the institution of the covenant and the circumcision is between Genesis 16 and Genesis 18. In chapter 16 Scripture tells you of the birth of Ishmael. When God instituted the circumcision Ishmael was 13 years old. That meant in the East: grown up. In Genesis 18 God proclaims the birth of Isaac. He will be born a year from now, the Lord says there. There were going to be children in the tent of father Abraham. Ishmael was walking around and over a year there would be the babycrib of Isaac. Now for the Lord the time has come to institute the circumcision. Ishmael was sired by the uncircumcised Abraham. Isaac, the son of the covenant, will be sired by the circumcised Abraham. Out of Isaac the Messiah will be born.

So the Lord comes to Abraham when he was ninety-nine years old and did not only make his covenant with him. He also instituted the circumcision. He, who is eight days old, shall be circumcised, every male throughout the generations.

You shall let the flesh of your foreskin be circumcised and that shall be a sign of covenant between Me and you. Congregation, God did not need to explain to Abraham how a circumcision was done. Circumcision was a normal habit in the East of those days. Only: This now got a whole new meaning. God used this now as a sign of his covenant like He used the rainbow in the days of Noah.

We want to go a little deeper into the meaning of circumcision. It is the foundation of the children baptism. You cannot understand the baptism of little children if you do not see the sign of the circumcision behind it. The circumcision is a small intervention on the male sexorgan. The foreskin of that was cut loose. A sharp knife was used, and a little blood flowed. The Jewish father set the knife into his flesh of his little son. Such a to be circumcised child was conceived and born in sin. Without knowing it, says the baptism form, it had part in the condemnation of Adam. The original sin is a real reality in the life of every human. And no less God's wrath against our rebellion in Adam.

When you keep all this in mind, congregation, you also understand why the circumcision-knife was used on that vulnerable place of the child. Actually that sharp knife of God's wrath had to hit every human in a deadly manner. The baptism form at the very beginning says: we and our children are conceived and born in sin. But God comes and cuts away a part of the flesh of Israel. Blood flows with this. Actually all that blood had to flow away in the death under God's wrath. But God knows: Later one comes who will pour out all his blood for these guilty people: his Son, Jesus Christ. About that the circumcision speaks in the sacrament of the circumcision. He, Jesus Christ. Later He will bear the wrath of God for his people till into death. He shall pour out all his blood for them. That is why God in the circumcision was satisfied with only the few drops that were poured out.

It is not easy to finish thinking about the sacrament of the circumcision. There is one more facet we should pay attention too. It left a scar in the flesh of the Jewish boys. Every day they were confronted with it. Every day that scar spoke of God's covenant that according to the word of the Scripture, Genesis 17 verse 13, is in your flesh. God made this holy sacrament a serious matter in Israel. Who did not bear this scar in his flesh, but remained uncircumcised, was in a way of speaking hidden from God. He shall be cut off from among his people. (verse 14) Do you remember congregation, the story of Moses when he with his wife Zipporah and both his sons Eliezer and Gersom, were on the way to Egypt. On that trip Moses became deathly ill. During his stay at Jethro's, his father in law's place, he had not circumcised his sons. How could he than later institute for Israel the second sacrament, the Passover, while he had neglected the first? Zipporah understood this and circumcised both the boys and threw their foreskins before Moses feet. Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me, she said, with an eye on the circumcision. (Exodus 4: 26) That is how serious God takes the sacrament of the circumcision.

O, say the opponents of the childrens baptism of today: that sign of the circumcision was only an external sign. It did not have a spriritual content. it was only a sign that the circumcised person belonged to the people of Israel. We may not put it on the same line with the baptism. It had nothing to do with God's covenant grace.

What do you think congregation? Could this be true? Was the circumcision not a gift of God's grace? Was it only an external sign? How than could David speak in that emotional Psalm 22:9,10: Yet thou art He who took me from the womb; Thou didst keep me safe upon my mother's breasts. Upon Thee was I cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me Thou hast been my God. Did David not interpret here what lived in Israelite parents, when they received a son from the Lord and he was circumcised on the eighth day? If there would have been one who has experienced that comforting and encouraging power of the circumcision in his life, it was David. Was the circumcision only an external sign? How then could the Lord call in Jeremiah 4 verse 4 to Iisrael: Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, remove the foreskin of your hearts? Just the circumcision of the physical foreskin called each Israelite to circumcise the foreskin of their heart.

Congregation, indeed, there are in the New Testament no definite words, that children have to be baptized. But the New Testament does proclaim, that God Himself in the baptism joins with the circumcision. After Paul in Colossians 2 has written about the glory of Christ, he lays a direct and immediate connection between the circumcision and the baptism. He binds it on their hearts: In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting of the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; and you were buried with Him in baptism. So close lays the apostle the connection between circumcision and baptism, that he calls the baptism the circumcision in Christ. And would the Lord, who under the old covenant the young sons of Israel let be sealed in his grace of the circumcision, withhold from them in the new covenant that seal through baptism? Have you noticed, how many times in the New Testament is spoken about baptism of whole "households". Would the children have been left out of it? When Lydia in Philippi believed, she was baptized and her household. In 1 Corinthians 1 verse 16 Paul says that he baptized the houshold of Stephanas. Would the little children of Stephanas have been excluded? Up to five times we read in the New Testament of the baptism of an household. Five times. And then still maintain that there is no ground for baptism in the New Testament? Does not lay in the baptism of whole households, in which children as well as bought slaves with their children were included, also not lay an indication for adoptive parents that they can have their adopted children baptized?

Once more, would God seal his grace to a lesser extent to children in the new covenant than under the old covenant through the circumcision? Read that mighty chapter of Romans 5, congregation. The apostle there puts Adam and Jesus over against each other. Through Adam's transgression all of mankind

was condemned. But much more, the apostle continues, notice: "much more" is the grace of God and the gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. (Romans 5: 15) "Much more". And then keep the children outside the grace of baptism? Has God's grace under the new covenant not become much more abundant for us and our children?

Wonderful, congregation, when a child is baptized in your midst. God's congregation is a baptized congregation. It is a feast in the church when a little child is baptized. Real beautiful how the beginning of answer 74 describes God gift of grace in baptism by saying that to infants, as well as adults, through Christ blood, the redemption of sin and the Holy Spirit, who works faith, is promised. And that rich promise is now being sealed to your children in baptism. Therefore, says the first baptismal question, and thus as members of His church, yes, that is what it says there, as members of His church ought to be baptized. Do not needlessly postpone the baptism of your children. Should we not desire this gift of God as soon as possible for our children?

2. God's congregation is a baptized congregation. It is that, and that is why there is the command to baptize the children. At the same time there is for you, as congregation, a rich promise connected to this. About that speak answer 72 and 73. We spoke about this in the beginning of the sermon and now we get back to this. Very sharply this Lordsday 27 asks, immediately at the beginning: Does this outward washing with water itself wash away sins? Sharper than this could not the controversy, between the Rome and the Reformation about the point of baptism, be formulated. It is a direct question. Is there in that baptismal water itself power to regeneration? this question wants to say. Imagine. You only had to have the child baptized and through that it was internally renewed. As if there in that baptismal water is a miraculous power, as Rome says. No way.

The baptismal water is plain water from the tap. Yet the pupil, who in the school of the church, asks this question, is now a little dazed (flabbergasted) How is this then, he continues to ask in question 73? The Holy Spirit does call baptism the washing of regeneration and the washing away of sins? There you are, he wants to say. In the Scriptures there is a vigorous speaking about the baptism and its effect through the Holy Spirit. How should I understand this? Congregation here you are at the profound secret of the baptism. That is in the close connection God makes between that outward washing of the baptism and the matter which is given in it. Our forefathers used a few eloquent words to typify this. They named the outward washing in the baptism the sign of God's promises. The matter, the spiritual faith matter, which is pictured and sealed in that, they named the significant matter. Hold onto these terms congregation, they will help you to understand the secret of what this is all about.

We can make this clear to you with a well known story out of

Samuel's time. When the Philistines in those days made war against Israel, Hofni and Pinehas, the sons of Eli, took the ark of God with them in the army. They thought: above that ark lives the Lord. When we take the ark with us in the battle, the Lord comes with us and we will surely win it. And indeed, that ark was the external sign of God's presence among his people. Only: it was not God Himself. it was only a sign of God's presence, not the significant matter: God Himself. That the Lord made them feel properly. He quietly let the ark be taken by the Philistines. But when they in their turn thought they had imprisoned the God of Israel, He turned the tables on them. Now Dagon's statue falls into pieces in its temple before the ark. Whoever lays hands upon the sign, the Lord shows, lays his hands also on the significant matter. These two are closely bound together.

Now apply this story to your baptism, congregation. The outward washing, the baptism, the sign is not identical with the significant matter. It is well very close to it. Answer 73 says very pointedly: God does not call baptism without a good reason the washing of regeneration and the washing away of our sins. So close are his sign and the significant matter connected together. See that baptismal water flow from the head of the child being baptized. See it. So the blood and the Spirit of Christ washes away our sins. Conceived and born in sin is that child. It is part of the condemnation in Adam. But God comes to this child and to its parents and to you as congregation and He says: as the water washes this child, so wash and clean I it in my mercy of that original sin. Now the faith grasps the connection between those two.

And if you still may doubt about it, congregation, than God takes another step. He now says: as truly as that water washes and cleans, so truly I pledge that this child and its parents and all of you gathered around it in the church, to wash you spiritually from all your sins. The baptism is a godly assurance and sign of this. Is that child not being baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit? Does the power, the promising and assuring power of this formula, penetrate you? The holy and merciful triune God is present here and bears in the sacrament of the baptism his grace to you.

O, congregation, sometimes we are so weak in our faith. The devil time and again throws doubt questions in our heart. Am I really a child of God? Is God's promise really for me? Where do I find the assurance for this? Many have sought the assurance of being a child of God in themselves. We disappoint ourselves so often. We have planned to fight against sin and all the time we fall back into it. You are a baptized congregation. You are, to say it again with David in the twenty second Psalm: thrown upon God from the time of the womb. Grasp that promise of God.

Comfort yourself with your baptism. In his explanation of the Catechism the well known preacher Kohlbrugge from the previous century asks: What comforts you in regard to the holy baptism? He gives this answer, in which he at the same time worded answer 73 of this Lord's day: That I have been thrown in my baptism on God's royal, fatherly and sanctifying Name, also have been

written in his Book of life with all my guilt, sins and needs; and that I have a rich God and a merciful Father in heaven. Is that not full of comfort?

3. Now we come to the last point. We are baptized because of God's command. That was the first. In that He seals us in his promises. That was the second. And also in that being a baptized congregation there is an appeal. In the first place it touches the parents of the baptized child. They brought it to be baptized. They, in a manner of speaking, are standing with their nose on the baptismal font. They are involved in the first place. They are, also through the baptism of their child, strengthened in their faith. You should notice how often the form of baptism uses the word "we". We and our children conceived and born in sin. God's covenant word to Abraham is also for us and our children. That is why we also promise to teach and let our children be taught the doctrine of the church, that rich teaching of God's covenant. You as parents have taken this commitment upon yourselves. Every baptism appeals to that anew in the midst of the congregation. You have made that promise. You should not leave that teaching to the men and women in the schools and to the ministers in the Catechism class. You yourself are called to this. You have made that commitment. Are you doing this? Are you devoted to this? Do you do this with word and deed? Do you live before them what it means to be baptized parents yourselves? Has churchleaving by the young people not often has its root in the not keeping of that promise? Is our life always in harmony with our confessing? What lies here a task for fathers and mothers in the church. And further: Does the baptism of a child not appeal to us all, congregation? Also to them who have not received children from the Lord or those who are not married. Here there lies a charge for the whole congregation. We are together as a baptized congregation the family of God. The baptized youth of the congregation touches all of us. How do we associate with the youth of the congregation? What is it difficult to find leaders for youth clubs. What can an open conversation with older members in the congregation do a lot of good to young people. Quite often there are unexpected opportunities for older people to have contact with the youth of the congregation. The children of the congregation are "ours", all our children.

And then the children themselves. You have heard this sermon. May be you did not understand all of it. But we heartily hope, that you take with you from this church service, that you belong to it. You belong to the Lord Jesus. He has put his hands upon children and has blessed them. You are the children of God in his covenant. You have a Father in heaven. Don't delay the doing of the good choice for Him. Perhaps you go into the army or to a school of higher learning or to work. You seek a girl, you are asked by a boy. Don't make those decisive choices before you have chosen the Lord. He seeks your heart. There goes from the baptism a profound and earnest appeal to all of us.

Paul points to this in 1 Corinthians 10 that all the Israelites were baptized in Moses, in the cloud and in the sea. All of

Israel, old and young, walked between the walls of water of the Red Sea. The water splattered them on all sides. Indeed, they were baptized in Moses and in the sea. But what does Paul write later? This: Nevertheless with most of them God was not pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness. They did not give their hearts to the God of their baptism in the sea. Don't let this have to be said about you. God's congregation is a baptized congregation. That is a rich promise. But at the same time a profound earnest appeal. Give your heart to God on which you have been thrown at your baptism. Because:
He will remember and uphold His covenant made in days of old.

Amen.

Now thank we all our God
With hearts, and hands, and voices,
Who wondrous things has done,
In whom his world rejoices;
Who from our mothers arms
Has blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love,
And still is ours today.

Hymn 65 stanza 1 Book of Praise.

Lordsday 28.

Flesh of his flesh, bone of his bones.

Sermon by the late
Dr. R.H.Bremmer,
Enschede, the Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton,
Alberta.

Reading Luke 14:15-24
Text Lordsday 28
Psalm 111: 1,3,
After the law: Psalm 112: 1,
After the creed: Psalm 117,
Psalm 43: 1,3,4,
Psalm 116: 7
Hymn: unknown

Dear beloved brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

Have you ever noticed the fine difference in the formulation in the Catechism in the Lordsdays about baptism and holy supper? In Lordsday 26, question 69, the confession asks you: How does holy baptism signify and seal to you that the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross benefits you?

But here, in question 75, your confession places before you the question: How does the Lord's Supper signify and seal to you that you share in Christ's one sacrifice on the cross and all his gifts? Do you hear the difference? With the baptism you are asked, how Christ's offer on the cross benefits you, comes to you. But here, with the holy supper, your confession goes one step further. Now it is about, in the holy supper how you share in that sacrifice of Christ. In the baptism you are passive. You are being baptized. In the holy supper you are active. You share in the sacrifice of Christ. You are a part of it. In the baptism you are carried to the baptismal font. Your parents let you be baptized. In the holy supper you take your seat at the table of the Lord. You take the bread and you drink from the cup. You have a share in all his benefits. From all what your Saviour has obtained for you at the cross, the forgiveness of sin and everlasting life, you share in at the holy supper. So are Christ and all his treasures central in baptism and holy supper.

What does your confession do in Lordsday 28? It gives an account of all these treasures. The right holy supper celebrant here gives account of what he does when he goes to the holy supper table. Indeed it is a long Lordsday, this Lordsday 28. It has long questions and answers. Sometimes the catechumen have trouble with it. But it is worth the effort.

Every three(two) months the holy supper penetrates into your life. It goes with you from the day you did confession of faith to the end of your life. Should you than not with the whole church give account of what Christ gives you in his supper? Come, congregation, today let us arrange ourselves to that joyful work. We speak to you about

CHRIST'S CHURCH GIVES ACCOUNT OF WHAT IT RECEIVES IN THE HOLY SUPPER.

We pay attention to three points:

1. Christ himself instituted it,
2. We have communion in it with Him
3. It points to his return.

1. First we pay attention to the institution of the holy supper. For that we have to image before us that very first time, that the Lord celebrated this supper with his disciples. Answer 77 reminds you of this. It cites how the apostle Paul wrote to the congregation of Corinth, that Jesus on the night when He was betrayed, took bread and said: This is my body for you, do this in remembrance of Me.

Congregation, what a night, that night in which your Saviour was betrayed. It was the night before the Jewish Passover. The Saviour himself had said to his disciples: I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. (Luke 22: 15) He had everything prepared by his disciples. That Israelite Passover reminds you in all its details of that first Passover in that dark night when it went out of Egypt. You know: that night when the angel of destruction went around in Egypt and killed all the firstborn. He went from house to house, but he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Goshen. There the firstborn did not die.

Was this, congregation, because the Israelites were better than the Egyptians? Did they not deserve God's curse? Perhaps you may think: Those Egyptians deserved it. They had suppressed God's people severely. Pharaoh and his accomplices, all those Egyptians, they had defied God and now God took revenge. But Israel? What do you think? Did Israel not deserve destruction? Had they not served idols in Egypt? Had they kept God's law perfectly? Why did God find it necessary to again at the Sinai issue his law? Had they stood in faith behind Moses in his struggle with the Pharaoh?

No, when the angel of destruction did go around by Israel, it was because of the blood which with the doorposts of the Israelite house were painted red. Red with the blood of an one year old lamb, which they had slaughtered that night. That lamb lay on the table in that night of the exodus in the houses of the Israelites. It had to be one year and perfect. Not a bone of it could be broken. You cannot go to God with a crippled lamb? Besides it lay the unleavened bread and bitter herbs. (Exodus 12: 8) Sourdough was used by Israel as yeast. it was a a soured dough that made the baking rise. Sourdough is also the image of the destruction by sin that permeates everything. Throw it away, says the Lord, not a crumb of sourdough shall be found among you. Only mazzoth: unleavened bread. And those bitter herbs and endives? They personated the bitter suppression of Egypt. God works in the old covenant plastic, also here by the Passover.

Congregation, do you know. what Passover means?

It wants to say: passing by. It passed by, that angel of destruction. Because of that slaughtered lamb and its blood. Blood reconciles and protects. Therefore, says the Lord, you shall observe this Passover, throughout your generations, as an ordinance forever. (Exodus 12: 17) And a fine particularity, which is being kept by the Jews to this day, is God's command that, when your sons say: What do you mean by this service?, their fathers should tell them the story of the exodus, God's liberating exodus. (Exodus 12 : 26) So Israel celebrated Passover from year to year. So also your Saviour has celebrated this Passover meal with his disciples in the last night of his life. Also this year thousands of lambs were slaughtered in the temple. Their blood was sprinkled against the altar. The feasters then took that slaughtered lamb with them and ate it with their families. Beside the bitter herbs there was a cup filled with festive wine, for every feaster a cup. And still later Israel added a separate cup. For Elisha in case he might return. Even today they have the backdoor ajar and an empty chair at the table so that Elisha can enter. In your imagination, place yourself at that last Passover meal of your Saviour in Jerusalem. See Him recline at the table. The evangelists do not speak many words about the Passover lamb. But it must have been there. Everything points to a normal celebration of this feast of liberation and deliverance. Matthew even tells that they sang a hymn (Matthew 26: 30) That was also a custom grown by the Jews. The feasters of the Passover sang the great Hallel, the psalms 111 to 118. Hear, your Saviour sings, together with his disciples. I love the Lord, because He has heard my voice and my supplication....the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me, I suffered distress and anguish (Psalm 116) and also: I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord. (Psalm 118) What did these Psalms speak to Him of his suffering and death awaiting Him, but also of the escape and deliverance through God's mighty hand. Congregation, there lay a lamb on the table. Not a bone of it was broken. That lamb spoke of Him, of the pouring out of his blood. That lamb was Himself. So He would be slaughtered for his people. Our Passover lamb is Christ, writes Paul in 1 Corinthians 5 verse 7. It became quiet in the Passover room. The Master took a piece of the unleavened bread to give it to his table companions. HEAR. He speaks words of salvation and of importance. Would they have understood the profoundness of it? Take, eat this is my body, that has been given for you, do this in remembrance of Me. Now they had finished their use forever with those unleavened breads. Tomorrow He would, the Passover lamb, be broken for his people as now the bread was broken. The cup went around or to be more precise: two cups. That had become the custom at the Passover. HEAR. Again the Saviour speaks. Now with the first cup: Take this and it go around by you. For I tell you that from now on I shall not drink of the vine until the kingdom of God comes. (Luke 22 verse 18) What must those disciples, congregation, have listened with

suspense. What did the Master mean with this? Was the Messianic kingdom that close? Not to drink anymore of the fruit of the vine till the great kingdom comes? If they would have thought of an earthly peace kingdom then the words of the Master by the second , the following cup, helped them out of this dream. This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. And immediately after this the word about the betrayal. No, the Master did not allude to an earthy kingdom. He spoke of his death and of his blood which would be poured out. Sparkling red was the wine in the cup. So tomorrow his red blood would drip along the cross for our sins.

And so congregation, he pushed aside forever, with a mighty sovereign hand, the Passover lamb. Thousands of Passover lambs had been slaughtered throuhout the ages. Now He would, once and for all, be sacrificed for his people. So He has in the night, in which He would be betrayed, pushed aside the old testament Passover and instituted the new testament holy supper. Do this to my remembrance.

The church has done this, from the apostles till today. It has understood the Word of the Master. It has from generation to generation broken the bread and it has passed the cup around as a remembrance to the suffering and death of its Lord. Your confession speaks in this Lordsday 28 with joy about the Lord's Supper. The church of the reformation had in a manner of speaking rediscovered it. Through the ages after the apostles it was deteriorated to the mass celebration and everything connected with it. About this Lordsday 29 and 30 will discuss this further with you. But already over this Lordsday 28 lies the glow of the rediscovery in the times of the reformation. The church returned to the simplicity of the first supper when the Lord instituted it and of which the apostle Paul wrote instructive to the Corinthians.

Congregation, read, those first beautiful sentences of answer 75: Christ has commanded me and all believers and has given a promise. He has commanded to eat this broken bread and to drink out of this cup to remembrance of Him. There it is. In a few sober words. In that is passed on to you what the Saviour commanded his diciples in the night of his betrayal. Ach , the Catechism wants to say, it is only a sober meal, which we here in the church make ready. It is the cup with real wine, pressed out of grapes, which is passed along. And still. How great and glorious, with every Lord's Supper celebration, rises the figure of your Saviour, your only Master. This already begins for you when the minister breaks the bread before your eyes. He takes those long strips of bread and breaks them before your eyes. And it continues when he takes the decanter and pours the wine before your eyes in the cup. It continues when the platter with bread reaches you and you eat from it and and the cup is given to you and you drink from it. You do this, says the confession, according to the command of Christ. That command touches you and all the believers, says the confession. How then is it possible, congregation, that so many believers have difficulty with this? Pay special attention to the words: and

all the believers. The Lord's Supper has not been instituted by Christ for a special group of initiates. For people who have been through profound experiences and at last have the boldness to participate. He calls all of you to this supper as sinners for whom He let his body being broken and for whom He poured out his blood. Indeed, we are at the Lord's Supper in the holy presence of God. God is there in our midst. But He is there in our midst in Jesus Christ, in your Saviour. God's holiness is here not a consuming holiness but a merciful holiness. As the father embraced the prodigal son and kissed him, so God will give you the kiss of his love at the Lord's Supper. Yes and once more: Christ has given the command to remember his death to me and to all believers. There is not a more oecumenical thing in the world than the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Nowhere else are the divisions among the christians as bitterly revealed than at the Lord's Supper. When the church keeps someone from the holy supper, it may only do this when it is absolutely convinced, that God does this. But also: Each child of God, that fears the Lord, has the right to a place on that table.

2. So Christ commanded us to celebrate this supper with joy. He also ties a promise to this. The root of this promise answer 75 puts into words by saying that Christ himself nourishes and refreshes my soul to everlasting life with his crucified body and shed blood. Golden words, but it is not simple to gauge the depth of them. Your confession helps you in answer 76 to penetrate the depth of these words. It also means, says this answer, to be so with Christ in heaven, that we on earth are flesh of his flesh and bones of his bones and that we forever live and are governed by one Spirit.

Congregation. What do you have a glorious God and what are there many reasons to speak about this. God has, to say it like this, more than one arrow on his bow to reach your heart. He wants to reach this with the way of the Word but also via the way of the sacrament of the holy supper. The Lord knows how often our faith is weak. He also knows how sometimes our sins really bother us. Now He will reach your heart not only through the preaching of his suffering and death of your Saviour, but also to make the Lord's Supper visble and tangible for your eyes. A boy cannot reach the heart of his girl only with words telling her about his love. He can also do this through a gift, that by itself may not be of great value, but will touch her heart. A mother can comfort her child that has sorrow, with words. She can also to do with a heartfelt kiss.

Now, once again, so is the Lord's Supper a kiss from God through his gospel. It is a heavenly gift of God that makes his love tangible. Also in this lies the secret of the holy supper. Answer 76 will that make this clearer to you with the words "more and more". With this the confession wants to express the profoundness of this sacrament. It is not only to accept the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, no, it reaches further. Answer 76 does that by saying to you that we in the holy supper become more and more united with Christ's holy body.

Your confession here is very sharp. On the one side it has to make a front against the roman catholic and lutheran realisme in the holy supper doctrine. You know what this contains. The catholic version is the bread and wine at the holy supper change into the body and blood of Christ himself. Luther did not go as far but said that Christ himself would descend into the bread and wine. Realistic: with both visions Christ in his body and blood is present in the holy supper. In a fiery reaction to this Zwingli proclaimed that in the supper of the Lord it is only about the remembrance of Christ's suffering and death. We would only remember his suffering and death with the bread and the cup. The catechism goes above both these points of view in this answer 76. For Christ is in heaven and we are on the earth. But at the same time you celebrate in the holy supper not only the remembrance of the suffering and death of your Saviour. That would take away the profoundness out of the Lord's Supper, the taking away of its sacramental character. That is why this answer 76 points to the unbelievable close tie which the Holy Spirit in the holy supper lays between your Saviour in heaven and you here on earth. Yes, without doubt, the Holy Spirit works in the Lord's Supper. He unites you in the holy supper so close with your Saviour in heaven that we really are flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones. What does answer 76 here have a masterly touch by through these words to go back to the speaking of the Scriptures about marriage. When God brought Eve to Adam, Adam said: this at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.(Genesis 2 : 23) So close is the tie between Adam and his Woman. And the apostle Paul in his turn took the words of Adam to express the close tie between Christ and his congregation. This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the church.(Ephesians 5 : 32) Now, so close the Holy Spirit unites you in the Lord's Supper with Christ that you become flesh of Christ's flesh and bone of his bones. And adds, your confession, that we live forever and are governed by one Spirit. While answer 75 uses the I form, -look it up- answer 76 uses the we form. I do not celebrate the holy supper by myself, not as an individual. In this your confession is four square against the I era in which we live. We celebrate it together as congregation, as the body of our Saviour. It is one Spirit who governs and binds us all together. We are together that one body of Christ, flesh of his flesh, bone of his bones. Our forefathers called that mystical union. Perhaps we could say it better as Uniting with Christ through the Holy Spirit.

How deep this Lord's Supper cuts into your life. That shows answer 76 to you in the beginning. That beginning speaks of the rich promises which lie in this supper of Christ. Pay attention in the beginning to the words "and so" I accept in the holy supper with a believing heart all the suffering and death of Christ "and so" receive forgiveness of sins and life eternal. "And so": through the eating of Christ's body and the drinking of his blood in that piece of bread and that sip of wine. Many think that we, before we go to the table of the Lord, have to be in the clear with God. But we celebrate the Lord's

Supper to get that forgiveness of sins and eternal life. God comes to us and gives in the way of the Lord's Supper celebration the assurance, that He is finished with us and has taken away our guilt out from his book. He assures us also that He governs us through his Spirit so that we will live as His children. So this holy table receives its steady place in your life. It goes with you, your whole life long. Young people sit at Christ's table and they receive by this forgiveness of their youth sins which sometimes can oppress them. And later you celebrate the Lord's Supper together with your children, who did confession of faith. It is for parents one of the richest moments in their lives when they celebrate the Lord's Supper with their children. It is also one of the most painfully things in life when this is not possible. And later, you sit at the table as an elderly person, The perspectives of this earthly life become smaller. But the Lord's Supper assures the forgiveness of sins and a view to eternal life. I receive the outlook on the joy of the marriage feast of the lamb.

Therefore it is of great importance in your lives with Christ to celebrate the Lord's Supper regularly. You should think about the man who gave a great banquet and send out his servants to say: Come; for all is now ready. (Luke 4 : 7). What an excuses for not coming. The one had bought a field. The other had bought five yoke of oxen. The third just had married a wife. They took everything very serious, their farming, their business and their marriage. One thing they did not take serious: the invitation to the banquet. Full of wrath than the lord who held the banquet said: None of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet. Is this not often also the same with the invitation to the Lord's Supper? The one takes a quarrel serious, another his churchly difficulties, a third his holidays. But they neglect the supper of the Lord. But now hear what the lord of the parable did. He invited the beggars and the maimed and the blind and the lame. He did not rest till his house was full.

Congregation if one of the above is valid for you: come to the banquet of Christ. There lay your parcel of your guilt over against God, your quarrel with your brother, your difficulties with a church situation. Lay them at the cross of Golgotha that is shown to you in the signs of bread and wine.

When you have together as congregation of Jesus Christ broke the bread and drank the wine, have had fellowship with your Saviour in heaven, than you may together hold unto this when the Lord's Supper Sunday has passed. You are governed by one Spirit. You have accepted each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. You can think differently about many things. Sometimes you have problems with each other, but you gave the bread to each other and passed the cup to each other. This table is the mightiest weapon against the devil if he tries to set brothers and sisters of the same house against each other.

One more question. When is the way open for the young to celebrate the holy supper? There is a clear answer to this. When you able to discern the body of Christ, says the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 11: 29) That is to say: when you are ready

in faith to understand what is going on in the Lord's Supper. That is why we reject as reformed people opening up the holy supper for children. The Lord's Supper is not a family supper. It is the supper of the Lord Christ. Wonderful, when you can make the decision to confess Him as your Lord and Saviour. Do not postpone the going to the profession class. If you can give yourself to Him and can understand about why it in his suffering and death does for you, you are ready for it. Then you with the congregation confess Him as your only comfort in life and in death.

3. Now we still have to speak to you about question and answer 77. Your confession cites the texts out of the first letter to the Corinthians, in which Paul passes on the institution of the holy supper through Christ. The apostle emphasizes also there the communion with Christ in the holy supper. Is not the cup of thankfulness, over which we speak the thankfulness, the communion with the blood of Christ? Is not the bread, which we break, the communion with the body of Christ? We thank with this cup, says the apostle to us here. Lord, we say, we thank Thee very much that you have died for us and that we may eat your body in this bread and drink your blood in this wine. Does not our heart flow over with thankfulness during the celebration of the Lord's Supper?

There is still another point that should strike you in these words of the apostle. As often, says Paul, as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. Christ's death and resurrection and return are very close together. First the bitter death of the Saviour for your guilt. But than also immediately that other word about his return. Till He comes. That means to say: Till the moment that the great feast begins forever, the feast of the marriage of the Lamb. The abbreviated form for the celebration of the Lord's Supper has put this view on the return of our Saviour and on the eternal life, very nicely into words. We receive at His table a foretaste of the abundant joy which He has promised and look forward to the marriage feast of the Lamb when He will drink the wine new with us in the Kingdom of his Father. So they are along the same line: the institution of the holy supper in the night in which He, our Saviour, was betrayed. And at the end: the feast of the marriage of the Lamb. You are as God's congregation on the road from that beginning to the end, praising your God with bread and cup. Should we then not sing:

What shall I render to my Saviour now
 For all the riches of His consolation?
 With joy I'll take the cup of His salvation,
 and call upon His name with thankful vow.

Amen.

Lordsday 29.

Not without an urgent reason.

Sermon by the late
Dr. R.H.Bremmer,
Eschede, the Netherlands

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton,
Alberta.

Reading: John 6: 41-59,
Text: Lordsday 29,
Psalm 63: 1,2,
After the law: Psalm 119: 15,
After the creed: Hymn 41: 2,
Psalm 138: 1,4,
Hymn 22
Hymn: unknown.

Dear beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

You know the parable of the royal marriage feast from Matthew 22. A king prepared a festive dinner for his son. Who is going to get married. Of course, guests are invited. But look at this. The guests do not accept the invitation to the wedding. They would not come, says the gospel. The king is not satisfied with this. He again send his servants out to invite the guests. Ach, one had to go to his farm and another had to do business. They did not come. And some of them even beat the servants to death, who brought the invitation. Horrible. Are you surprised that the king became mad? After being treated like this? He send out his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. But the wedding would go ahead. He send his servants to the crossroads. There, on those squares, in those days everybody gathered. Now that the great persons in the kingdom would not come, the king invited everyone who wanted to come. The feast of his son had to happen. And it did happen. The Saviour says: Good and bad came, so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

Who does not think with this parable about the holy supper? Would Christ himself not thought about it when He told this parable? Where can He give away his love better than at the holy supper? Strange guests they were that came to the wedding of the king: Good and bad. Unworthy by themselves. But they were invited and they came. They together with the king enjoyed the feast.

You may time and again join in the feast of Christ your royal Host. The Lord's Supper is a feast. It is different than all other Sundays. You have, if it is right, prepared yourself for this feast. You even dressed yourself for it. Christ himself comes to you, when the minister leaves the pulpit and in Christ's name receives you at his table.

Congregation, have you ever noticed that your confession speaks about the holy supper in no less than three Lordsdays? Lordsday 28, this Lordsday 29 and later Lordsday 30. Someone named these Lordsdays the comforting repeat of the same. Indeed you can call it that way. Here, in the middle Lordsday of the three, your confession penetrates deeply into the secret of

the holy supper. It does this against the background of radical differences, which originated about the holy supper in the time of the reformation. It is definitely still timely. It shows you in the long sentences of this Lordsday how great the salvation secret is in the holy supper. Christ gives himself to you in bread and cup. Here, at this table. He receives you in a very special way in his communion. Great, to think about this together young and old. We speak together about

CHRIST RECEIVES US AT THE LORD'S SUPPER IN HIS COMMUNION.

He does that

1. through the sign language of the sacrament;
2. to strenghten the faith;
3. to the affirmation of the bond to each other in love.

1. Congregation, we are in question 78 immediately in the midst of it. Question 78 places you in the heart of the controversy, the dispute with Rome. Are then bread and wine changed into the real body and blood of Christ? the catechumen asks his minister. He has listened closely when in the previous Lordsday the institution of the holy supper was discussed. What a terse language was used there. The Saviour plainly said when He broke the bread: this is my body for you. And the apostle Paul spoke plainly about the communion with the body of Christ. The catechumen has listened closely. He is asking himself if this is not the same as what he has heard about the roman catholic idea of the holy supper. This means that the wafer, the bread of the holy supper, becomes the real body of Christ. Because of that his question goes to the root of the matter: Are then the bread and the wine really changed into the real body and blood of Christ?

Perhaps you think, does it make sense to take a look at this old struggle question with Rome today? There have been so many changes in the roman catholic church. The mass is now celebrated in the language of the land, not anymore in Latin. The Second Vatican Concilie has changed much in the R.C church. But do not get fooled. In the ground structure nothing has changed. The Pope still has maintained the doctrine of the transsubstantiation.

There is no way that Rome today would not believe anymore that the bread really changes into the body of Christ and the wine into his blood. That is why we do not participate in the so called oecumenical Lord's Supper celebrations. That is a matter of clearness and honesty.

You may ask yourself: how did the christian church ever come to confess this fickle wonder of the transsubstantiation? How did the church of the middle ages come to believe, that on the moment that the priest speaks the institution words, the bread changes into the body of Christ? And the substantiation of the wine into his blood?

That certainly does not come from the institution words of Christ. Rome bases it on that but absolutely unjust.

Congregation, place yourself in your imagination to the

institution of the holy supper by Christ. The Saviour sits with his disciples around the table. On that table are the bread cakes which Israel ate at the Passover. There are also the cups filled with festive wine, which is drunk with it. Now your Saviour takes a piece of bread. He breaks it before the eyes of the disciples. At the same time He speaks the institution words. He says: Take, eat, this is my body. Of course the Saviour meant it to be symbolic. Was the old testament Passover not totally symbolic? Did the lamb not speak of the sacrifice of his life that He would bring? Did not the unleavened bread cakes speak of the doing away of the destruction of sin? How then could the Saviour with the words "This is my body" mean it to be himself? He himself was standing at that table? But then how come that the church of the middle ages took these words so literally? Well, congregation, that had two reasons. In the first place it was among the first christians the habit, to before the Lord's Supper, have a love supper. The more well to do members brought the needed gifts for that. They laid them on the table. Out of that grew the thought that the holy supper also was a sacrificial supper. In the second place there was a need in those superstitious and idolatrous times to bring Christ closer. To worship Him bodily in bread and wine. Christ in heaven: that was so far away. On the altar of the church you could see Him in the wafer and worship. Slow but sure the conviction grew in the church that bread and wine became Christ's body and blood, at the moment the priest spoke the institution words. In the year 1215, at the fourth Laterans concilie, the idea of the transsubstantiation definitely became the doctrine of the church. And in the year 1414, the concilie of Constanz took the cup away from the congregation. From now on it reserved this only for the priest. To prevent the messing of the precious blood of Christ. Also: now that the wafer became his body, it also contained his blood. What has the reformation brought a radical turnaround in all of this. With Luther came the thought that sinners only were righteous before God through the belief in the finished sacrifice of Christ at the cross. Now it was not necessary anymore to bring Him from heaven to the altar of the church. He now is our Mediator and Quarantor above with God. That where He takes it up for us by the Father.

Only: what is it tragic that especially on the point of the holy supper the reformers disagreed and parted company. Unimagineble. Especially there, where we in unity confess Christ together, there originated the schisme. Because of that, Luther, Zwingli and later Calvin unfortunately parted. We have to explain this better, if you want to understand your own confession here in Lordsday 29.

It is namely like this: Zwingli in his denial of the roman catholic thought was the most radical. No, the holy supper according to him, was nothing else than a remembrance of the suffering and death of our Saviour. It is no more than a remembrance supper, in which we celebrate the memory of his suffering and death. So we should keep alive for us the thought

of his suffering and death on Golgotha. And at the same time we testify, says Zwingli, the bond to each other as confessors of Christ's sacrifice. The holy supper is only that, no more. Luther having his turn, did not go as far. He rejected with Zwingli the transsubstantiation idea. Also according to Luther bread and wine do not change into the body and blood of Christ. But on the other hand he also rejected that the holy supper only would be a remembrance supper of the suffering of Christ. Very heavy it weighed to him that the hypocrites and the ungodly who celebrated the holy supper, would not be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. That is why Luther came to teach, that Christ at the celebration of the Lord's Supper really descends in the bread and the wine. He is in, with and under the signs of bread and wine of the holy supper present. That is why Luther with all his power held on to the idea of the omnipresence of Christ's human nature. He is not only in heaven. He is actually present among us when the Lord's Supper is celebrated. He then descends in the sign of bread and wine. Did you know, congregation, that Luther and Zwingli personally have conferred together on this point for days in Marburg? Luther there stood on his viewpoint so strongly, that he immediately, at the beginning of the discussion wrote on the conference table: This is my body. And he stuck to that. In this critical situation of the reformation God gave Calvin. He rejected with Luther that the holy supper only was a remembrance supper. There is more. But that he did seek in the descension of Christ in bread and wine. Bread and wine speak to us about the unbelievable strong bond which is there between Christ above in heaven and us here on earth. That bond, that faith bond, the Holy Spirit lays between Christ and us. So strong is that bond that Christ himself said with the breaking of the bread: this is my body for you. And with the pouring of the wine: this is the blood of my covenant. And so through the faith and through the working of the Holy Spirit you share in this.

Because of that the words in our Lord's Supper form, that we should not cling with our hearts to the outward symbols of bread and wine, but lift our hearts on high in heaven, where Christ, our Advocate is. And then hear congregation, what then follows in the form: not doubting that we shall be nourished and refreshed in our souls with his body and blood, as truly as we receive the holy bread and drink in remembrance of Him. Once again, so close is the bond which the Holy Spirit lays between Christ and us in the holy supper, that the bread that we eat can be called the body of Christ. Not because it changes into the body of Christ, but because, says now the ending of answer 78, this is the manner on which the Holy Spirit speaks about the sacraments.

Congregation, certainly, Christ himself receives you at his table. He is the great Host. He receives you at his table through his servants. They reach to you the bread and the cup. They receive you in the name of Christ as guests to this festive supper. That is why we also reject the celebration of the Lord's Supper by only giving each other bread and wine as the darbyists

and the critical basis congregation do. Christ is present in his servants, who before your eyes break the bread and pour out the wine and give these to you. Everything is done precise at the table of this royal Host. Is this not a festive supper? Behind his servants we see Him, who receives us with the sign of bread and cup.

Here we think about the parable out of Matthew 22, There was one guest who did not have a festive garment. When the king saw him and asked him: Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment? And there was no answer. There was no excuse. The only thing what than follows in the gospel on the question of the king is: And he was speechless. You know what follows then: the king had him thrown in the outer darkness. The parable goes with this in the reality of the eternal condemnation for those who reject this Host. Celebrating the Lord's Supper is coming to this feast on the invitation of Christ. It is also: to understand what it all about. To understand the contradiction of this glorious sacrament. Through bread and wine we are bound in faith with Christ through the Holy Spirit. Who like this in faith receives the bread and wine from the hand of Christ's servants, wears a festive garment. Who walks up without faith, does not wear a festive garment. You have heard what the involvement is in this.

2. So together we have considered that Christ wants to receive us through the sign language of the holy supper into his communion. He does this too and especially to strengthen us in our faith. He appeals to our faith. About that we speak in question and answer 79. Pay attention how carefully this not to easy a Lordsday 29 builds up in the question and answer game between the catechist and the catechumen. In answer 78 the teacher has explained to the young church member that bread and wine do not change into the real body and blood of Christ. But totally satisfied he is not. He still is stuck with a difficulty. And he does not hesitate to throw this on the table. All well and good, the pupil wants to say, Christ sure uses strong words. Just like this: the bread his body and the cup his blood. Is this possible? Of course this is possible, answers your confession. But you really have to pay close attention. For Christ does not say that without an urgent reason. With other words: He has for this a real necessary reason. On that than follows answer 79. In this you see with a glance how Christ, by speaking like this, wants to say two things to us. He wants to teach us something. That is "one". He also wants to assure us of something. That is "two". What is it actually simple and clear your confession wants to say here. In the first place already in that what Christ wants to teach us. Hear, He says through that contradiction of the sacrament: you know that bread and wine support us in this temporary life. That does not make any problems. Now, so will I, your Saviour, through my crucified body and poured out blood feed your soul to eternal life. That is why I speak so boldly and I say plainly that the bread is my body and the cup my blood. Congregation, is this not exceptional? Did we not all lie in the midst of death through

our rebellion against God in Adam? Does this not mean, that we have deserved the eternal death? Just like the man without a festive garment?

Now here comes your Saviour in that ^{implication?} contradiction of bread and wine and He says: Do you see that bread and have you tasted the wine? Now, like that I am the bread of life for you.

O yes, says your Saviour in the gospel from John: the Israelites who ate manna in the desert, have died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh. (John 6: 48-51) It is here about the quality of the life Christ gives. It is everlasting life. It is a life that never will be spoiled. It is a life that thwarts death and brings us in the glory of God and his holy angels. Your Saviour spoke these words at the beginning of his work on earth. But surely here He already pointed to the holy supper. To whom the holy supper bread is given and eats, receives Christ and all the treasures of his redemptive work. Who takes the cup and drinks out of it, he drinks his blood to forgiveness of his sins.

So they bring you to Golgotha, congregation, those signs of bread and wine. They bring you to the foot of the cross. See the blood drip from the cross. That God's Son has poured out for you. That He poured out for your your guilt and unrighteousness. Through that He conquered death. He defeated the devil with it. You are on the road to eternal life. Not for nought your Saviour testifies in the first three gospels that He would not drink of the fruit of the vine till that day when He shall drink it new with his disciples and with all those who after them shall believe in Him, in the kingdom of his Father.

And still your confession is not finished to make clear why Christ in the institution of the holy supper so boldly speaks of the bread as his body and of the cup as his blood. For, says answer 79, He does not want only to teach us something, He also wants assure something to us through these visible pledges and signs. What Christ wants to assure us off, goes above of what He wants to teach us.

Your confession here is four square over against the holy supper teaching of Zwingli. He laid the full accent on what we do in the holy supper. We remember the suffering and death of Christ. We testify through the holy supper that we belong to Christ and to each other. It is an action on our part. But here in answer 79, your Saviour is central in all what He does.

He assures us through the working of the Holy Spirit that we share in his true body and blood. Certainly, we celebrate in the holy supper also the remembrance of the suffering and death of Christ. Only: it does not remain with this. As sure as we receive the signs of bread and wine in his remembrance, we share in his true body and blood. So your confession has built in that element of the remembrance celebration in this powerful assurance by Christ. How we share in Christ's true body and

blood in the holy supper, your confession does not say this here. But it does say, that it happens through the working of the Holy Spirit and what more explanation do we need? Even so, congregation, this is not all. Answer 79 goes further. It lays also a direct and immediate bond between the gospel of the justification through faith and the holy supper. For Christ assures us, so ends answer 79, that all his suffering and obedience are as certainly ours as if we personally had suffered and paid for our sins. Do you recognize here the words of Lordsday 23? There you confessed that God imputes to you the perfect satisfaction, righteousness as if we ourselves had accomplished all the obedience which Christ has rendered for us. Now, this central gospel of the justification through faith is proclaimed anew here in the holy supper. It is made visible and tangible for you in the broken bread and the poured out wine with each holy supper.

Don't we have a real need for this? Is it not exceptional that Christ assures us of this every two or three months anew? I also think here about the young people. So much comes to them in these times. There are those who feel very lonely. Sometimes they are tempted to chase away that loneliness through drugs or sex or in other ways. Now Christ knows their temptations and their doubts. He also knows those of us the grown ups. He comes here in the holy supper to young and old. He says: I give you forgiveness of all your trespasses. I show you here, that I have suffered and paid for your guilt and shortcomings to God. I assure you that with my suffering and obedience are as certainly yours as when you with your mouth eat and drink.

What is the formulation, which the church uses with the celebration of the Lord's Supper, here full of room and royal. Take, eat, remember and believe that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was broken for the complete forgiveness - really, a complete forgiveness - of all our sins. And with the cup of thanksgiving: that the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ - and this is precious - was poured out for a complete forgiveness of all our sins. Drink from it, all of you, says the church with this cup. Are you troubled by your life's shortcomings and your guilt? Do they keep on seizing you? Lift your hearts, congregation, lift your hearts to heaven where Christ is, our Mediator, at the right hand of his heavenly Father. There He is, but at the same time He comes to you at this holy table through the working of the Holy Spirit. He gives himself away to you in bread and in wine. Haven't you put on the festive garment of true faith in Him? You are not a quest without a wedding garment.

3. So we come to the last point we want to speak to you about. Christ receives us as quests to his table also in the strong bond of his love. It attracts attention, how the confession in the holy supper Lordsdays speaks in the plural. Christ wants to teach us and assures us, that we share in his suffering and obedience. I do not celebrate the Lord's Supper all by myself.

I celebrate it in communion with my brothers and sisters and with all the saints. Especially here in the holy supper this is of importance. What the apostle Paul says in Ephesians 4 verse 5 in relation to baptism is also valid for the holy supper: one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all. Also all those belong who confess that one God and that one Lord and that one baptism to the "one" holy supper table.

What is it a sad matter that the reformed christianity, as we saw before, right after the reformation, went different ways. That Zwingli, Luther and Calvin could not agree with each other. Not to speak about the schisms which have taken place through history in our country between confessors of that same God and that same Christ. Let us pray that the great Shepherd will bring the sheep of his flock together under one pulpit and to one holy supper table. Let us also pray that we from our side do not put up a hindrance to this convening together. Let us get involved in this. Christ receives us in his communion also to strenghten the bond of love among each other as congregation. Our Lord's Supper form points to I Corinthians 10 verse 17, where the apostle Paul says: Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body: for we all partake of one bread. That is why, continues the form, we shall all together be one body. We shall have to prove this not only with our words, but also with our deeds.

Congregation, we come back once more to the parable of the royal marriage. You have been invited. Together you celebrate the feast of the king. You are his quests. Let the joy over this feast shine over all your life. A congregation which celebrates the Lord's Supper of its Saviour, festive and in a living faith, is a blessed congregation. What in between times has divided it in disputes and disagreements melts away in the glow of this joy. Such a congregation shall also be a fire of love in this stone hard world. It shall also with a strong yearning look forward to the coming of Him, who is now our Mediator with God. Than it shall with Him and with all the saints drink new the festive wine in the kingdom of the Father.

Amen.

Then at Thy sacred altar bending,
My heart to God in prayer I'll raise.
With harp and voice, in worship blending,
Thy courts resound; while psalms, ascending
To God my highest joy, bring praise
For all his wondrous ways.

Psalm 43: 4. Book of Praise.

Lordsday 30

Holy Supper or mass: table or altar.

Sermon by the late
Dr. R.H. Bremmer,
Enschede, The Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton,
Alberta.

Reading: Hebrews 10: 1-18
Text: Lordsday 30
Psalm 27: 1,3
After the law: Psalm 1 : 1,
After the creed: Hymn : unknown
Psalm 116: 1,2,3,7.
Hymn 40 : 2.
Psalm 22 : 8.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is now the third Lordsday in which the Catechism speaks about the holy supper. First in Lordsday 28 about the institution of the holy supper. After that in Lordsday 29 about the holy supper in relation to the Roman Catholic doctrine in regard to the transubstantiation, the changing, according to Rome of bread and wine into the flesh and blood of our Saviour. And now anew in Lordsday 30. Is this not too much of a good thing? Is there a reason for three Lordsdays and then long ones too yet, to speak about the Lord's Supper? If you question this for yourself, you have to pay attention to two points.

In the first place: question and answer 80 were originally not in the Catechism. Later in the third German edition they were added by Olevianus on the instruction of Frederik the Pious. That was a reason for this. In 1536 the concilium of Trent finished its meetings. It had definitely laid down the Roman Catholic doctrine over against the Reformation. In those statements of the concilium was also, that who taught that bread and wine of the holy supper did not change into the body and blood of the Lord was to be cursed. Trent laid a curse in the church against the reformed doctrine of free grace also in the holy supper. Over against this the Reformed Church chose to take in this question and answer 80 a sharp position. Immediately already in the first question: What difference is there between the Lord's supper and the papal mass? The answer says in these well-known words that the mass basically is nothing else but a denial of the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ and an accursed idolatry. If there has to be cursing in the church, says here the church of the Reformation, then the idolatry in the mass. Here it is absolutely not about trifling matters.

The second reason that the Catechism takes a third Lordsday about the holy supper is, that there has to be a discussion about the question for whom the holy supper was instituted. Like the Lordsdays about the baptism end with the question of children having to be baptized, so now also is asked for whom the holy supper is instituted. And also: who should not celebrate it.

Do you mind congregation, to speak and to think once more about the holy supper? We really hope not. It is here about the central

matters of your catholic christian faith. The whole faith doctrine comes with the holy supper in motion. Christ receives you in the holy supper at his table and distributes to you the treasures of his promises and of his covenant. Should we not at our turn desire to be let inside that treasure room of the Saviour? You have to know what you are doing when you celebrate the holy supper? Under this aspect we will speak anew in this Lordsday 30 about the holy supper.

YOU HAVE TO KNOW REALLY WELL WHAT YOU ARE DOING WHEN YOU CELEBRATE THE HOLY SUPPER.

1. You have to know what this contains: over against Rome;
2. You have to know in what condition you celebrate it;
3. You also have to know for whom the holy supper is not appropriate.

1. In two points answer 80 puts sharp opposite each other what the difference is between the holy supper of the Lord and the papal mass. Perhaps you may ask yourself: But since the 16 th century haven't there been many changes in the roman catholic church? Are these points of difference still timely? Is the sharp formulation of answer 80 still valid? We agree with you: Outwardly through the ages there have been changes in the roman catholic church. Especially the Second Vatican concilie has introduced different changes in the roman catholic liturgy. The mass is no longer read in Latin but in the people's language. In many roman catholic churches the statues have been removed. In many places the mass is not celebrated anymore at the high-altar, but behind a white set table. The mass celebrants do not receive the wafer on their tongues on their knees anymore but standing up in their open hand. Even, congregation, even with some modern roman catholic theologians the question rose if the doctrine of the transsubstantiation should be taken so literally, as Trente formulated it. During the sixties there were theologians who alleged that the wafers, which were left over from an Eucharist celebration, do not have to be kept with care, but could be thrown away. Imagine: the wafers which were changed in the body and blood of Christ. Then Pope Paulus VI spoke in his encyclick *Mysterium Fidei*. In that He has confirmed the doctrine in regard to the transsubstantiation and the mass. And today's Pope John Paul II continues in his footsteps. There are plenty of reasons anew today to put sharp the antithese between the reformed holy supper doctrine and roman catholic celebration of the mass. It can help you in conversations with roman catholics to show them the way to the gospel. In the first place then congregation, what a difference between your holy supper celebration and the administration of the mass. The holy supper table is a common table and it is covered with a sober white cloth. The servant of the Word who serves the holy supper, is not specially dressed up. He is a brother among the brothers. He breaks the bread before your eyes and distributes it, He pours the wine in the cup and passes it around. Everything is simple and sober.

This is totally different with celebration of the mass. There a man in a colorful churchly robe deals far in front of the congregation. Behind the altar he performs a series of solemn ministrations. Choristers and other divine clergymen assist him in this. At the high point of the mass he raises the wafer and speaks the institution words. The priest kneels and worships the wafer in which Christ is now present. He alone drinks from the cup. Here it is not a table of communion around we sit and have communion with Christ, but an altar on which He is sacrificed anew and is distributed as a sacrificial Redeemer. Here we are at the root of the matter. Christ, says answer 80, is still offered daily for the believers. Congregation, you have to discern between the transsubstantiation about which Lordsays 29 has spoken and here the mass in its totality. The transsubstantiation happens when the priest speaks the institution words. Then the bread actually changes into the body of Christ and the wine into his blood. But after this the priest lifts up both elements apart from each other. On the one side the bread, the wafer and on the other side the wine. That lifting up separately of bread and wine means according to Rome that Christ is being sacrificed anew. That is according to Rome the great secret of the mass. There, in the front of the church, Jesus Christ is being sacrificed anew for his people. He sacrificed himself on the altar of the church as real as when He sacrificed himself on the cross at Golgotha. Yes, says Rome, that sacrifice of Christ on Golgotha is permanently being continued. Every minute somewhere on earth the mass is celebrated. Every moment Christ sacrifice is being continued. The sacrifice on the cross by your Saviour continues, according to Rome, from the cross, now approximately 2000 years ago, through all the ages till his return. Every time the second hand on the clock moves. Christ is being sacrificed anew somewhere on this world.

That is necessary, says Rome. Certainly, the sacrifice of Christ on Golgotha was of great significance. With that Christ took our sins upon Him. There He also reconciled our original sin. But how important this may be, that was not sufficient. We also commit our daily sins. The sacrifice of Christ on Golgotha is not sufficient for them. Also those daily sins, those deedsins, which we time and again commit, have to be reconciled. Because of that the sacrifice of Christ on Golgotha has to be continued. From second to second it has to be continued on the altars of the church.

Now put opposite this what you yourself here direct at the beginning of answer 80 confess. The Lord's Supper testifies to us that we have complete forgiveness of all our sins through the only sacrifice of Jesus Christ which He Himself accomplished on the cross once and for all. You hear in this sentence where the accents fall: it is about the only sacrifice of Christ. He has accomplished once and for all for us on the cross. That is what this all about. Once Christ has been crucified for us. Once he hung on the cursed tree of the shame. Once He has wrested for us under the wrath of God. Once, but conclusive, He cried out for us: It is finished. Once He has also been

forsaken by God so that we never would be forsaken by God.

All this testifies, assures, us the Lord's Supper. Answer 80 adds as second point of difference something more. Secondly it continues -what is there always a lot to summarize- that through the Holy Spirit we are grafted into Christ, who with his true body is now in heaven at the right hand of the Father. And as conclusion to this long sentence, follows: and this is where He wants to be worshipped. Is this not tremendously rich? We, poor sinners, are bound to Him, our Lord in heaven. He is there my Head, and we here are his members. Amidst of all what can happen to us, amidst all our problems and worries and unrighteousnesses, we know ourselves to be bound to Him through the Holy Spirit. He rose from the dead and ascended to heaven.

But that did not break the communion with Him. On the contrary the contact with Him is now a lot closer than when He walked on earth. Where ever I am, I am bound to Him. The mass shoves back the hands of the clock of the salvation story. It lets Christ be worshipped in the wafer, on the altar of the church. The form says it so clearly: But lift our hearts to heaven, where Christ, our Advocate, is, at the right hand of His heavenly Father. Don't the articles of your christian faith point you to that? Sursum Corda. Lift up your hearts.

Congregation, remember Revelation# 5. There John sees a Lamb, as though it has been slain, with seven horns and seven eyes. A wonderful vision. The Lamb stands before the throne, but stands there as slaughtered. It bears the scars of his slaughter, but it stands. It has left the slaughter behind. That slaughter has happened, it is over and done with. It now stands full of power, triumphantly, before God's throne. The seven horns, which it wears, symbolize his power and royal might. Through this vision of Revelations 5 the mass draws a cancelling line. The mass brings, in a manner of speaking, the Lamb again from heaven to earth. Let us in opposition to this, worship the Lamb, not on the altar of the church here below, but as standing before God's throne above, in glory.

Congregation, you are reconciled with God through Christ. That does not have to happen anymore in a continuous mass sacrifice. That is the first thing what you confess here in answer 80. You are united with Christ through the Holy Spirit. You worship Him in heaven. That is number two. Now there is a part of answer 80, which we have left for a while. But now we will speak about it. In the first part of the mass is, that Rome confesses, that the living " and the dead " only receive forgiveness of sins, when Christ is sacrificed daily for them by the priests of the mass. The living and the dead. Also the dead have, at this point of view, still need of the forgiveness of sins. The power of the mass sacrifice even reaches into purgatory. Because of that, the soul-masses, which Rome still celebrates for the dead. They have not, according to Rome, penetrated into the heavenly bliss. There are after their death, still their sins to be reconciled. Here you also hit upon the difference between the

reformed and the roman catholic notion of sin.(sense of sin?) The roman catholic theology sees sins as a quantity. In a manner of speaking, you can add them together. The total of the sins, for which here on earth no reconcialation was obtained, now is reduced in purgatory through the sacrifice of the mass brought here on earth.

Now put over against this what you have confessed in Lordsday 22. There your confession says that your soul after this life immediately be taken up to Christ, my Head. IMMEDIATELY. For who dies in Christ there are no sins left to be reconciled. He goes to his Saviour. The dying of a christian, says Lordsday 16, puts an end to sin and is an entrance into eternal life. God redeems his children, in the moment of death, totally from all unrighteousness. That is why answer 80 emphasizes the complete forgiveness, of which the holy supper testifies. Christ cried out: It is finished. The dead share in that forgiveness by their faith in Christ during their lifetime. Congregation, we placed as theme above this sermon: You have to know really well what you are doing when you celebrate the holy supper. Now the contents of this we will summarize once more. The holy supper testifies that the living and the dead are reconciled with God through the sacrifice of Christ. It says also, you are grafted into Christ through the Holy Spirit and you worship Him, as He is seated on the right hand of God his heavenly Father. Who so believes God's promises contained in this answer 80, is entitled to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Here we think about Luke 15. You know: that chapter of Christ seeking the lost ones. The shepherd seeks the lost sheep. The woman seeks her lost coin. The father embraces his son. Why did the Saviour tell us these three parables? Well, because the Pharisees scornfully said of Him: This man receives sinners and eats with them. With the Pharisees this was a reproach. But for you it a comforting word. Indeed Jesus receives sinners and eats with them. He invites you to his table. Not, because a priest would sacrifice Him anew for you. He invites you, so that you under the sober signs of bread and wine receive from Him the assurance, that He once and for all has died for you. Now you also lift up your hearts to heaven. You worship Him, your Saviour and Quarantor, who above intercedes for you with the Father. You know yourself to be united with Him through the Holy Spirit in the faith. Christ be praised.

2. We saw: You have to know really well what you are doing when you celebrate the holy supper. That is not only valid for what the holy supper means. It is also about the question for whom the holy supper was instituted. Answer 81 wants to thoroughly discuss this with you. We pointed out to you in the introduction of this sermon, that the Lordsdays about the baptism conclude with the question: should infants also be baptized? Here at the conclusion of the holy supper Lordsdays, your confession asks for whom the holy supper is instituted. With that the so called childrens communion is rejected at the same time. Not, congregation, because that the children do not belong. The baptism forms confesses: they are included in God's covenant

and church. Only: they are not yet entitled to the holy supper. That shows us the content of answer 81. It is in this connection of importance to point out that in the original text of the catechism question 81 was formulated as: Who have to come to the holy supper of the Lord? The coming itself to the table of the Lord is without doubt. For the having to come is at the same time an allowing to come. You have to come to the table of the covenant, because you are may come. These two simply cannot be separated from each other. There lies a command of Christ because there is a permission from Him.

In large sections of the christianity in our country they often have great difficulty with this. Also among you, you who listen to this sermon, perhaps there are brothers or sisters who have a problem with this. May I celebrate the holy supper? Sometimes our sins are before our eyes as large as life. Is there really a place for me at Christ's table?

Well, congregation, with the answer to that question answer 81 wants to help you. It speaks to you of rightly examining yourself, which is asked from every christian before the celebration of the holy supper. That is also the reason children cannot attend. They are not that advanced in the faith so that they can examine themselves as is needed before the celebration of the holy supper.

Read with attention what the Reformed Church here asks of you in answer 81 about the self examination. There is not a word spoken about characteristics, which you should find in yourself before you celebrate the holy supper. There lies in this self examination, to which you are instructed, not any referring back, from the holy supper's rejecting power.

On the contrary. In the fresh and full trust on God's promises the speaking language of the reformation answer 82 here shows you the way. Who have to come or who may? Well, that are those, who are truly displeased with themselves because of their sins and yet trust that these are forgiven them for Christ's sake. your confession here is amidst the practise of the life of faith. You are called to be displeased with yourself. I have to dislike myself, it wants to say, because of my sins. You are always disapointed with yourself. You know that bitter wrestling with your sins that is there time and again?

You know yourself to be a sinner before God. Only: the Catechism says, do not halt with this, but keep going. Yet trust that those sins for Christ's sake are forgiven. That we have discussed so thoroughly with each other in answer 80. Congregation , your Saviour has reserved that place for you at his table. He has bought that for you and paid for it with his precious blood. There at that table is the communion with Him.

Come along, says the Saviour to you, come along. I, your Saviour wants to celebrate holy supper with you. I want to celebrate communion with you. You may trust that regardless of your sins and wickedness, there is a place reserved for you. You may trust that all your sins are forgiven.

Behind that table and behind each chair at that atble rises up for you the cross of your Saviour. And hear, He says, you are wrestling with the remaining weakness, that time and again

is with you. But also this remaining weakness is covered through my suffering and death. Congregation, what is that a pastoral expression: the remaining weakness. Your confession means with this: again in spite of everything there is always sin in your life. What does this thwart you. It remains, regardless of your fight against it. But now hear; also this remaining weakness is covered through his suffering and death. Covered before God's holy face. God does not see it anymore. He only sees the blood and the suffering of his Son.

Then follows the third point in the self examination: who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and amend their life. Do you hear how in this self examination the three parts of Lord's Day 1 come back again? They are the golden thread that goes through the whole catechism. You have a dislike of your sins, you know your misery. You trust that they are forgiven for Christ's sake: the redemption.

Now at the end: the thankfulness. You desire more and more to strengthen your faith and to amend your life. You celebrate the holy supper for this. To strengthen the faith. You here receive the strength through the faith to amend your life. But then you may not let your seat at this table be vacant. We know very well where some in relation to this, have problems with it. They have heard that Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 speaks about unworthy eating of the bread and drinking of the cup of the Lord (verse 27) They also have read, that he in relation to this speaks of eating and drinking a judgment upon themselves, when they do not discern the body of the Lord. (verse 29)

What is there a lot of worrying about this. Many have deprived themselves, because of this, of the blessing of the holy supper. But what does the apostle mean? There were in the congregation of Corinth people who were in this not for the holy supper itself. They misused the love supper, by greedily wolfing down the food that was put on the table. Or to become drunk of the wine which was available. Who than like this, after becoming drunk at the love supper, celebrated the Lord's Supper, he drinks judgment upon himself, says Paul. Someone like that does not even know what celebrating the holy supper is.

Congregation, when you celebrate the holy supper you have to very well know what you are doing. You sit down at the table of Christ. Every time anew it is an act of faith by you. You don't celebrate the holy supper because of habit or with an unbelieving heart. Is it not the supper of Christ for you? Do away with all your anxieties and doubts in your heart and renew in the holy supper your the covenant with your God. Strengthen yourself through this in the faith and better your life. May and have to: they go together at the holy supper. Your Saviour says: Come along, for I receive sinners and eat with them.

One more arrow the confession in answer 81 has on its bow, which with it wants to strike the hearts. Very sharply answer 81 concludes with an admonition. It says, but hypocrites and those who do not repent eat and drink judgment upon themselves. Now your confession also uses the expression from 1 Corinthians

11 of a while ago. It does this justly. Here he warns the hypocrites. Alas, alas. They are time and again in God's congregation, the men and women who have not put their hearts on Christ. Who do not examine themselves before they attend the table of the Lord. They simulate, says your confession. Congregation is it not horrible, to play the hypocrite before the face of that God who tries the hearts. If these are in the midst of us, than we lay this warning on their hearts. We also call them to repentance. God be thanked that this is possible. Who repents before God from being a hypocrite, receives the grace of the forgiveness. And who, congregation, does not find by himself time and again a piece of hypocrisy? Your confession here shoots an arrow. Which will strike everyone in the heart. Indeed, you have to know really well what you are doing when you celebrate the holy supper.

3. Now we came to the last question and answer of this Lordsday. It is a question, which directs itself especially to the consistory, to the office bearers in our midst. While question and answer 81 is directed to each one of you, now the confession speaks to them, who in their office bear the responsibility for the whole congregation. May also those be admitted to the Lord's supper who by their confession and life show that they are unbelieving and ungodly? Is the holy supper table an open table for everyone, also for them who in their lives profane (desecrate) God's covenant? With all its power your confession's answer to this is a whole-hearted NO. That would be profaning God's covenant and kindle his wrath against the whole congregation. And then suddenly, congregation, your confession puts the celebrating holy supper congregation of these times in a mighty perspective. It sets the church of all ages in the light of the first christian church.

The Reformed Church is the christian church. It is not a sect, it is not a separate division of christianity. No, it stands on one line with the new testament church of apostles and prophets. As that church had the calling to use the keys to the kingdom of heaven, so it has that today. According to the command of Christ and of his apostles, says your confession. Your Saviour sent Judas away from the first holy supper: What you are going to do, do quickly. Peter unmasked Ananias and Sapphira: You have not lied to men but to God. (Acts 5 : 4) The Reformed Church conforms with her holy supper discipline to the old christian church. It keeps the table of the Lord holy.

These are heavy words which are spoken here. If the offices in the church do not keep the table of the Lord holy, the heavy wrath of the Lord will be kindled over the whole congregation. We see them once more opposite each other: the altar in the roman catholic church with the priest who lifts up the wafer and the cup and so means to prolong the sacrifice of Christ through all the ages. Opposite this that sober holy supper table with the bread and the wine as sign of the body and the blood of Christ, sacrificed once for us on Golgotha.

A hand moves the chairs to the table. There is a place for you at this table, says the gospel. Which has been bought and paid for by your Saviour. Indeed, I have to know really well what it is to celebrate the Lord's supper. I have also understood, how it should not be done. Come along, says the Saviour, come along, now you may meet Me at that table. Later on you also may see Me above. At the throne of God, Me, the Lamb.

Amen.

Lordsday 31

Function of the keys in the church: The redemption in a sharp context.

Sermon by the late
Dr. R.H.Bremmer,
Enschede, the Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel.
Edmonton,
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Reading : Isaiah 22: 15-25
Matthew 16 : 13-20
Text Lordsday 31,
Psalm 122: 1,2, 122: 1,2,
After the law: Psalm 106: 2
After the creed: Psalm 65: 3,
Psalm 101: 1,2,5,6,
Psalm 85: 3,
Hymn: unknown.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The roman catholic church has in Pope John Paul II a good ambassador. He travels around the whole world. Wherever he goes thousands of people are ready to cheer him. The roman catholic church pretends to be a world church. And this Pope has brought this notion powerfully forward. He is not only a good ambassador of his church, but also a smart propagandist. In as far as he fights in this against the sins of these times, against abortion and sex idolization, against the use of drugs and addiction, we can be thankful for this. There is in Rome a restraining power in relation to the loosening of the morals. But at the same time we have to realize, that here to a human of flesh and blood an enormous power has been granted. It depends on him, only on him, in what direction the roman catholic church goes. He is a propagandist for the Mary veneration and the celebration of the Eucharist. He maintains these and other roman catholic errors with emphasis. We as confessing protestants should see this. We reject these errors with heart and soul and also the whole hierarchy system of the roman catholic church.

But, ask the roman catholic theologians of today, did not Christ give the keys to the kingdom of heaven to Peter? Did He not pass them on to his successors, the Popes? Does not the Pope justly have keys in his papal coat of arms? Does he not have as successor of Peter the highest lawgiving and teaching power in the church? Is it not just that above his papal throne in the Saint Peter church in Rome is written: thou are Peter and I shall give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven? Does the Pope, as successor of Peter, not have the infallible working of the Holy Spirit when he proclaims doctrine? With these questions they wrested with in the time of the Reformation. And what do you think, congregation? Are they not very timely anew today?

Don't we have the calling today, in which many roman catholics are in a great turmoil, to show them the way to the gospel and how the gospel speaks about these keys? The fact, that the Catechism here in Lordsday 31 puts the keys of the Kingdom of heaven very emphatically on the order paper, already proves how important the men of the Reformation figured the correct vision of these keys to be. And take note: they put the question

of the keys of the Kingdom of heaven at the end of that large section of the Redemption. That whole section of the redemption is once more put sharply into focus. That here is on the order paper, and so we will consider this when we speak about:

CHRIST, IN THE WORKING OF THE KEYS THROUGH HIS CHURCH, SETS THE REDEMPTION IN SHARP FOCUS.

We see this:

1. in relation to the preaching;
2. in relation to the discipline;
3. in relation to God Himself.

Congregation, we have in our confessing in regard to the keys of the Kingdom of heaven to do with a biblical term. The Lord Jesus used it Himself. Think about the part of the Scripture we read together out of Matthew 16. Your Saviour is at the pinnacle of his Messianic work in Israel. He was in the area of Caesarea Philippi in the North of the holy land. There He asks his disciples a sharp question: Who do men say that the Son of man is? Now it is for the disciples to confess their faith in Him. Ah, they answer, some say: John the Baptist, others say: Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Like this they themselves at this moment choose not to take a position. But the Saviour pushes them to it. He then asks very directly: But who do you say that I am? Then Peter the fisherman comes forward. He confesses very frankly his faith in Christ. He answers: You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. The hard word was spoken. Peter has confessed his Saviour as the Christ, the Anointed by God. Now hear how your Saviour reacts to this. He blesses Peter and says: Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jona. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. Peter did not come up with this confession by himself. Now Christ takes one more step. Now that Peter has come to this decisive confession, He continues: And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Our Saviour here connects to, in his speaking about the keys of the Kingdom of heaven, the prophecies of Isaiah. When we read Isaiah 22 as a background of Christ's words to Peter we discover what a speaking image your Saviour here uses. God commands, in that chapter, for Isaiah to go to Shebna, the steward of the royal household of king Hezekiah and the administrator of the palace. That Shebna, says one of the explainers is a parvenu, an upstart, a man who enriches himself in his office. Isaiah has come to tell him about his condemnation by God. Behold the Lord will hurl you away violently like a man hurls away something. (verse 17b) And that is not all. God will call his servant Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, and put him in your place.

In beautiful imaginable words Isaiah told this to Shebna. He says, God shall place on Eliakim's shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open and none shall shut; he shall shut and none shall open. You see it before you, congregation. Such a steward carried, as a sign, a wooden key on his shoulder. He walked around with it. He arranged to the entering of the palace of the king. He decided who could have an audience with the king. When he opened the door of the royal palace for someone, than that door was open. Then such a person went to the throne-room of the king. Did he shut the door for someone, then he did not deign someone worthy to have an audience with the king, and then that door remained tightly shut. No power on earth could open it. Speaking images of the authority, about which such a steward wielded in the palace of the king out of David's house.

Now the Saviour takes this image and applied this to the authority which He gave to Peter. As Eliakim decided, who to the heart of the kingdom, of Sion, to the king was permitted to go, so now Peter receives this authority with an eye to the Kingdom of heaven. What you shall bind on earth, says Christ, is bound in heaven. And what you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Christ here uses the expressions of the rabbies of those days. Binding, congregation, means here: to proclaim the doctrine with authority. It also means: who does not want to submit himself to the good doctrine of the Kingdom, to deny the entrance into heaven. And so loosening means: after penance and repentance admit someone to the kingdom. As Eliakim received the authority to let someone enter into the heart of the royal palace, opening the door to it, so Peter receives this now for the new-testamentic church. Your Saviour has, after his resurrection, underlined all this once more for his diciples. When they were together on the evening of the first resurrection day, He appeared to them in his resurrection glory. He then send out them out as his apostles: As the Father has send Me, even so I send you. (John 20: 22) And when He has said this, writes John, He breathed on them and said to them: Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained. What a power Christ here grants to his apostles. Take note: not only to Peter. No, to all the apostles. He breathed on them. He gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit. He spoke in plural: if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained.

Then here also the the ways of Rome and the Reformation parted forever. For the roman catholic church declares now, that the power which Christ granted to Peter, -the keys to the Kingdom- has been passed on by Peter to his successor. According totradition this is called Linus. On his turn he gave them again to his successor. So the keys of the Kingdom were passed on to the present Pope John Paul II. Only the Pope has the authority to forgive sins. Of course, he cannot do this personally. He grants this authority in turn to all the priests. The keys which Christ entrusted to Peter, have become little keys handled by the priests. They do this in the confessional, in which people

confess their sins. Who confesses his sins in the ear of the priest, he now receives from him the forgiveness.

How will he hear from the mouth of the priest: Absolve te:

I pardon your sins. He also gives the punishment which the sinners deserve.

Again, congregation: the ways of Rome and the Reformation are opposite from each other. For to what a misunderstanding did this so-called sacrament of the confession lead? If you confessed your sins to the priest, then you were done with them. What an hypocrisy, what double dealing was possible here.

What was Calvin in his Institution angry against this. Who forgives sins? only God. To whom else could sins be confessed than to God? Who gauges the repentance of him or her, who confesses the sins, then only God? On which ground does God forgive the sins than only because of the finished work of our Saviour? No, the sins do not have to be confessed in the ear of the priest. They have to be confessed before the face of the holy and merciful God.

What has your confession that carefully worked out in answer 84. How, it questions in question 84, is the kingdom of heaven opened and closed by the preaching of the gospel? How does the church serve that first key which Christ first entrusted to Peter and later to all the apostles? (Matthew 16, John 20) Well, it does not use this key in the confessional of the church, in secret, by a priest. The Reformation has taken away the message of the godly acquittal of our sins out of the confessional. So it has snatched that out of the hands of the priest. It has laid this down on the pulpit, publicly. God now lets this royal acquittal be proclaimed in the midst of his congregation.

Is this not great? Peter, that plain fisherman, received that key of acquittal and forgiveness first. After that it went to the other apostles. Since then it has been passed on to all the office-bearers of God's church. They are called by God to proclaim the gospel of the acquittal of guilt and punishment in the midst of God's congregation.

Calvin says: God put a little man made out of dust, on the pulpit to announce the glad tidings of Jesus Christ to his congregation. It handles upon instruction of Jesus Christ the first key which answer 84 names: the preaching of the gospel. That key opens and it closes. Through the preaching of the gospel, the forgiveness of their sins for Christ's sake, is proclaimed to the believers. Emphatically your confession explains that the promise of the forgiveness of the guilt is proclaimed to all and to each personally. It touches your person. Only those who with a repenting and a guilt acknowledging heart hears the preaching, experiences the forgiveness to his heart. How sharply here, for the last time, is put the part of the redemption. Here your confession makes an appeal on your faith, congregation. To you is proclaimed the forgiveness of your sins, as often as you accept by true faith the promise of the gospel. You are called here to actively believe God's promises. Your confession says here, faith is not a dose spiritual possession, that you have or not have. Every Sunday anew the preaching of

the gospel comes to you and every Sunday anew you are called to believe this. Otherwise the redemption by Christ will elude you.

How sharply this part of the redemption is put, shows in what answer 84 says. To all the unbelievers and hypocrites is proclaimed and testified that the wrath of God and eternal condemnation rests on them as long as they do not repent. Congregation, that happens through that "one" preaching of the gospel. That works to two sides. It works and strenghtens the faith of them who accept this gospel with a repenting heart. It also unmasks all the unbelievers and hypocrites. Here your confession closely connects to the last two questions and answers of Lordsday 30. There it was already said that there is no room for hypocrites at the table of the Lord. Here the confession goes one step further. Now to all the unbelievers and hypocrites in the church is proclaimed, that God's wrath and eternal condemnation rests upon them. The Catechism does not mean to say here that the hypocrites and unbelievers separately have to be spoken to in every sermon. They used to do this in the old days. After the singing after the second point of the sermon, the preaching was pointed to the hypocrites and the unconcerned. Answer 84 does not mean it this way. The "one" preached gospel is life for one hearer and for the other a condemnation. The apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 2 : 15,16 We are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance of death to death. But for them who so will be saved a fragrance from life to life. It is "one" gospel that is proclaimed to all. Christ proclaimed his gospel to all his apostles. To Peter but just as well to Judas. He spoke to all his diciples: be elated that your names are written in the heavens. With that He points to Peter as well as to Judas. But when the latter definitely rejects the gospel, the Saviour says in anger: What you are going to do, do quickly. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews in chapter 4 verse 12 says: For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Can it be sharper? It opens the Kingdom by opening the door to God's treasure room wide open for who believes. It closes the door for every one who rejects this in unbelief. The wellknown preacher Rev. J.C.Sikkel has once said: the gospel is not a candy that is presented to us on a platter. Again and again it asks for decision and surrender. It forces to say yes or to say no. That is why the preaching is not a discourse, nor a piece of dogma, also not a political discourse as some of today would like. It is the preaching of the Word, explanation and application at the same time. The preaching displays the treasures of Christ for you and forces you to make a choice. Do you say yes or do you say no? Congregation, how do you sit in church? How do you listen to the preached Word? Why do you go to church?

Our fore-fathers spoke about coveting salvation when going to church. The word may be somewhat old fashioned, but not the

matter. Your Saviour has compared the Kingdom of heaven with a treasure in the field and with a pearl of great value. (Matthew 13). Suddenly there was that treasure before the feet of the digger. Surprisingly, suddenly. And the diver for pearls experienced the same. He found that precious pearl. So it also goes with the preaching: Who listens desiring salvation is digging and time and again he shall discover the treasure of the Kingdom in the sermon, and find the pearl of great value. So lives through the preaching, the treasure of the forgiveness of sins in the congregation, from Sunday to Sunday.

2. Indeed, that was for the church of the Reformation of great importance. In the place of a conversation between the priest and the confessant in the confessional, came beside the preaching the home visit. In that the elders of the congregation speak with the sheep of Christ. They are entrusted to their shepherd-like care. They bring the same gospel, that is proclaimed from the pulpit, to the believers in their homes and families. They, with the ministers of the Word, are like the stewards, about which Christ spoke in Luke 12. They distribute as true and wise stewards the treasures of the gospel to the members of the congregation.

To be an elder is a glorious calling. At the same time it is not an easy task. You still are not a good elder even as you have the gift of speaking easily. Also not if you are able to have a good conversation about the latest church problem.

To be a good elder you have to have a pastoral heart. Luther wrote once, that to be an elder you need a tender heart and have a happy and joyful mind. You could also say: in the elders the congregation visits itself. It feels its own pulse.

Elders come, instructed by the Lord, with the same gospel, with the same promises which are proclaimed in the church on Sunday. They are their most powerful instrument and weapon. Where there is sorrow and mourning in the congregation, they comfort with the gospel. Where there is unbelief and desertion of the covenant, they admonish. They stimulate with that same gospel the faith. They are brothers among brothers. They are with the members of the congregation, who they visit, in the midst of life. They know the temptations which come to God's children. They give direction to the life of the congregation. They know by their own experiences how they can comfort and encourage Christ's sheep. They do this officially instructed by Christ. Congregation, there is in Proverbs 27 a fine proverb. It says in verse 17: Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another. In the King James bible it is stated more powerful and closer to the original: Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. When two knives are sharpened, you rub them against each other. So the office bearers sharpen the to them entrusted sheep of Christ, with the sharp of the gospel of the redemption. Also in the church discipline the part of the redemption is again put on sharp.

Once more, it is not easy. It demands tact, love and firmness. It also demands knowledge of life. Discipline visits especially are not easy. Here the confession gives a good indication. It

speaks in answer 85 repeatedly about brotherly admonishment. As well as that repeatedly and that brotherly here are worth their weight in gold. The church exercises a lot of patience with its members who may be straying. It has learned that patience from the great Shepherd of the sheep and it has to be taught this time and again. God is patient, congregation. He took the time to move Pharaoh with ten plagues in Egypt to let his people go. Only with the last plague the angel of destruction struck. How much patience did God have with his people Israel during the times of desertion of the covenant? Hear Jeremiah say in God's name: For I solemnly warned your fathers when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, even to this day, saying: Obey my voice. (Jer 11: 7) And what a patience your Saviour had with Judas up to that deciding moment when He send him out of the Passover room.

Being an elder, congregation, does not mean only to finish a list of homevisits. The congregation, in a manner of speaking, should lay pastorally on our hearts. From there that repeatedly admonishing of which your confession here speaks. That is especially valid for the weak and straying sheep of the flock. They have to feel the pull of love in our visits. Here also the word brotherly is of great importance. It wants to say: speaking with the sheep as a brother. To let them know, that we ourselves also know of temptations of sin and unbelief. How we also know how to resist this in Christ's power. When we as office bearers have done what we could, if nothing more helps, then follows the forbidding of the sacraments and the excommunication from the christian church. That is also exclusion from the Kingdom of Christ. This is a moving happening. For the consistory the minister of the Word declares, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that this and this brother or sister, who have excluded themselves from the congregation of Christ, are now excommunicated. That horrible judgment we as office bearers can only pronounce when we are in our hearts convinced, that the last admonishment has been done. It is remarkable, congregation, how the reformers involved the congregation in all this. They did not leave the discipline to the hierarchy as in Rome. From the beginning the congregation is involved in it. The ante is hell or heaven. The congregation has to watch that its office bearers and members themselves hold on to the Word of God and the commandments of the Lord. All this happens in the open. The congregation receives its young members in a public church service, in which they do confession of their faith. Its ministers of the Word are called by it. They are ordained in its midst in their service. Attestations are proclaimed in the assemblies of the congregation and after that issued. In all this there is a piece of consent by the congregation.

In practise we often are out of touch about these things. Sometimes we leave all this up to the consistory. In a flourishing congregational life the congregation communes with its office bearers and consistory. Iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the face of its neighbour. There is one more point we want to point out to you. The excommunication from the

congregation is not the last about which the church speaks. The in the excommunication thrown shut door to the Kingdom is not hermetically locked. It can be opened again, God be thanked. Answer 85 does not end with the excommunication, but with the readmission. Your confession proclaims in the last sentences this grand piece of the redemption, that those excluded can be received again as members of Christ and of his church. They have to promise and show real amendment. The last part of the church discipline is not about exclusion but of taking back. Here we think about the piercing word of the prophet Jeremiah in chapter 3 verse 22, where the Lord cries to his people: Return, O faithless sons, I will heal your faithlessness May the answer of those who deserted the Lord or threaten to desert, than also sound: Behold we come to thee; for Thou art the Lord our God. After the form of excommunication follows the form readmission. As long as a human is alive, he can convert himself to God. And upon repentance the door of the Kingdom opens wide. Congregation, your God is a charitable and forgiving God and full of mercy.

3. Now we come to the last point. We saw how Christ in the use of the keys puts on sharp the section of the redemption in the relation to the preaching and the church discipline. We now will speak about setting it sharply in relation to God Himself. If Lordsday 31 shows us one thing then it is that God is involved with all of this. As a sombre pealing church bell sounds through this Lordsday the expression : by God Himself. In answer 84: According to this testimony of the gospel, God will judge both in this life and in the life to come. In answer 85: the godless are excluded by God Himself from the kingdom of Christ. God is present in the meetings of the congregation. We are also together in the consistory room before the face of God. Of that the prayer in that consistory room be witness. I read once, that the decline of the Reformed Church in the province of North Holland started when they omitted the prayer in the consistory room.

It is about the keys of the Kingdom which God has entrusted to his congregation. Let us really think about this with the preaching and the use of discipline.

We again think about the Pope and his appearance all over the world. The humble fisherman of Capernaum to whom God entrusted the keys of his Kingdom would not be able to believe his eyes. He calls himself the fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ. (1 Peter 5: 1) Tend the flock of God that is your charge. Not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock. Let these words be written in the heart of the preachers, office bearers and the congregations. Then also the promise which Peter connects to this will be fulfilled to us: And when the chief Shepherd is manifested, you will obtain the unfading crown of glory.(verse 4) Is that not a beautiful conclusion of the great and royal part of the redemption?

Amen.

Lordsday 32

Not half a Christ

Sermon by the late
DR.R.H.Bremmer,
Enschede, the Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel
Edmonton,
Alberta.

Reading : 1 Peter 3: 1-18a
Text: Lordsday 32,
Psalm 34: 1,6
After the law; Psalm 119: 21
After the creed: Ps: 134:1,2
Psalm 116: 1,3.5.7
Psalm 103: 1
Psalm 86: 4,7.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Have you ever checked how often in the bible the word thankful and thankfulness appear? You may think: that has to be quite often. Otherwise the Catechism would not have put the word thankfulness above this third part of our confession. Be not mistaken. It appears only two times in the whole New Testament. There is much talk about thanking. But thankfulness you only find twice. In the first place in the letter to the Colossians, chapter 3 verse 15, where the apostle writes: And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. You will also find it in Hebrews 12 verse 28 with the powerful stimulation: Therefore let us be grateful (Dutch bible dankbaar i.e. thankful) for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship.

Twice the word thankful appears in the New Testament and still your confession puts above this whole third part of the Catechism from Lordsday 32 to Lordsday 52, that short and powerful heading: OUR THANKFULNESS. It has a reason for this. Because with this it redeems a promise which it already made in the first Lordsday. There it told you that the only comfort in life and death consists out of three parts: in misery, redemption and thankfulness. With that your christian life has been drawn. You have been out your misery, in which your fall in Adam put you, redeemed by Christ. And there than follows how you prove to God your thankfulness for this redemption. Today we will speak about this last part. It is about:

OUR CHRISTIAN THANKFULNESS

1. Christ works this in you;
2. It is of great meaning for you and your neighbour;
3. The Scriptures binds this on your heart.

1. Your Catechism is a real fine booklet. We notice this time and again. But what is it really all about in the Catechism? What does it want to bind on your heart? O, you answer: Is it not the only comfort? You are right in this. However not all has been said with this.

The Catechism also wants to show you that this only comfort comes to you in the three main points of you being a christian. That is in the first place in the twelve articles of faith. In article by article you confess what you believe in regard to God the Father, God the Son and about God the Holy Spirit. After that follows the second main point: how you shall serve God. For that reason your confession puts the 10 commandments of the law of the Lord before you. But you still are not there yet. You also have to know how you shall pray to your Father in heaven. That is why the Catechism deals with the Lord's prayer petition after petition, the way the Christ has taught this to you.

But why is the Catechism such a fine booklet? Well, because it presents those three main points of you being a christian in the frame of the three parts which we mentioned before: in the light of your misery, your redemption and your thankfulness. Your confession does not without reason lay these three main points on the table. It shows you these against the background and in the perspective of those three parts of which the comfort exists. You could say: those 12 articles, those 10 commandments and the Lord's prayer are the three diamonds which the Catechism inserts in the golden ring of the comfort. Now, congregation, the first main point of the christian faith, the 12 articles with bound to that the sacraments of baptism and holy supper, are explained to you against the background of your misery and your redemption. Now follow the 10

commandments and the Lord's prayer. This your confession now presents to you in the frame of the thankfulness which you owe God.

As only the word thankfulness appears twice in the New Testament, the matter is continually there. And that matter the drafters now use to cut off all the misunderstandings by the speaking about the law of the ten commandments. Look at the first question in this Lordsday: question 86. In this the drafters of the Catechism, Usinus and Olevianus, immediately confront their roman catholic contradictors. They do this in a convincing manner. They know their roman catholic opponents really well. They knew that they continually say: those reformers, they are something. They continually cry: know your misery, know how really evil this is. Realize out of what a pool of misery you have been redeemed. They than also continually speak about grace. You can hear that they in the beginning of question 86 lay it in the mouth of their oppenents. In the somewhat solemn start: Since we have been delivered from our misery, by grace alone through Christ, without any merit of our own. The redemption out of free grace through the work of Christ cannot be expressed more powerful. All good and well, now say the roman catholic opponents: but why do we still have to do good works? You feel, congregation, what the stake is. Here the whole doctrine of the free grace is put in a bad light by them. There you are with your doctrine of free grace, the roman catholic contradictor wants to say. What kind of power here still has the having to do of good works. You are saying: You are redeemed. Than you can do what you want. Congregation,

we have to add, that this question about the having to do good works has not been made altogether without reason. In those days there was a trend beside the reformers who could not care less about christian way of life. The so-called antinomianers - throwers away of the law - claimed that you as a christian do not have to keep the law. Did not Christ do this for you? In reality this is not a new error. You find this already in the time of apostle Paul. He also lets one antinomianer ask: What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? Angrily the apostle cries against this: By no means. How can we who died to sin still live in it? (Romans 3: 1,2) So here lies this question on the table. Agressive, accusing. How can you, with the doctrine of the free grace, urge people to do good works, to true thankfulness? How can you combat those antinomianers? Now look at the answer, congregation. With this the Catechisme makes a masterly move. No, it does not let the problemthesis of its opponents be forced on itself.

It does not put up a row of arguments, why a christian has to do good works. It also does not point to the law as a demand of good works. It will not even consider to exchange the gospel for the roman catholic work-sanctification. It doe not say: Those good works are needed for this or that. Absolutely not. Pay attention to the first words of answer 86. Through Christ, they say, and then follows what Christ does.

We could have expected something entirely different. The answer by itself is not logical. If someone asks you why you do something, you cannot answer by pointing to something someone else does. But let this answer be illogical. It is -once more- a fantastic move. For it points to Christ. It approaches this problem from a totally different angle. It does not point to what we have to do or what we should have done. No, it points to Christ to what He did and does. Suddenly it places our Saviour Jesus Christ in the centre. It puts Him central. It says: because Christ having redeemed us, also renews us by his Holy Spirit to be his image.

O, yes, the reformed confession here goes over a sharp edge. It goes, in a manner of speaking, along precipices. You may have made a trip through the mountains during your holidays. Sometimes you may have to walk on ledges between precipices. One step to the left or one step to the right and you fall in the abyss. But still you go quietly on along the path. For even as dangers threaten left or right, the path is safe and reliable. So it is here too. Your reformed confession goes here on the one side along the roman catholic work-sanctification.

And on the other side there is the abyss of the throwing away of the law, of the antinomianism: continue in sin so that grace may abound. Your confession goes between this, safe and beneficial. It says: Aren't you from Christ? Did He not buy you with his blood and liberate you? How those few words masterly summarize the whole part of the redemption. Redeemed and liberated. Through Him. The Catechism wants to say: you do not have to do this yourself. You do not have to jerk yourself loose out of the power of sin. That has He, your Saviour done.

No, what we have confessed in the part of the redemption is not put here on a loose foundation. You do not have to earn heaven through good works, From that you cannot take off one centimeter. But on the other side of the coin, it means that not for one moment you can live as you please. That you do not have to be concerned about the law and God's commandments. Congregation, now pay attention, how your confession continues in this answer 86. Now that Christ has redeemed us, He does not stop there. Certainly not. He also renews us by the Holy Spirit to his image. He keeps working on us. He keeps us in his grasp. Or to say: it has not only been Good Friday but also Easter. He not only poured out his blood for us on Golgotha and redeemed us with this. He also rose from the dead. He defeated on that early Easter morning the devil and jerked us out of his power. That is one.

But now comes two. He went to heaven. He took his place at God's right hand. From there He poured out the Holy Spirit. It also became Pentacost and through his Pentacost spirit He seized our hearts. He also made us different people, new people, who will serve the Lord. Here you may think about Romans 8 verse 29 where Paul wrote that for those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that He might be the first-born among many brethren.

Congregation, we often think too scanty of the work and of the power of our Saviour. You have a living Saviour. Once again: He keeps on working on you, also now, today. Your confession says He renews us. What is there a depth in this answer.

I do not renew myself. I do not make myself into another human being. How could I do that? I, who have been received and born in sin. He does that. He does that out of the power of his finished work through his Pentacost Spirit. I may be one of his many brothers and sisters, who are made to his image. When two people, a man and a woman, have been married for many years, they start to look like the other. They assume each others speech and habits. They become closer and closer to each other. Is this not so between you and your Saviour? If you live out Christ if you daily take refuge to his sacrifice and his blood, if the Spirit lives and works in your heart, it cannot be different then that you conform to his image. You are going to show his image. You become forgiving. You start to love God's law. Then this does not stand anymore against you in its condemning power. On the contrary, it becomes a joy to keep this law. Then you sing with Psalm 119 stanza 21: I've kept thy law, I sing with joyful tongue. Congregation, now you are understanding why your confession discusses the third part of the Catechism under the heading : Our Thankfulness. Here thankfulness is definitely not a contra performance. Sometimes it is made this way. In the southern parts of the Netherlands you can see stone crucifixes on the sides of the roads. On those Christ is portrayed. Sometimes there is an inscription: This I did for you. What are you doing for me? The confession does not want to understand the part of the thankfulness like this. It is not like this, that Christ first has delivered an achievement for us and after this it becomes our turn. No, Christ continues

to work on you. He does not half a job. He does not place a period after what He did for us on Gogotha. The confession formulates it very carefully what He further does for us and to us. It says, it renews us to his image, so that we with our whole life we may show ourselves thankful to God for his benefits, and He may be praised by us.

Golden words, congregation. In the following Lordsdays the 10 commandments and the Lord's prayer are on the order paper. The confession sets both of these in the light of: show with your whole life that you are thankful to God. I may do this: out of thankfulness. The law does not lay a whip over my life. It does not say: you have to do this, you have to keep this. And man oh man if you did not do or keep this. Christ does not say: you have to pray like this and man oh man if you do not pray like this all the time. No, I am allowed to do all that. I may in my life as a christian according to God's law show my thankfulness. I may in my prayer to my heavenly Father show how thankfull I am to Him. Time and again I may come back to Him with my wants.

Congregation, do you know what the word thankfulness really means? It comes from the word thinking about. Who is thankful to someone for what he gave you, who thinks about him with feelings of thankfulness. Someone gave you advice, good advice in a critical moment of your life. You will never forget him. Someone offered you a helping hand in a critical time when others left you in the lurch. You will never forget him or her for the rest of your life. And if their is an opportunity to show this, you will do that. I know: our christian life is vulnerable. Sometimes we go through heights and depths. The devil is there too. He attacks us vulnerable life again and again. Sometimes we are deeply ashamed for our heavenly Father. And yet, I may be thankful and I may show this thankfulness. Every time I seize his good law. Psalm 119 in stanze 62:(new dutch translated version) Seven times daily, I say thanks to your goodness, righteous is your law and a blessing to me. And; they who love your law, go your ways. And they walk on in peace, frank and free. And so it is also with prayer. In my vulnerable and sometimes clumsy christian life I may in thankfulness pray for help and power. I know: my Father does not leave me in the lurch.

There is still one more element in this first sentence of answer 86 for which we ask your attention. I may during my whole life show thankfulness to God, says this answer, so that He may be praised by us. Congregation, do not let these words go by the wayside. It is about God's praise in our thankful christian life. We do not only express our thankfulness with deeds but also with words. Sometimes this is more difficult than with deeds. You can, if you want to thank someone, slip some flowers through his door. But to thank him heartily with words is sometimes more difficult. The praising of God is not always so easy. Do you have difficulty finding the words, congregation? Than the book of Psalms can really help you with this. What a praising of God. What a spontaneous expression of

thankfulness to God. Take Psalm 103 vers 1 and 2:
 Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul and forget not all his benefits. Or Psalm 118 vers 1: O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; his steadfast love endures forever. A speaking example of the praise of the Lord for his benefits is also Psalm 116. When the poet of this Psalm has spoken to God about his rescue from deadly danger, he is asking himself: What shall I render to the Lord for all his bounty to me? He rejects every thought of contra achievement. Him render to the Lord for what He did for him? Impossible. And yet he shows his thankfulness: I will lift up the cup of salvation. That is the Eastercup of the remembrance of the liberation from Egypt. And then: I will call on the name of the Lord. That is a manifestation of thankfulness.

One more time, congregation, does christian thankfulness mean: first Christ's work to redemption and than we with a contra achievement? No way. It means to make visible in our christian lives that Christ is not half a Redeemer. He is a whole Saviour. After He has bought you through his blood and redeemed, He also renews us to his image. You do not have a halve, but a whole Redeemer.

2. We saw that Christ works our thankfulness life in us. That is of great meaning for yourself and your neighbour. Answer 86 speaks about this with the sober word "further". The confession wants to say with this, No we are not finished speaking about this. We still have more to say. Listen: further that we ourselves may be assured of our faith by its fruits. In the thirties there was a lot to do about this sentence. In those days there was a heated debate in the churches about the question: how can I know for sure that I am a child of God? How can I be assured that I belong to the elect? Some say: Here the Catechism teaches us that we could found the assurance of being a child of God in our good works, in the fruits of us believing. If you are really worried if you really are a child of God, examine yourself. Check if there are fruits of faith in your life. If so, then you can draw the conclusion, that you are a real christian, a real child of God. Others opposed this reasoning with all their power. They said against this that you can never find the assurance of being a child of God in the fruits, which you find in yourself. What would that be an unstable ground. Because one time you will discover fruits in yourself. But at another time there are none. And then you are nowhere. There are even participants in this discussion who said: Here our Catechism is mistaken. Imagine, that you have to base your faith assurance on your fruits. What is this an unstable ground. No, they declared, only God's promises are the firm ground for us to be a child of God. The firm ground on which we build can never lie in ourselves. This only lies in God's faithfulness. The Catechism has bound this on our hearts in Lordsday 7. Then it said that a true faith is not only a sure knowledge whereby I accept as true all that God has revealed to us in his Word, but also a firm confidence

that not only to others, but also to me, God has granted forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness, and salvation. In this is the assurance of the faith and that your confession certainly does not take back. I may for the assurance that I am a child of God, take refuge in God's promises and the finished work of my Saviour. God has sealed and assured those promises in my baptism.

Congregation, only this assurance is so often tempted in my life. The devil is very active in this. Sometimes he throws the doubt-question in our hearts by pointing out to us our sins and weaknesses. Are you with those sins a real child of God, he throws at us? In such moments raising the point of the fruits of the faith can help us. That word fruit your confession takes from John 15 vers 5 where our Saviour says: He who abides in Me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. It cannot be otherwise. He, Christ, the vine, makes us bear fruit in Him. Now the Catechism says here: when there are fruits in your life and you notice them in faith, then they may assure you in the knowledge that you are Christ's. Not as the only ground to found on this your assurance but as a living proof, that you are bound to Christ, the vine. Congregation than do away with satan, in those moments of temptation. Do away with him and clasp yourself to the finished work of your Saviour and show with thankfulness in your life the fruits of his work. Then the assurance of the faith will grow in you.

Now the christian thankfulness-life is not only necessary with the eye upon ourselves. Your confession says it is also of great meaning for your neighbour. Here your confession really looks to all the sides. Answer 86 ends by saying: that by our godly walk of life we may win our neighbours for Christ. The Catechism points with these last words to a striking text from the first letter of the apostle Peter (chapter 3: 1,2.): Likewise you wives, be submissive to your husbands, so that some, though they do not obey the word, may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, when they see your reverent and chaste behavior. We said before this is a striking text. It places you in the first christian congregation. There were women who were converted to Christ, but not their husbands. They were still unbelievers. Sometimes they lived in total heathenness. To what does the apostle Peter press these women? Do they have to continually speak with their husbands about the faith in Christ? Do they have to have disputes about this? No, says the apostle, they have to win their husbands for Christ by their godfearing walk of life. Sometimes their heathen husbands made it very difficult for them. Often they lived godless and as drunks. And yet stay submissive to your husbands, writes Peter and stay christian. Show that you are a christian through your behavior. From that goes a continuous power to win for Christ.

Congregation, of course: intentional evangelism is important and we do not want to undervalue this. But at the same time: what a power goes out from our christian walk of life.

A continuous quiet power. Your confession here not only has eyes for your neighbour outside of the church. It also thinks about your neighbour inside the church, about your own husband,

your own wife, your own children; they are continually confronted with your Saviour by your christian walk of life. Here we think about discussions about of leaving the church. A poll showed that many young people turn their backs to church and faith because there was not a christian way of life at home. Going to church and reading the bible had become a formality. There was not a convincing and a convincingly christian way of life behind it. Young people are not won for Christ by this Congregation, let us be warned. Let through our walk of life, without the salt of faith in it, not estrange our children from the Saviour and his congregation. What a great responsibility lies here on us as parents. And also on the employers and the employees and visa versa. Everywhere, on our jobsite and in the street on which we live, we may witness, by our godfearing walk of life, of Him who bought us with his blood and who is not half a Saviour.

3. Now we get to the last point. In the last two points it was about the christian thankfulness, which we owe God. Alas, there are also unthankful christians. The Catechism does not hide this. This is told us in a direct manner in question 87. There are church-people who continue in a godless and unthankful life. It is thoroughly sad, but the Catechism does not disguise this. It has a message for such church members, a sharp penetrating message. Your confession says, they cannot be saved. They will not inherit the kingdom of God. Is here a hell and condemnation preaching minister talking? Does here someone speak who asks from others, what he himself does not do? Take notice how your confession motivates this. By no means they will be saved declares answer 87, for the Scriptures say so. It does not happen very often that the Catechism literally cites the bible. It only does this with conflicting points. So it is here. Anew, and again with great power, your confession proclaims here that in any case the doctrine of the free grace does not undermine or damage the christian life. The contradictors here are answered with the bible in the hand. Scriptures itself say, that an unchaste person, idolater, adulterer or any other godless sinner shall not inherit the kingdom of God. The wellknown preacher Reverend J.C.Sikkel said once in a sermon, no rascals will enter heaven. What would the unclean and the godless do in God's clean and glorious kingdom? Congregation, we have made a beginning with the part of the thankfulness. In the coming Sundays it will be about the commandments and prayer. And all of this in the shining light of the christian thankfulness. The stakes are high, say this last question and answer. Congregation, bear in mind: You do not have half a Saviour. For that reason and more so: an unthankful person shall not inherit the kingdom of God. That is why we end with those powerful apostolic call from Colossians with which we also began:
BE THANKFUL.

Amen.

Lordsday 33.

Of the true repentance or conversion.

Sermon by the late
Dr. R.H.Bremmer,
Enschede, The Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton,
Alberta.

Reading Romans 6: 1-14
Text Lordsday 33
Psalm 66: 1,8
After the law: Psalm 65: 2,
After the creed: unknown hymn
Psalm 56: 1.3,5.
Psalm 119: 43,
Psalm 25: 2,6.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Acts 16 we read two striking conversion stories. The first one is the of Lydia, the seller of purple goods from Thyatira. The second is of the jailer from Philippi. Luke does not say his name, but about his conversion to God he writes to us in details. Both converted to God. Both were also baptized. And yet - what a difference between the conversion of these two people.

You know, how it went with Lydia. Luke writes in verse 14 of Acts 16 that the Lord opened her heart, to give heed to what was said by Paul. During several Sabbaths in Philippi she listened with her heart to the preaching of Paul. So she came to believe in Christ and converted herself to God. With the jailer it was totally different. When an earthquake opened all the doors of the jail and the handcuffs of the prisoners were loosened, he cried out to Paul and Silas: Men, what must I do to be saved?(verse 30) They answered him: Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household. After that he and his family were baptized, just like Lydia. There is a clear difference and similarity in both these conversion stories. They both converted to Christ and let themselves be baptized. That is the similarity. But with Lydia it went gradually through the listening to the preaching of the gospel. With the keeper of the prison - using the King James version- it went suddenly, as with a shock. Were both their conversion stories finished? Certainly not. They had themselves baptized and that baptism calls on them to continually convert themselves from the Jewish life that Lydia and of the heathen life the jauler had led. God demands from us, that we during our whole life turn away from sin, and convert to God and the life in his service. Lordsday 33 speaks about this. It is here about the true conversion of man. With that you have to notice especially one thing. Your confession handles the conversion of man in the third part of the Catechism, in the part of the thankfulness. Converting yourself is thankfulness-work for the redemption, which we through faith received in Christ. That also is expressed in the description which the Catechism gives in this Lordsday of the conversion. So today we will preach to you the Word about this important theme in the thankfulness-life of the christian.

We speak about
THE TRUE CONVERSION OF THE CHRISTIAN.

We pay attention to

1. the surprising approach of it;
2. the radical demand;
3. the glorious fruit of the conversion.

1. Someone once said: I find that word conversion such an old-fashioned word. Can you still use this with modern man? For instance, take evangelization. In that we call people to convert. But does it get anywhere? Do non-church people seize that word? Do they understand with what you mean to say that all people have to convert to God? Is that so? Would a church outsider not hear in that word conversion, that in this it is about turning to another direction in your life? For what the word conversion means is very clear in the bible. Especially the prophets in the Old Testament used a word in Hebrew that simply meant turning around. To make this clearer with an example: you walked to the left and now you walk to the right. The prophet Isaiah uses this in chapter 55 verse 6 in which he called the Israel to conversion. Listen: Seek the Lord, while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near, let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord.

Congregation also listen to the prophet Joel in chapter 2 verse 12: Yet even now, says the Lord, return to Me with all your heart Rent your hearts and not your garments, return to the Lord your God. You hear that in these places of Scripture that with conversion two things matter. In the first place it touches the direction of your life. Isaiah calls the godless Israelites to also radically change their life-direction. But it also touches your thoughts, your heart also has to change radically. It is remarkable, that in the New Testament two different words in the original are used for conversion. With the one God calls us to change our heart, our thoughts, with the other to radically turn around your wrong life-direction.

The New Testament gives us speaking examples of both those meanings. We think about John the Baptist during his preaching at the Jordan. Pharisees, tax collectors, soldiers, all kinds of people are standing around him. And listen: He calls to all of them to repent. For, says John, the Kingdom is at hand. With this he uses a word in Matthew 3 verse 2 that means a radical change of disposition. It has to become totally different with all these types of listeners. Their thoughts have to change radically. But as Paul, in his turn, in Acts 2 proclaims the gospel in Lystra, he calls on the heathens to turn from the vain things of the idols to the living God who made heaven and the earth and all that is in them. (verse 14) Then he uses a word, that means a change of life-direction. Up to now they walked behind the idols, they have to radically leave them behind and walk in the direction of the Lord.

In the beginning of the sermon we named two different kinds, ways of conversion. The one was like Lydia's, which went in

a gradual way, and the other was like the jailer, sudden and shocking. Recently I had a conversation with someone, who had a problem with the part of the conversion. He was a christian, true and hearty. He also had done confession of faith. But, he said, I have not been converted. He had a problem with this. He said, for his mother had taught him that doing confession of your faith was not sufficient. His mother told him, you also have to be converted. What he meant by this was, you have to know the day and the hour of your conversion. Like in the spirit of the jailer of a while ago. That is why he still could not celebrate the Lord's Supper. His mother had told him, you can only do this when you really know that you are converted.

Well his mother was right when she said that man has to convert himself to God. We saw before, how the prophets also called for this. But she was absolutely wrong when she told her son that this had to happen sudden, shocking, so that years later you can name the day and the hour. We will not say that this cannot be this way and so cannot happen. We already gave you the example of the jailer. There are still more other speaking examples about this. God can work with man in miraculous ways. Now think about king Manasse of Judah, the son of the pious king Hezekiah. Manasseh was a totally different king than his father. He erected altars to the Baals and made Asherahs and worshiped all the stars of the heavens. He practiced soothsaying, which God of Israel had strongly forbidden in his law. He even burned his son, an abominable human sacrifice. Then the Lord gave him into the hands of the king of Babel who locked him up in prison and bound him with bronze handcuffs. But, says 2 Chronicles 33 verse 12, when he was in distress, he entreated the favor of the Lord his God. And humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers and prayed to Him. God heard his supplication and brought him again to Jerusalem and into his kingdom. Is this not a speaking example of how a person suddenly can convert himself to the Lord? As through a shock. After his exile in Babel Manasseh went in a totally different life-direction than before.

Congregation, the same you see with the apostle Paul. When Stephen, the deacon was stoned, he stood there and guarded the coats of the men of the Sanhedrin who stoned Stephen. Later he went with letters of the high priest to Damascus to persecute God's congregation. Then suddenly a light from heaven surrounded him on that road to Damascus. He heard a voice: Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? And to his question: Who are you Lord? came as answer: I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. (Acts 9:4,5) From that time on Paul became from church-persecuter No 1 to church-builder No 1, a miraculous conversion. They are examples of a sudden and shocking conversion. That is how God can work with a person.

However that is not to say that this is the only way in which a person can convert himself to God. Beside the above mentioned examples there are also other examples from Sripture.

There you hear of people who gradually and without shocks came to the service of the Lord. Think about king Hezekiah, the father of Manasseh of a minute ago. He was 25 years old when he became

king. Do you know what his first deed was? He opened the doors of the house of God and repaired it. Hezekiah was clearly a king who from his youth feared the Lord. And take Timothy of whom Paul wrote that he from childhood was acquainted with the Holy Sriptures, which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 3: 15)

There is still a misunderstanding that with speaking about the true conversion of man time and again comes to the fore. Many christians take up the conversion as an exclusive beginning of being a christian, as the starting point of our redemption. Especially among those, who value the edifying writers of the previous century, this idea is found. That is because of the exaggerated meaning which is attached to this sudden shocking first conversion. Through this conversion, so it is reasoned, you are transferred from the spiritual death in to the life with God. That is why they see the conversion as the gate to redemption.

But where does your confession speak about the true conversion? Have you ever thought about this? You are with Lordsday 33 not in the part of the redemption anymore. No way. With Lordsday 32, the previous Lordsday, began the last part of the Catechism, that of our thankfulness. In the part of the conversion it is about the thankfulness, which we owe to God for our redemption. Converting yourself to God is thankfulness-work. On this the emphasis has to fall. The necessity of the conversion is not put in front of one who is not a christian. Definitely not. Already in Lordsday 12 you have confessed, that you are a member of Christ by faith and thus share in his anointing. And in Lordsday 23 you have said: that you through faith are righteous before God and a heir to life everlasting. Do not forget this for one moment. It is in this Lordsday 33 not about the question: how do I, by converting myself become a christian? No, you confess here as a christian what God of you demands in the conversion.

That is a surprising approach of the Catechism. You stand here as a christian, as member of Christ, before the question: what does God demand of me in the true conversion to Him? And again: the answer that your confession gives here, is absolutely surprising. It answers here, your conversion is in the dying of the old nature and the coming to life of the new. The old text called this the two parts of the conversion. And as the expression " the two parts " in left out the new text, the matter is still present there. The true conversion of man has as a first "part" the dying of the old nature and as "second" part the resurrection of the new nature. Don't you find this a surprising approach? Your confession does not give a definition of what conversion now really is. It does not make a dogmatic problem out of it. No, it shows the conversion the way Sripture speaks about in two aspects.

It is exactly like in Lordsday 1. There you confess that as your only comfort in life and death is, that you belong to your faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. After that it is asked out of how many parts that comfort consists. You know than what follows:

in three parts, namely the knowledge of misery, redemption and thankfulness. The confession definitely does not intend that there are three stages of us being a christian. No, it are three aspects, three different sides, of that only comfort. So it is here with the conversion of man. You should not understand answer 88 that first you have to die of your old nature before a new nature can be raised. No, the surprising thing is correct that these two different sides, aspects, are of your conversion. We call this answer surprising. Namely it helps us with the correct scripture-like view on us being christians. Sometimes we have difficulty with this. On the one side we know for ourselves that we love the Lord. We find it wonderful to serve Him and follow Jesus Christ. We like to go to church and we try hard to live like christians. But at the same time our sins can really bother us. We fight against this with all our strenght but every time we fall back in it. Young people can have a lot of difficulty with this. They wrestle with the power of passion that sometimes blazes up in their young lives. They find themselves so weak in the association with those who do not fear the Lord. They should be more of a witness of Christ, they think. In short: we all wrestle with our shortcomings in our christian lives.

Do you know how this happens? This finds its cause in the fact, that we often wrestle with these things without our Saviour, without the finished work of Jesus Christ. Scripture itself does not do this. Here you have to think about Romans 6. the congregation of Rome, to which Paul writes, also had these difficulties. They were converted from the Jewry and from the heathenism to Christ. There was however so much lacking in their lives as christians. Now you have to see how the apostle Paul approaches this. He points his brothers and sisters to their baptism. He asks in verse 3: Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? and the apostle continues: We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Is that not a powerful pointing to our baptism? You worry about your christian life, says here the apostle. You have so much to do with your old nature. Look at your baptism. You are, when you were baptized, buried with Christ. That is to say: with your baptism you went under in the water of the baptism. So also Christ went under in death and in the grave. He did this in your place. He took your sins with Him into the grave and into death. He also was raised to life. He left your sins behind in the grave and in death. Through the majesty of the Father He was raised to a new life. And now also look at verse 11 and see what Pauls conclusion is: So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Instead of: So you must also consider, the King James version translates this tersely: Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed into sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Then immediately the apostle follows up with: Let not sin reign therefore in your mortal bodies, to make you

obey their passions. Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life. (verse 12 and 13) Again, is this not surprising? Do we not in our conversion, in our christian life, make enough use of our baptism? Let our young people use their baptism. In this they will have a powerful hold in the battle against the temptations of the devil and of sin. For us, older people no less. Through our baptism we are inseparably bound to our Saviour. Out from Him we have to think and speak about our conversion. The dying of the sin and the raising to a new life, the apostle concentrates in Romans 6 in Christ and us being baptized in Christ. Without a living and righteous faith in Christ, the dying of the old nature and the raising of the nature, will come to nothing. Then we keep on looking at ourselves and try out of our own strength to conquer sin.

2. But now pay attention to what a radical demand God makes of us in this conversion. You find that in the answers 89 and 90. There is further speaking about the old and the nature. These are real biblical expressions and words. About whom would the Scriptures think, when it speaks about our old nature, than no other than Adam, the first man? He became through his fall into sin the old nature in the most concrete sense of the word. He has taken all of us along with it. His evil power works in all of us. We are "old natures" so far as those powers of death and destruction of Adam continue to work in us. At the same time we are also new natures. The new nature: that is in the first place our Saviour, Jesus Christ. He is as the second and last Adam brand new. Congregation, It is here not about two separate parts of us human beings. The theology of Kuiper has brought many misunderstandings on this point among us. He put it like this, that through the regeneration a new vital principle (levensbeginsel) was planted in us. This would slowly develop. The new nature would then become stronger and the old weaker. However if you so see the relation of the old and new nature, you get into great difficulties. Then we consist out of a holy regenerated part and an unholy unregenerated part. Now who is then responsible for the sins we do? We ourselves or our unregenerated part? There are christians who about their sins over against God have easy excuses. They did not do them, but their old nature did, their old Adam. Instead of confessing with David: Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done which is evil in thy sight. (Psalm 51: 4) What is the meaning of Christ in my life if my good works come forth out of my regeneration? Why shall I then take my refuge in Christ if I am already good in the core?

No, congregation, you stand before God being responsible yourself for all what you have done wrong. You yourself have to confess your sins before God. You also may with the shortcoming of your life and with your guilt over against God take your refuge in your Saviour.

So you can understand the depth and the radicality of the answers 89 and 90. What is the dying of the old nature? asks your

confession in question 89. The answer is: It is to grieve with heartfelt sorrow that we have offended God by our sin, and more and more to hate it and flee from it. Your confession here penetrates into the heart of the matter. Are you really sorrowful about your sins? Do you hate them and flee from them? It is in your confession not about external work, about a clean respectable life. It is about what we affect God with our sins. Again we were egoistic, we rolled in the intoxication of sin, we were jealous, greedy, untruthful. It is not about that you loose your wild hairs, losing your pranks a little. The Lord demands a heartfelt sorrow, a powerful hating and fleeing. Here your confession is exposing. Hypocrisy has to be brought to light. The apostle Paul uses the image of a coat for our old nature. This we have to put off, he says, which goes to corruption. (Ephesians 4: 22)

Congregation, as radical as the Catechism formulates God's demand in the putting off of the old nature, it does that with the coming of life of the new nature. It is with love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works. Also here, with the resurrection of the new nature, your confession wants to touch your heart. Once again, it is about the heartfelt joy in God through Christ. Christians are happy people. Young people may be really happy when they have chosen for Christ.

Your confession lays a cheerful tone in us being a christian: To live with love and delight according to God's will. Not sighing and with a sad face. You as child of God find it wonderful to serve the Lord. Your confession here is not easily satisfied. It is about the radical demand of God in our conversion. In that same Ephesians 4 the apostle used the image of a coat also for the resurrection of our new nature. It is the putting on of the coat of the new nature, who is created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness, says the apostle. So the confession penetrates the respectable front which we sometimes erect for our lives. Does in your heart really bloom the joy of being redeemed in Christ? Do you really enjoy to live in good works before God's face?

3. Now we come to the last question and answer of Lordsday 33. This connects closely to answer 90. Now your confession asks: what are then those good works in which we may live with love and with delight? Well, congregation, they are a glorious fruit of your true conversion to God. They are done out of a true faith, according to the law of God and to his honor. Sharp antithetic your confession adds: not those based on our own opinion or on precepts of man. Your confession here sharply opposes the roman catholic cloister asceticism and all the external good works which were prescribed during the ages: pray so many times, making pilgrimages, obtaining indulgences etc. Very sharply your confession points to 1 Samuel 15, king Saul's punishment by Samuel. The Lord had commanded to ban the Amalekites. Saul did not do this and saved their livestock using the excuse that he wanted to bring a sacrifice to God with this. What does the prophet say? Behold, to obey is better than

sacrifice, and to listen better than the fat of rams. Saul's sacrifice was not according to the will of God and to his honor. His high-handed good works meant the end of his theocratic kingship. Your confession here also points to Isaiah 29 verse 13 where God says to Israel through Isaiah: Because these people draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment of men learned by rote, the prophet has to speak the woe over this people.

Real good works to God, fruits of true conversion, are done spontaneous out of faith and to the honor of God. So spontaneous that we ourselves do not even know that we are doing them.

In the last judgment the righteous shall ask, says our Saviour in Matthew 25 verse 37: Lord, when did we see Thee hungry and feed Thee, or thirsty and gave Thee drink? When have we seen Thee naked and clothed Thee? Than the king shall say:

Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethern, you did it to Me.

Congregation, we are the Reformed Church. That is to say: reformed, renewed, to the service of God. That is a honorable name. It also lays great responsibilities on us. To the congregation of Ephesus says the Saviour that He has against them, that they abandoned their first love. Remember then from what you have fallen, and then He let John write: Repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

(Revelations 2 : 5) Let this not be said about you. Convert yourself every day of your life to God. Than this will lead to the surprising approach of this radical demand to conversion in this Lordsday by you to a glorious fruit.

Amen.

Lordsday 34.

The law of the Lord: not frustrating but normalizing

Sermon by the late
Dr.R.H.Bremmer,
Enschede, the Netherlands.

Reading Psalm 119: 1-24
Text: Lordsday 34,
Hymn unknown.
After the law: Psalm 119: 39
After the creed: Psalm 146 :3,
Psalm 99 : 1,2,5,6.
Psalm 147 : 6,
Psam 19 :3.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton,
Alberta.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The time we live in, is sometimes typified as the ego-era. The ego, the I of man is dominant, You could typify this life-institution perhaps best with "I am I" and "you are you. You do whatever you want to do, I do what I want to do. Aren't we free individuals and don't we go our own way in this life? In Germany a book was published with the typifying title: Alone. In that the "I am", it being alone of modern man, is described. He does not want to bind himself in anyway shape or form. Why do have to marry officially? Why should you "take" children, as it is now called? You live alone and are not tied to anything. Norms? Laws? Don't come with them to modern man. Aren't you your own norm? The well-known French philosepher Sartre said it all: Man is free to make his own life-design. You just have to dare to do so. He did not even consider to have the law dictated to him by a god. Laws that come from the outside to you, frustrate you in you being a human. Recently a young man, when he was to be judged for his criminal deeds, said: I don't care about people. I go my own way. The "one" words it very philosophical, the other says and does it raw, in principle it is the same free modern life-ideal.

In this world lives the church of God. In its public meetings, on the day of the Lord, it lets the 10 commandments be proclaimed. Its message is exactly the opposite. It does not proclaim an unbridled freedom but binds us to the law of God. Does that frustrate, congregation. us being human? Do the 10 commandments destroy our freedom? Do God's commandments put us in handcuffs so that life becomes difficult and heavy? Or are God's laws beneficial, laws to life, which bless our lives? Do not forget that your confession proclaims the 10 commandments to you in the third part of the Catechism. In the part of the thankfulness. There in Lordsday 34 stands a thankful person before you and he asks in a happy and cheerful mood: What is the law of God? Because this, he says, you have put before me in answer 91 as the norm for the doing of good works. I am, as a redeemed child of God, eager to listen to this. There is in question 92 something we also hear by the poet of that beautiful Psalm about God's law, Psalm 119: With open mouth I pant, because I long for thy commandments.(verse 131) So today we will listen to God's beneficial laws.

They are the rule for our life in thankfulness.

GOD'S LAW AS RULE FOR OUR THANKFULNESS.

1. This does not frustrate us;
2. it normalizes our life;
3. It is radical.

1. Your confession in the first place asks: What is the law of God. The answer points to Exodus 20 verse 1-17 and to the repetition of the law in Deuteronomy 5 verse 6-21. Is this not strange congregation? Aren't you the congregation of the new covenant? Did not Christ fulfil the law of Moses? Why does the confession not point here to the laws, which Christ gave to us in the sermon of the mount? Or why does the answer not point us to the rules, which the apostle Paul in his letters gave to us for a christian life? Does it make sense, many christians ask, to read the law of Moses in the meeting of his christian congregation Sunday after Sunday? For example would it not be sufficient using the summary of the law, as Christ gave in Matthew 22? Those questioners would be right, in case God had intended the law only for the people of Israel. But this is not the case. Think about paradise. Did God leave Adam and Eve ignorant in regard to his will? Did not God make his law be known on the Sinai for the first time? Certainly not. God lived with Adam and Eve in a covenant, the paradise covenant. What do you think? Did not God bind the first people in that covenant to his demand to love Him over all things and the neighbour as himself? No doubt, God had sharpened his covenant-demand in the test law in paradise. In that He tested man if he really was willing to render love to God, by observing the test-covenant. Love to God and to the neighbour was God's covenant-demand for the first people. This fundamental law of the covenant God maintained, also after the fall of his first covenant-partners. Real fine God renews that command in his covenant-pact with Abraham, his friend in Genesis 17 verse 1. There God speaks to Abraham, just before He made his covenant with him: I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. Congregation, in this is everything what God already promised in paradise and demands from us. In front goes the promise: I am God Almighty and of course the Lord means with this: That I am for you, Abraham. Then God adds to this his covenant-demand Walk before me and be blameless.

Why than does God come anew to his people at the Sinai and He gives anew the law to this people? Well, the sense of the law of God, of the godly demand of love to God and to the neighbour was worn away with the Israelites. Someone made this clearer using the image of a flat grave marker in an old medieval churchbuilding. Such markers are worn by the many feet that walked over them. Time has done its erosion. So was God's law worn away by Israel in those ages in Egypt. God decided it was high time to sharpen that law anew. And what did the Lord, congregation, go to work with this in a merciful and royal manner. The proclamation of God's law has been a powerful happening for God's people at the Sinai.

Note the moment, in which God came to his people with his law. They only have been liberated a few months ago from Egypt. They are on the road: from Egypt to Canaan. Egypt lies behind them and the land of the promise is ahead of them. What a lot has happened since that liberation from Egypt. They already had grumbled. At Mara, because of the bitter water. In the desert of Sin, because of a shortage of food: God gave them Manna. At Rafidim because of the lack of water and Moses had hit upon the rock and brought forth water. What a grumbling and rebellion against God. And now they are at mount Sinai and God figured it was high time, that He anew sharpen his law to them. The way they are now, they cannot continue to go to Canaan. God renews his covenant and let his law be heard again. Congregation, pay attention, to the heading, the signature of the law. That says: Then God spoke all these words saing: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. It is too bad, that answer 92 in the first sentence left out the word "Then". It is emphasized in Exodus 20. (Not in the K.J.V. nor in the R.S.V. but it is in the Dutch bible) And it is of great meaning. Then, says Scripture, then, there at the Sinai. Then, then when Egypt was behind them and Canaan was ahead of them. Then God liberated them out of that horrible house of bondage and went with them on the road to the land of milk and honey. Not for all the money in the world should we want to do without that word "then" in the heading of the law.

A heading above a law, congregation, is of great importance. It bears the imprint of the whole law. During the war our laws and regulations were proclaimed with the heading: In the name of the governor of the German realm. What a difference that amde with the laws proclaimed in the name of Queen Wilhelmina. Such a heading expresses the authority and the nature of the laws. Now, here comes the Lord God Himself and introduces Himself to his people. He presents Himself as the Giver of these commandments. I am the Lord, Jahweh, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Congregation, do you hear the claim that God lays here on Israel? He does not proclaim for nought in that heading, that He the Lord, is your God. Both his covenant names He places at the front. He is the Lord, Jahweh, I am who I am. Or: I shall be whom I shall be. The God on whom you always can rely. Who never defaults. To whom you always can go with your worries and your guilt. And: I am your God Israel. That word God names God as the Creator of heaven and earth, which can make or break Israel. This God is your God, He Himself says it here.

And yes, what says the Lord emphatically, that He brought them out of the house of bondage. Catechumen sometimes have difficulty with this word bondage. Ask them what it means. Ten to one, that they do not know. God means Egypt with it. Did they not have to serve in the hard work in the tile-ovens of the Pharaoh? Was Egypt not for them for the last years, a huge concentration camp? House of bondage: that word reminded the Israelites of the clubs and the whips of Pharaoh's supervisors. It also reminded them of more horrible things as the drowning of the

little boys in the Nile. And now, congregation, before the Lord God proclaimed one article of his law, He puts them before the fact, that they out of that house of bondage, out of that concentration camp Egypt, have been liberated. In that light and perspective stand the 10 commandments which God will proclaim. Pay attention that God does not use the word commandments. Not that this would not have been a right word. Certainly not. But it still remarkable that the Lord speaks of words. God spoke all these words. They are not stone hard laws which God now is going to proclaim to press life into a straightjacket. They are words of life. They are beacons in the sea of life which show the direction to your ship of life. They are the words, with which God wants to reach your heart, so that it becomes a joy to keep these commandments. So that you can sing with the poet of Psalm 119: Oh, how I love thy law. It is my meditation all the day. (verse 92) So God comes to his redeemed and liberated people with these ten words, and so He shows the background in the heading of these ten words of life.

There is something else we want you to notice. Here grace goes clearly ahead of the law. The gospel precedes the demand of God. You are, says God to Israel, a liberated people. God proclaimed that gospel, that grace of his covenant, already in Egypt itself, the last night before the exodus. What was laying on the tables of the Israelite families, which were ready to leave Egypt? Congregation, It was the Easter lamb, that was slaughtered and of which the blood was brushed on the doorjambs. Was that Easter lamb not a powerful proclamation of God's redeeming and liberating grace? Did Israel itself not deserve death just as well as the first born of Egypt? But this blood liberated them from the guilt. The gospel of this Lamb precedes the demand of God in the ten commandments. And what has God once more underlined that merciful deliverance from Egypt with the passage through the Red Sea. Through that, says our form for baptism, baptism was signified. The water of the Red Sea that splattered them on all sides during the passage, proclaimed to them just as the Easter lamb, God's graceful liberation. Now that we have looked at all this, does God now not have the right to ask for the heart from his people in the ten words of his law? Take a look at the first commandment: You shall have no other Gods before me. This does not mean anything else than: you only shall serve Me. Only to Me you give your heart. This claim on the heart of God's people comes back again in the tenth and the last commandment: you shall not covet what is your neighbours. With other words: your desire shall only go to Me, your Covenantgod.

When you consider all this, does your conclusion become: God's law is frustrating my life? The law of God presses us into a straightjacket? It cannot be any different as you answer: Certainly not. On the contrary, God's law puts my life in the space and the freedom of the service of this God-Liberator. Does it frustrate your life when you sanctify God's name and keep his day in the blessed rest of the Sabbath? Does it frustrate your life when you not kill but love your neighbour?

Does it frustrate your life when you do not desire the wife of your neighbour but live in trust with your own wife? Does it frustrate your life when you keep your fingers away from the possessions of your neighbour and not begrudge him his possessions? Someone once wrote: God's laws are not dogs which bite you, but which bark you to the life in love to God and your neighbour.

Do you remember with what we began? With the question if the confession does it right, to point you, the New Testament congregation, to the law of the Sinai. We answer to that: Take one more look, congregation, to that heading of the law, the signature; this law comes from God, which led us out of the house of bondage.

As we saw, for Israel this was Egypt. What is this for you? Can, may and do we not have to read this heading against the background of the finished work of your Saviour, Jesus Christ? Did He not enter in our place on Golgotha into the house of bondage of sin and devil? Did He not fulfil in our place the ten words of God's law? Did He not through his actual obedience love God and the neighbour as Himself? Did He not bear for us the punishment of our law trespasses? May we from now on not read this heading, as a New Testament congregation, like this: I am the Lord God, who brought you, in Jesus Christ, out of the house of bondage of sin and satan? You are the through Christ liberated congregation of God. Where in Israel did the stone tables lay, on which God wrote with his own finger the ten words of the law? They lay in the ark of the covenant and under the gold mercy seat. Plastic image of the atonement of our law transgression through the blood of Christ. Not for nought did the high priest yearly sprinkle on the Atonement Day the atoning blood just on that lid. It closed within a centimeter the ark as a box. God's grace totally covers the trespasses of the law of his people.

Christ has fulfilled the law for us. He also has liberated us of the curse of the law, through becoming a curse for us. So He also has obtained for us the strength to do God's law, to love that law, and to let our lives be normalized by it. The apostle Paul has wrestled with the true vision on the law. He came from Phariseism to Christ. As Pharisee he had experienced God's law as a straightjacket, as a trammel of convention, through which you were squeezed all your life. Then Christ came into his life. He discovered that Christ fulfilled the law for him. That he, Paul did not have to do this himself as a means to live with God in peace. That law did discover himself to his guilt and shortcoming before God. Very frank the apostle writes to the congregation at Rome: If it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin. (Romans 7 :7) That is how he experienced the discovering power of the law. But later the apostle shows how he from Christ saw the law as a rule of thankfulness. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good.(verse 12)

There is no reason for us that we should feel frustrated by God's ten sanctifying words. They come to us in Jesus Christ. So they are to us a merciful rule for our lives in thankfulness.

2. No, the law of the Lord does not frustrate us being man. God's commandments come to us as a rule for our lives in thankfulness. They do not frustrate us, but they do normalize us. That is also grace of God. He does not leave it up to ourselves. He shows us the way. He gives us the norms, the rules for our live in our hands. In the ten commandments. What is everything God has made good, congregation. Of course God could have formulated his commandments into a different number. He gave us ten. For every finger of our hand "one" commandment. Children can count them on the fingers of their hand and learn. What has the Lord arranged these commandments with care. Question and answer 93 speak about this. There your confession asks: How are these commandments divided? The answer points to Moses and to Christ, a masterful touch of the Catechism. To Moses by speaking of the two tables. With that you should not think of a table of which you eat. No, with tables here are meant tablets, granite tablets on which God with his own finger wrote his commandments. God did this twice. When Moses after the first time threw them angrily into pieces, when seeing the golden calf, God wrote them once more. (Deut 10: 4) The Catechism takes it in answer 94, that God wrote the first four commandments on the one table and on the second the remaining six. The first four normalize our conduct over against God, and the other six our relation over against our neighbour. So man has for ages understood the speaking of the Scriptures about the two tables. However lateky there came a new explanation which is worth considering. It points to the fact, that when in the time of the Old Testament two kings made a pact, the one gave the other two clay tablets with the terms of the pact. If one tablet got lost, than there still was a extra copy. Now God made his covenant with Israel, which was represented by Moses. Now He gives, along with this way of thinking, two tablets to Israel with on each the ten commandments as text of his covenant with Israel. So important is this covenant. But how do we understand the speaking of Scripture about these two tables, it does not change anything about the division. The first four commandments put the love to God central, the remaining six this to the neighbour. So our Saviour Himself divided them in his conversation with a lawyer in Matthew 22. He asked Him about the great commandment of the law. About this the Pharisees could debate passionately. Was by example the commandment to honor your parents more important that the commandment of keeping the Sabbath or was it vice versa. Your Saviour does not get dragged into that useless debate. Masterly He answers: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. And the second commandment, which is like the first, is: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. Did God not formulate his law beautifully with an eye on our conduct? Is He not central in those first four commandments? Only to serve and honor Him, says the first commandment. But serve Him according to his Word and not in a self-willed way, says the second commandment. And if you honor and serve Him, then firstly you have to keep

his name holy, says the third commandment. And how can you serve Him better and more intensively than by reserving a full day of your workweek for Him, says the fourth commandment. So the Lord comes closer and closer to us and He seizes our heart, our life and our time.

Now the remaining six commandments. Your Saviour put them all together under the heading: love your neighbour as yourself. Actually congregation, in those first four commandments your neighbour is not forgotten. If I have idols before God's face, then I tempt my neighbour. When I neglect the sabbath, then this has consequences for my neighbour. Only, here in the last six commandments, God especially confronts me with my neighbour. My neighbour, what a speaking word. It is the man or the woman who stands beside me and lives beside me. God puts that man or woman beside me. Biblical neighbour love has an unbelievable deeper background than the humanistic one. Nowadays the humanistic covenant preaches also neighbourly love. Even now there are sounds from that side, that they need the church again to teach people to have respect for their neighbour. Congregation, there is an unbridgeable abyss between the humanistic neighbourly love and that because of the will of God. As reformed people we confess that God places our neighbour beside us. And if this a friendly man or woman, or a difficult and irretating one, this does not matter. You have that neighbour, which God places beside you in your family, your business, at your work, you have to accept and to love him or her for the sake of God's will.

What a challenge for the congregation of Jesus Christ in these times. Today they talk much about the critical society judgment. Now, here you find the norm for a critical judgment of society. Do you show neighbourly love on the job, or where ever in society? Do you do this because it is God's will? How different our society would be, how less hard and egoistic, if living was done according to the second table of God's law. Think about the parable of the good Samaritan, in which the Lord Jesus gives clear object teaching on who at a concrete moment can become my neighbour.

There is yet another aspect of our normalisation through God's law. Lately there has been struggling about the question if the christian faith works horizontally or vertically. Then it is said: the orthodox christianity is way to vertical. It only speaks about our relation with God. It has to set itself more horizontal and get into the need of this world of hunger and war. Congregation, is here an antithesis? Definitely not. Especially that fine division of God's law in love to God and to the neighbour cuts off this dilemma. I cannot devote myself horizontally full of love to my neighbour, if at the same time I do not love the Lord. These two are unseparately bound together. The I am I and the you is you of this ego-era here melts in the double love-law of God. God guards us for this, that it may happen to us as to the rich man from the parable of Luke 16, who did not fear God and did not care about anyone. Christ did not warn us there for nought.

3. Now we come to the last point. We saw that God's law does not frustrate us being human but indeed normalizes. As the last point we will now consider the radicality of the law of the Lord. That comes to the fore in the first commandment. Have you ever noticed that the Catechism reserves for all the following Lordsdays a separate Lordsday, but only not with the first commandment? Your confession wants to show with this how close the beginning of the Catechism, the I am the Lord your God is bound to the first commandment. Now that He the Lord our God is, it is impossible to have other gods before his face. And also see, congregation, how masterly the Catechism, the first commandment immediately after the heading and division, brings to the front. It does not ask: what does God prohibit you in the first commandment. Still it is clearly formulated as a commandment: You shall have no other gods before me. No, your confession asks specifically in question 94: What does God command you in the first law? Your confession here is about the positive. What flows there from the first commandment for my concrete life-position? And before your confession says one word about what is demanded from us in this commandment, it impresses upon us what here in this first commandment is at stake. No less than your salvation, your bliss, congregation. Listen: for the sake of my salvation I avoid and flee all idolatry. You have already understood: in the obedience to the first commandment everything is at stake, your salvation. God cannot even see those idols before his face. He does not tolerate them. He sweeps them away in this first commandment. If this commandment is relevant? Asking the question is answering it. I think about all these modern religious superstitions: Indian religion, re-incarnation, transcendental mediation, alternative religion and in whatever man seeks his salvation. Away with this, says the first commandment. Away with it. There is only One who truly can be trusted and who you can rely: the Lord God, the God of the covenant, the Father of Jesus Christ. He then is also central in the further explanation of this commandment. It is really a hymn, that answer 94, a hymn about the trust and caring love of our God and Father. Congregation, what has this "I era" brought to mankind? Nothing else than enslavement, blood and chaos. True freedom? It does not look like it: enslaved to powers and demons. Blessed who lets himself be normalized through the radical law of this God and Father. Congregation, forsake all creatures rather than do the least thing against his will. Be radical and be on guard for the idols.

Amen

By Him Jerusalem is guided;
 The Lord his statutes has provided,
 His steadfast love to Jacob showing,
 His word on Israel bestowing.
 He dealt thus with no other nation;
 They did not know his revelation.
 Praise then the Lord, your gladness voicing
 And in his steadfast love rejoicing.

Psalm 147: stanza 6.

Lordsay 35.

The second commandment: No dumb images, but a living proclamation of the gospel

Sermon by the late
Dr.R.H.Bremmer,
Enschede, The Netherlands.

Reading: John 4: 1-26
Text: Lordsday 35,
Psalm 96: 1,3.
After the law: Psalm 99 : 5,
After the creed; Psalm 89 : 5,
Psalm 138: 1,2.
Psalm 97 : 5.
Hymn 7 : 1,5,9.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton,
Alberta.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lately in our country we are confronted with religions of the strangers " who live within thy gates " to say it with the words of the fourth commandment. Among them are also the Muslims. Here and there their mosques are being built. Have you ever seen one of those mosques from the inside? There may be some among you, who have seen the large Omarmosque in Jerusalem, built on the earlier temple square. The first thing that attracts attention at a mosque is the fountain or the watertank in which the mosquevisitors do their ritual washings. Islam copied this from the worship service of the temple with the copper wash basin. But after this there is very little to see in a mosque. On the ground there is a wooden floor on which the muslims kneel when they say their prayers. A mosque is not a church but a prayerhouse. And the only decoration which Islam allows for this prayerhouse are Koran texts with sometimes beautiful formed letters and drawings of flowers. Images are strongly prohibited. It is not possible to portray Allah. That has to be shown very sharply in a mosque.

Does Islam with this look like our reformed worship service? Did we not also remove the images from the churches? Our reformed worship service is also sober? Yes, and still there is a profound difference between the manner in which, we as christians worship God and those of the Islam. For us the Lord is not the far and exalted Allah. In no possible way. We know our Lord as our Father in Jesus Christ, our Saviour. God is not far away and unreachable. God has come to us in Christ, who is the image of God.

And so we also worship Him; in Christ, his dear Son. It is in the second commandment not only about an external and withered worshiping of God, as with the Muslims. In this commandment it is about our worship service, in which Christ is central. Our confession expresses this like this: we shall not worship God in any other manner then He has commanded in His Word. And that Word became flesh in Jesus Christ. What that spiritual worship service of God contains we will consider today. I speak to you about:

IN THE SECOND COMMANDMENT GOD ORDERS US TO WORSHIP HIM SPIRITUALLY.

So that we

1. Believe Him sincerely,
2. worship sincerely,
2. fear sincerely.

1. Congregation, the second commandment is very closely tied to the first. Both commandments run like in one breath together. First: You shall have no other gods before Me and immediately after that: You shall not make yourself a graven image of God. It is clear that these two commandments are closely connected. That made the roman catholics and the lutherans unite both commandments. They regard them as one commandment: the first. Because of that their commandments count one number lower than ours. What with us is the third commandment is with them the second and so on. Yet they also come to ten commandments, because they split the tenth commandment into two. First as the ninth commandment: You shall not covet your neighbours house and then as tenth: you shall not covet your neighbour's wife and what further follows in the tenth commandment. The reformed reformation did not follow Rome and Luther in this. Calvin also followed the synagoge which also separate the first and second commandment. They are also to be discerned, these two commandments. In the first God sweeps all other gods from before his face. Away with them. No other gods before Me. In the second commandment God sharpens this by forbidding the making of an image of God. We shall, says answer 96, not make an image of God in any way. Pay attention, congregation, how carefully God developed that second commandment. You have to place yourself in the old-eastern world, in which Israel lived. That was totally different world then the one you live in today. When you do this then you will be able to understand this commandment a lot better. God begins with the prohibiting of a graven image. In that you can see an old easterner busy with his idol. The prophet Isaiah has described this to us in chapter 44 in a plastic and ironic manner. The ironsmith fashions it and works it over the coals; he shapes it with hammers and forges it with his strong arm. The carpenter stretches a line, he marks it out with a pencil; he fashions the idol with a plane.(verse 12,13) You can hear the scornful laughter of the prophet about a made by hand graven image.

How earnest the Lord is with the forbidding of the by men graven and formed images shows in the detailed summary which the second commandment gives of this. On the background of this is Israels longtime stay in Egypt and no less in the later entering of Canaan. The Lord clears the decks of the past and warns his people with an eye to the future. They shall not make a graven image of anything that is in heaven above. The Egyptians worshiped the sun god Ra, they also worshiped certain birds. Here God sweeps them away. He also forbids the making of images

on what is on earth. The Egyptians made themselves images of animals as an example: the hyenas. With this they pictured the idol Anoebis. And the Lord even forbids the making of images of what is in the waters under the earth. God here connects to the old eastern world picture. In those days they imagined the earth to be a flat disk, which floated in the world sea. They thought, this is under the earth. Gos does not want to say with this, that the world is made like that. He spoke so about the comprehension of Israel in those days. For example, the Egyptians worshiped crocodiles. They even have mummies of those animals. At the same time God forbids, anticipating, the worshiping of sun and moon as Baal and Astarte later in Canaan. So the Lord with this second commandment is amidst the life of the world of those days. Especially throught the detailing God shows Israel how earnest He is with this commandment. He expresses this by adding, that they shall not bow down to them nor serve them.

How did it happen, congregation, that time and again Israel let themselves be tempted to make such images and kneel before them? Well, then you should think about the story of the golden calf. In that you can see how susceptible Israel, God's own people was for the making of such images, even of God Himself. For really, they were hardly liberated from Egypt, for hardly has God given them in an audible voice this second commandment or they made this golden calf. You know how Moses was with God on the mount Horeb to receive God's law and instructions. For them that took way too long, They felt lonely. Where now is the Lord? They had to believe that He was with Moses on the top of the mountain. They wanted to see Him. They wanted Him close to themselves. That is why they went to Aaron and said: Make us gods who shall go before us. With other words: whom we can see. For this Moses, the man who brought us up out of Egypt- we do not know what has become of him. (Exodus 32: 1) If you would have said to Aaron: what are you doing now?

Are you going to teach Israel the service of an idol? He would have strongly defended himself. Surely he would have said: this is not so. We are not going to worship other gods. But look, that young and powerful bullcalf, which you see there, is that not a beautiful image of the Lord and of his fertile making power? We really worship the Lord, but the eye wants something too. Listen to what they cried: These are your gods, O Israel, who brought out of the land of Egypt. Aaron in his turn cried: Tomorrow shall be e feast to the Lord. Other gods: how can you have that idea. How angry Moses was when he came down from the mountain and heard the festive noise around the golden calf. In his anger he threw the stone tablets, on which God had written the law, to pieces. Israel was found wanting in faith, they wanted to see. They did not have enough with the words, with wich God had revealed Himself to them.

Ages later the same happened when Jerobeam set the golden calves at Dan and Behtel. He was a civil servant of Solomon, rebelled against his king and fled to Egypt. Their he had seen the iamges of Egypt's gods. There they could see their gods. They, as Israeltes had to believe that the Lord lived behind the veil

in the temple above the ark in the holy of holies. That is why he erected, when he was king, such images as the two bullcalves, the one in the North at Dan and the other in the South at Bethel. He also made himself to be the high priest of that worship service. Now there was no more need for the Israelites to make those long journeys to Jerusalem. They now also could see the Lord, just as in Aaron's time at the mount Horeb.

Congregation, you know how angry the Lord was and showed this through the prophet he sent to Bethel. Jerobeam's arm, which he stretched out against the man of God from Judah, stiffened and the altar torn to pieces. And in the further history of Israel it sounds as a dark refrain with just about every king of Israel: For he walked in all the way of Jerobeam, the son of Nebat, and in the sins which he made Israel to sin. The Lord counts the sin against the second commandment as very serious. Congregation, why did the Lord take such offence to this sin? Because it pulled Israel away from the faith in the invisible and majestic God. If we can see God, then it is not necessary to believe in Him. And that is what the Lord wants to teach you in this second commandment. Abraham left Ur of the Chaldeans not knowing where he would end up. He did not see God, but he had God's promises. Congregation, and those promises are made visible and tangible for you in your Saviour, Jesus Christ. In Him God reveals Himself to you. Think about the words out of the first chapter of the gospel by John: No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known. (verse 18)

Here you may also think about that short conversation between the Saviour and Philip in John 14. Christ has told his disciples: No one comes to the Father than through Me. Then Philip asks Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied. How beautiful and penetrating did your Saviour answer him: Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know Me, Philip? He has who seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say: Show us the Father?

There lies the heart of the obedience to the second commandment. It pushes us to God's revelation in Jesus Christ. He, writes Paul in Colossians 1 verse 15, is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation. In that living man of flesh and blood, in Jesus Christ, God shows Himself to us. Christ, writes the letter to the Hebrews: is the reflecting of his glory and bears the stamp of his nature. (Hebrews 1 verse 3)

What is this commandment relevant today. O, no today's man does not make a graven image of God from wood or stone. But what do you think? Does he not form with his brain an image of God? How do some Christians think about the God of the election? Don't they cut themselves an image of a stone-hard God? A God of fate, that hits you if you are an outcast and for which many live in fear. Instead of believing in God's merciful election which with Him comes to us in Jesus Christ to encourage and comfort us. Or the God of the mystic, which you have to experience deep within yourself instead of believing in Him on his Word. Congregation, your God is merciful and full of grace but also majestic and angry about all the unrighteousness

of the people. So He has revealed Himself to us in Jesus Christ. He proclaimed the gospel of the forgiveness of sins to whores and taxcollectors. He also whipped with his word the Pharisees and the scribes. God comes to you in the preaching of the gospel. You cannot form an arbitrary image of Him but you shall believe Him on his Word.

2. Believing the Lord according to his Word in Jesus Christ. That was our first point. Now we come to the second. We shall serve Him according to his Word. That he emphasizes also to us in the second commandment. Your confession interprets that in a very speaking manner in question and answer 98.

The question is: But may images not be tolerated in the churches as "books for the laity?" Your confession answers this with a powerful "NO". It continues; No, for we should not be wiser than God. He wants his people to be taught not by means of dumb images but by the living preaching of his Word.

With this question and answer you are confronted with the roman catholic religion. We realize that in the today roman catholic church of the Netherlands most, if not all, the images have been removed. But in a lot of other countries this is not the case. Also the confession here touches the structure of the roman catholic church, which distinguishes between the laity and the clergy. That structure has never been changed. That is why it is, also with an eye on conversations with roman catholic christians and the evangelism work necessary, that you know what it is all about here.

Why does the roman catholic church use images in the church? For that they have two arguments. In the first place they do this from a pedagogic point of view. Your confession describes this short and terse: they see the images as "books of the laity". You should know, that Rome sharply distinguishes between the hearing and the teaching church. The hearing church are the plain church-people without the clergy. They have, in spite of all the reforms of the Second Vatican Concilie, actually nothing to say. They have to hear to what the teaching church, the clergy, tells them. The images work with this as illustrations. In every roman catholic church there is a way of the cross. In about ten paintings the suffering and dying of Christ is portrayed. It is in reality the same thing as we saw with the Israelites of a minute ago. You can see the suffering of Christ. That is the pedagogic argument.

Besides this there is the mystic argument. The image, so says the mystic vision, lays an immediate contact with that what is being portrayed, Jesus or Mary or a saint with the church-goer who looks at it. In the roman catholic literature there are some wellknown samples of this. So the "holy" Teresa of Avila, still worshiped by many roman catholics, was converted because she looked at an image of Jesus. Later she told, it went through her.

Against this whole superstition, this trespass against the second commandment, the confession of the Reformation was sharply opposed. Answer 98 says: God wants his people to be taught not by means of dumb images but by the living preaching of his Word.

Opposite each other are the laity on the one side and God's christians on the other side. Do not read over that small word "his". Your confession does not say: God will the people be taught but his people. Such small words are not accidental congregation. You remember here, what you have confessed in Lordsday 12. There you were asked: Why are you called a christian? The answer was: Because I am a member of Christ by faith and thus share in his anointing to prophet, priest and king. Now, God wants his christians, his to prophets, priests and kings anointed congregation, not being taught by dumb images but through the living proclamation of his Word.

What a beautiful expression: the living proclamation of his Word. This points to all his christians. God's christians together form his "of age" new testament congregation. To it comes that living proclamation of God's Word. To this the whole reformed worship-service is aimed. Totally different than the dead formal prayer services of Islam. Also totally different than the roman catholic mass with priest as leader. No, the Lord sets a co-christian, a called minister of the Word, in your midst on the pulpit. He has the heavy but also a glorious task to proclaim God's Word to you. He does this from Sunday to Sunday. That living proclamation of God's Word forms the centre of your public worship service. Around this the other parts group themselves. But together they are the worship service, to the praise of God.

That also has to show in all the parts of the worship service. Congregation, how do you sing the Psalms? What is it wonderful that we now have the Reformed Churchbook with the new rhymed version of the psalms. You must have noticed, that they have become more accessible to you and to the youth of the church. You sing the psalms in today's language. The living Word of God, through which He wants to teach us, also comes to you in the psalms and the hymns. It is worded in them. That is why it is of life-importance that the church knows its psalms. Learning a psalm or hymn at school is worth its weight in gold. Through that God's Word is etched in the memory of your children. What is also important that in critical life-circumstances you have the psalms at your disposal. Once I spoke to a brother who told me that he in the concentration camp was continually comforted and encouraged by remembering Psalm 116 : I love the Lord the fount of life and grace.

Also prayer is an important part of your worship service, congregation. In that you aim yourself, via the mouth of the minister, to God. You hold his promises before Him and you plead upon them and confess your trespasses to the Lord. Also in this is a little piece of the service of the Word.

Of course; the living proclamation of God's word on Sunday does not exclude the own bible study from you as congregation. This it stimulates. How could you understand that proclamation and build up your life, if you yourself are not at home with the Word of God? Here also the work of the men and women societies is of importance to you. There biblestudy is the centre of the work. And then the ministers of the Word themselves. They have to bring this living proclamation of the Word.

They have to take care that the proclamation of God's Word is truly a living proclamation. Christ says that every scribe who became a disciple of the Kingdom of heaven, is like a householder, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old. (Matthew 13 verse 52) In this manner the proclamation stays alive. Paul writes to Timothy that a minister of the Word has to handle the Word of truth rightly. (2 Timothy 2 verse 15) It shows how important and how responsible the work of a minister of the Word is.

What does the second commandment lay upon you, as congregation, a heavy task on your shoulders. It is in this commandment about the right way to serve God. This is also of great meaning for your own churchgoing on Sunday. How do you take care of this? How active are you in this? How do you listen? There is all the more reason to pay attention to this. Our time is focussed on the seeing. The television has made us used to fast changing images. It also makes it easy for us to grasp the news. You can take the time to look at it all. But in the church it depends on the hearing. On the closely hearing and understanding of the preaching. God does not want his Christians to be taught by flimsy images but by the thorough work done on a sermon. Let us as ministers be careful that we keep this preaching lively. No dull and dry sermons please, with which a congregation can be preached dead, to use this speaking expression. God's Word itself is alive and plastic. It often speaks in images and through happenings. When the preaching has an eye for this, the sermons become alive and plastic and the congregation is built up in the faith.

3. Now we come to the last point. In the second commandment it is about a sincere belief in God and serve Him sincerely and now in the third about fearing Him sincerely. We pointed this out to you before: God takes this command very seriously. It touches the relationship of our heart over against Him and his service. God then added a sanction, a punishment-threat, to this commandment. For, He says, I, the Lord, your God- and what lies there a depth in that word your-am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love Me and keep My commandments. There they are at the end of this commandment: an earnest threat but also a powerful promise. That is how it is with God's promises. He gives rich promises to those who fear Him and serve Him. He also threatens those who hate Him -what is this horrible, congregation-with his covenant curse. O, yes, we hear that threat and that promise being read every Sunday from the pulpit. But do they do something to you? Do they touch your heart? Do they wake something up in you? Or are they words which just flow over us? It is about sincerely fearing the Lord. That means to say: to love Him with whole your heart. But also to, with a deep respect for Him, keep his commandments and listen to them. He is a jealous God. Perhaps you may think, is this fair of God, right by God that He visits the sins of the fathers, that is to say: punish the

children to the third and fourth generation? The prophet Ezekiel does say the soul that sins shall die. that is why it could not be said in Israel: the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the childrens teeth are set on edge. (Ezekiel 18: 1-4)

How can God visit the sins of the fathers to the children? Well, congregation, pay than attention to the words which are added to this. He visits, He says, the sins of the fathers to the children in the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me. In this the own responsibility of the children comes to the fore with power. But immediately on that God lets follow: but show steadfast love to thousands of those who love Me and keep My commandments. Also here the mercy praises against the judgment.

Yet there is one thing which we will point out to you. That is about the responsibility which the fathers here bear in regard to the coming generations. Especially today of churchleaving and of secularization it is of great significance how you educate your children. Let fathers and mothers be one in this. What does this commandment touch the marriage choice.

Let our people not lightly make a marriage choice. Do marry in the sight of the Lord. There is so much at stake for the future of your issue.(progeny) So we have considered this second commandment of the law of the Lord. Still one more thing:

Let He, who also completely kept this commandment, your Saviour, be central in your life.

Believe the Lord in Him.

Serve the Lord in Him.

Fear the Lord in Him.

Also keep this commandment in his strenght. Show in your life the image of your Father in heaven. His service is not a withered formal service as with other religions. It is a glorious service and your life-choice for the Lord is a blessing for future generations. Blessed is the man, the woman, who fear the Lord and walk in his ways.

Amen.

Ashamed become all the souls
which kneel for the images
with praise and prayer,
becoming worthless.
High above sits the Lord;
He is God and no one else,
They bow, deep and dumb,
all those gods,
before God's greatness.

Beskaamd word all siel
wat voor die beelde kniel,
met lofwoord en gebede
gerig tot nietighede
Hoog bo sit die Heer;
Hy's God en niemand meer.
Hul buig hul, diep en stom,
die ganse godendom,
voor God se grootheid neer.

Psalm 97 stanza 4 from the Dutch-African Psalm Rhymed Version of Totius.(Theological professor in Potchefstroom, South Africa)

Lordsady 36,

The third commandment: The red light of God's name.

Sermon by the late
Dr.R.H.Bremmer,
Enschede, the Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton,
Alberta.

Reading: Leviticus 24 :10-23
Text: Lordsday 36,
Psalm 75 :1,4,6
After the law:Psalm 119: 21
After the creed: Hymn 29: 4
Hymn 7: 1,2,4,9.
Psalm 72: 10
Psalm 8: 5.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

When you in your car approach a railway-crossing, then it can happen that the red lights begin to flicker. There is a train coming and danger threatens. Who than does not stop immediately, will crash. That flickering red light has an enormous warning power.

Now, something like this is at hand in the third commandment. You know what this commandment says: You shall not take the name of you God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His Name in vain. Do you see in those last words the flickering red light go on? The Lord does not suffice with the forbidding of the vain use of his name. He adds a sharp threat to this. He shall not hold guiltless who takes His Name in vain. There are only two commandments to which the Lord adds a threat: the second commandment and here in the third. Your confession underlines this threat by once more declaring in answer 100, that there is no sin greater or provokes God's wrath more than blaspheming of His name.

Is the third commandment than such an important commandment? Why does the Lord add only to this commandment and to the second such a strong threat? Have you ever thought with this commandment about what the Saviour says in Matthew 12 when the Pharisees reproach Him that He through Beelzebul, the prince of demons, cast out demons? He saus then: every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Does not here flicker the same red light? The blaspheming of the Lord can result in blaspheming the Holy Spirit. There is nothing as precious as the holy name of God.

That is why the Lord warns Israel in this third commandment for the blaspheming of his name. And Christ deepens for us, as congregation of the new covenant, as Pentacost congregation, the demand of this commandment by warning for the blaspheming of the Spirit. Is there in these godless, anti-godly times not a very good reason for us as congregation of the new covenant to be taught about the profound contents of this third commandment?

That is why I speak to you about
 GOD'S COMMANDMENT TO THE SANCTIFICATION OF HIS NAME

1. It warns us for the abuse of that name;
2. It rouses us to the proper use;
3. And it shows us what is at stake in the third commandment.

1. In the third commandment is anew, just as in the second commandment, God central. Now in his name. In that name God has revealed himself to us people. Nowadays a lot of people have a problem with this. Did God really reveal himself? Does God exist? Congregation, you must have heard that the secularisation is increasing daily. Secularisation means that God is more and more pushed out of life. Secularisation is a form of atheism. But a different atheism than the one propagated by the marxists of the previous century. That fought against religion by making it look ridiculous. It caricatured God by per example portraying Him like an old man, who sit above the world on a throne and governs it with the help of canons and machine-guns. Faith in God is than annex to capitalism. The present secularisation is a totally different form of atheism. It simply denies the existence of God. A transcendental God, a God who sits enthroned above the world and governs it? Forget it. A personal God, to Whom you pray and before Whom you place your personal needs? Who believes in this today? At the most it is said, that God gets a shape for us in our fellow-man. Religion then becomes a form of fellowship. Be nice to each other. Especially in the roman catholic circles, this gospel of fellowship is important. If there really is a trancendental, going above the world, God exists: What then is his name, ask many modern people. How can I picture Him? Congregation, do not think that these are questions of today. They are as old as the world. People always have wrestled to know God. Who is He and where can we find Him? What is it glorious congregation, that we as an answer to these questions can point to the bible. In that God has revealed himself to people and we learn to know Him. God has revealed himself in his name and this third commandment shows us how precious God's name is. That the bible shows you, when it tells how God revealed his name to Moses at the Sinai.

I think that you know this story but with the third commandment in mind we will repeat it for you. You know how Moses was looking after the sheep of his father in law Jethro in Midian close to the mount Horeb. Suddenly he saw a strange phenomenon. Very close to him a dry bush was burning. But instead of the bush burning away, it remained untouched. The Angel of the Lord revealed himself there to Moses in that flame of fire. The Angel of the Lord: that is God himself as He revealed himself to the people in the Old Testament. There Moses met God, who called him: Moses, Moses. He answered: Here am I. Then God said: Do not come near; put of your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.(Exodus 3: 5,6) Then an impressive conversation developes between God and Moses. God presents himself to Moses as the God of the covenant.

I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. God says to Moses that He has heard the crying of the Israelites in Egypt. He is going to liberate (deliver) them. That is why God calls Moses to be the liberator and deliverer of his people. Come, says the Lord, go, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt. (verse 10)

Moses is frightened. Does he have to do this? He tries to get out from under God's instruction. Moses said: If I come to the people of Israel and say to them: the God of your fathers has send me to you and they ask me: What is his name? what I shall I answer them? In reality it is the same question which man of today asks. Who is this God? What is his name? How can you know Him? Listen, how God answers Moses. He who already had presented himself as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob made Himself further known. God does this in a special way and provokes to reflect about it. God now answers: I am Who I am. God then adds: Say this to the people of Israel: I am has send me to you. Is that not a special name? O, yes, you are not there yet. It is like with the parables of the Lord Jesus. They also provoke you to thinking. But if you take the trouble to penetrate them, they contain a glorious message. So is it also with this name of God. I am, who I am.

In this name the Lord reveals himself as the God on whom you always can rely. It is a name that looks back on the past but also looks ahead to the future. Here God says to Moses: I am who I am but at the same time He says that He is the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. That means to say: The God who I was for the patriarchs, also I am now, today, for you Moses and for all the Israelites in their distress. And who also "I shall be" in the future, when you later on are liberated from Egypt and live in Canaan. You can rely on me, Moses. I back you up. I am the God of the covenant. In the past I was with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Today I am with you and in the future I shall be with your children and with your future generations. I go with you in the salvation history.

Do you know which place in Scripture shows us in a fine manner the meaning of this name Lord, -Jahweh it is in Hebrew?

That is the high priest benediction in Numbers 6. That is also a beautiful explanation of the name of the Lord. He is the God who comes to us and penetrates into our lives. Listen:

The Lord (Jahweh) bless you and keep you. He blesses our lives and looks after it. The Lord (Jahweh) make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. He shows us his friendly face in his promises in every situation of our lives. He puts us in an atoning relation ship to Him. The Lord (Jahweh) lift his countenance upon you, and give you peace. That is the peace, the sjaloom, with which He blesses life in his covenant.

Have you ever paid attention to your Saviour who applied the " I am, who I am " to himself? He is Jahweh appearing in our human flesh. In Him we meet God himself. Who has seen Me, He says to Philip, has seen the Father. (John 14: 9)

You also may think here about the words which your Saviour spoke,

at the moment He was to ascend to heaven : Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age. So God has revealed himself to his people in that glorious name Lord, Jahweh. He is in Christ for us the God of the past, today and the future.

"I am here now, I was there yesterday and I shall be there tomorrow "; your God in Jesus Christ. That name of the Lord is a great encouragement for God's people. The poet of the proverbs said it like this: The name of the Lord is a strongtower; the righteous mans runs into it and is safe.(Proverbs 18 : 10) If you entrench yourself in a fortress, no enemy can conquer you. Like this the righteous is safe when he clamps himself to the, to him turned name of the Lord.

Now you too understand, congregation, how the Lord in the third commandment guards this precious name of Him. You shall not take the name of your God in vain, says the Lord. Your God: It is here not about a strange, a far away God. It is here about that God, who as Lord, Jahweh, is our covenant God. That name of the Lord we are not allowed to use in vain. Literally it says in biblical, Hebrew: you shall not lift up to what "sjaw" is. The Hebrew word "sjaw" is not easily translated in one word. It indicates to that what is vain, is worthless, we even could say what is demonic. God did not give you his glorious covenant name for that. His name is too precious for that. God's name is , in a manner of speaking, not like one of your keys, which you carelessly slip on your key-ring. He is not like a phone number, which you look up in the telephone book to ring someone. God's name is not like some change which you carelessly count out on a store counter. It is God's wonderful and glorious name.

God has that name, in a way of speaking, deposited it with us, his people. Should we then lift up that name to the worthless, the vain? Does it amaze you that God adds to this commandment a threat? Is it not about his name. about Himself?

A while ago we read in Leviticus 24 about a man who had an Egyptian as father and an Israelite as mother. He slandered the name of the Lord in a dispute with an Israelite and cursed. He lifted up that holy name of God in vain to emphasize his words. He was caught red handed and was brought to Moses. Who asked the Lord himself for a verdict. Congregation now, it is evident how high God takes this blasphemy of his name. He instructed Moses to bring this man outside the camp. Those who heard him curse, have to stone him. This is how The Lord guarded his holy name among Israel. Once again God emphasizes who blasphemes the name of the Lord, shall surely be put to death.

Do you remember from the beginning of this sermon that red flickering light, that lights up at a railway crossing? There is danger of life. So here the Lord lets flicker the red light of his warning threat. The Catechism shows us what is at stake here by the penetrating manner in which it explains this third commandment. Answer 99 says, it is about that we do not blaspheme or abuse the name of God by cursing, perjury, or unnecessary oaths. Congregation, swearing is a real Dutch (Canadian) people sin. It seems that the abuse of the name of the Lord has increased

in the last few years. We think especially about the media. There are some broadcasters who abuse God's name and the name of our Saviour. It is sad that a nation, to which God in the course of its rich history has given so many favours, abuses God's name. We live in a time of coarsening of morals. This is noticeable in the swearing.

Let the parents in our midst take care that their children do not go along with this. With a clear conscience be strong in the forbidding of swearing. Point out to your children the horror of it. When forbidding it, at the same time tell your children about the rich content of the name of the Lord. Speak with them about the holiness of that name. Go against swearing in their presence. Do not get dragged along in the use of refined swear words. Actually a swearer is a powerless person. For one reason or the other he knows that his own words do not have much power. Now he seizes the above natural world, the name of God, to add power to his words. Your words should have their own power. Christ himself says: Let your yes be yes and your no no. If your words do not have strength of their own, you are better off to be quiet. Is it not awful that men seize the glorious name of God, to underline their unholy words? Your confession in answer 99 makes a remark worthy of consideration. It declares that we should not share in such horrible sins by being silent bystanders. You are also guilty by being silent where there is swearing going on. Seemingly you can live in an environment in which the name of the Lord is ridiculed. A Christian cannot live in this. And as so often with the other commandments your confession does not stop here at the external trespass. It penetrates into the heart of the matter. In our time we often speak about polluting the environment. That is also cursing. As far as that is concerned the wellknown Association against swearing does a lot of good work to fight the cursing in public meetings.

2. After the confession has reacted so sharply against the abuse of God's name, it points to the correct use of it. With the word "in short" it combines everything what it has said so far, once more together and formulates then the positive contents of the third commandment. We shall use the name of God only with respect and reverence, so that He rightly through us be confessed and called and in all our words and works be praised. Congregation, here it is about your answer to God's name. He, your God and Father, has in his name turned his friendly face to you. He reveals himself in this in all his virtues. Now He asks from you an answer on that holy name. He has made himself known to you in Jesus Christ. Hear your Saviour in the high priest benediction: I made known to them Thy name, and I will make it known, so, says Christ, that the love with which Thou has loved Me may be in them, and I in them. (John 14 :26) Is this not great? By revealing God's name to us Christ pours God's love in over us.

When a violin builder has made a violin, the most exciting moment for him is the trying of the strings for the first time. Will they bring forth the sounds, which he wanted to lay in them?

When someone has written a book and it is published, then he is anxious to know what the reaction will be from the public and the critics. Now the Lord God in Christ has made his name known to us, He is anxious to know how we react to that name. That is what your confession here has in mind as it speaks of rightly calling upon Him. Congregation, confessing is a true biblical word. The Lord Jesus says in Matthew 10 verse 32: So everyone who acknowledges Me before men, I will also acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven. Confessing actually wants to say: Speak about something openly, make it known publicly. Confessing you do not do in secret, that you do publicly. You declare openly to the people, that you are a confessor, a follower of Jesus Christ. You have heard God's precious name in Christ and that you now confess.

We as christians confess personally. we also do it in communion as God's church. So the old church, already early, has repeated the holy gospel of Jesus Christ in the Apostles Creed. It did this also in the creeds of Nicea and Athanasius. In a fierce defence against the heresy of Arius and his supporters, who denied the Godhead(divinity) of our Saviour, the old church echoed the gospel by confessing Christ as Son of God. So also the Reformed Church in the time of the Reformation has repeated in the three forms of Unity what the gospel confessed about sin and mercy and being saved only through free grace. It is with this confession as with the violin of a moment ago. In his name the Lord has made known to us his free grace and his mercy about sinners in Christ. Now He wants to hear our answer to that name in our confessing. And of course, when your confession here calls for rightly confessing God's name, it is not only about the recorded confessions of the church. Church-history shows that there were times, that the church guarded every letter of its confessions but did not let the contents sound like it in her actual speaking. Than the confessions become a petrified expression of our christian faith.

Confessing God's name rightly is not a confessional keeping of the letter of the confession as dead orthodoxy does. It is to acknowledge God and his name with enthousiasm and inspiration in this world. In this case the church goes over the sharp edge of the knife. On the one side you have to reject the confessionalism, but at the same time the clamour that it does not matter, what you confess. Over against the oecumenical we have to, with the church of all ages, defend strongly the Being-God of your Saviour and for the revelation of God's name in the atonement through the blood of the Lamb. You are called to defend both sides.

Rightly confessing God's name you also do every Sunday in the preaching of the gospel. As there is preaching, the church confesses. God's name is heard loud and clear for everyone who wants to hear it. On Sunday you also confess God's name publicly through the mouth of the minister by confessing God's triune name with the Apostle's creed. Also in the Catechism class you confess as church your faith. There your children are formed to believers of the name of the Lord. Congregation, also you are stimulated to the confessing of God's name through the

preaching. What a responsibility here rests on the ministers of the Word. They have to lead the congregation in the pastures of God's Word, so that the congregation itself in its daily life proclaims God's name. Therefore congregation, we may ask of you for effort in the listening and the understanding of the preaching.

However not only the confessing of God's name question 99 ask of you, also to the rightly calling of God's name. We saw that God has deposited his name with us. Now He wants to hear that name in the calling upon his name. We are with our prayers in a life covenant relationship with the Lord. We call upon God's name in many situations. With our meals, in the church services, in the home visits by elders and deacons, in our conversations, at our societies. This easily can become a rut. What is the leading in prayer at home and at all kinds of meetings a responsible task. Your confession calls upon you, at the end of answer 99 to do this so that God's name is praised in all words and deeds. In our home and public prayers the praise for the Lord will ring through. Praying asks for preparation and reflection about what has to be prayed. Praying is as confessing, to give an echo to God's name. (weerwoord geven) Praying can also become cursing when God's name is not the centre of our prayer. The third commandment asks from you spiritual effort and concentration on the name of the Lord. The apostle Paul says in Colossians 3 verse 17: And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

3. So now we come to the last point: what is at stake in the third commandment. That again touches on the red flickering light of the beginning. God does not leave him innocent who lifts up his name to the sjaw, the worthless. Your confession underlines that by showing us in answer 100 that God had instituted the death penalty on cursing in the old testament. Here you may also think new testamentic about the blaspheming of the Holy Spirit. That touches on the unforgiveable sin against the holy Spirit. What else is this than knowingly and stubbornly swear on the name of the triune God? What else is this than the sometimes stubbornly maintained unbelief even on a deathbed? Is it not God's mercy that He time and again, when the law is read, lets that red light flicker to warn us?

Congregation, you live in a critical time. You live in a time in which the fine haze of atheism and secularisation permeates life. You know that: on an early wintermorning a fine haze can blurr the sharp contours of things and cover them with hoarfrost. Modern men lives in a haze of a denial of God. He masters the technics. He can create a testtube baby. He has placed his feet on the moon. In what does he, he thinks, have any need of God? God is not of any use anymore and the name of the Lord is not used anymore.

The third commandment offers against all this a strong defence. God has proclaimed his precious name over this world. He guards in this third commandment the holiness of that name.

He is there. He is " I am who I am ". He lets flicker the red light of his threat and tears apart that fine haze of God-denial and atheism. He powerfully calls on church and government to honor and sanctify his holy name.

In this third commandment you are called to confess God's name faithfully in this world. The future of God's church and the salvation of your souls is here at stake. You ask, how this is possible in this godless world? Congregation, see to Christ your Saviour. We heard Him say: I have revealed Thy name to them, whom Thou has given Me. He has made us through his guaranteeing Mediators work from cursers of God's name, which we are by nature, to confessors of God's name. Flee to Him with all your shortcomings in the confessing of God's name. He also has finished this third commandment for you into death. Learn from Him to pray with your whole heart: Thy name be hallowed. Learn from Him to rightly confess God's name. Flee in that name: she is for the righteous a strong tower. And, congregation, Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever; may his glory fill the whole earth. Amen, yes amen. (Psalm 72 : 18,19)

Amen.

The king, whose name we are professing,
 Shall like the sun endure.
 In Him all nations find their blessing;
 Make Thou his throne secure.
 Blest be the Lord, for He so glorious
 Alone does wondrous things.
 O God, in all the earth our chorus
 With " Amen, Amen " rings.

Psalm 72 stanza 10. Book of Praise.

Lordsday 37.

The great importance of the oath.

Sermon by the late Dr. R.H.Bremmer, Enschede, the Netherlands.	Reading: Genesis 24: 1-9 and Matthew 5: 33-48 Text Lordsday 37 Psalm 24: 1,2 After the law: Psalm 25: 6
Translated by Ralph Winkel, Edmonton, Alberta.	After the creed: Hymn 17: 5 Psalm 15: 1,3 Psalm 139: 1 Hymn 7: 1,2,4,9.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Many of you at that time, in 1980, have seen on the television screen how our queen Beatrix was inaugurated. That was a special impressive happening. A young woman was called to a great task, to the highest position that our government knows off.

Amid all the representatives of our people, together in the meeting of all the provinces, she made an oath on the constitution. She swore to defend the independence and the territory of the State, to protect the freedoms and the rights of her subjects, as a good king is supposed to do.

So help me God Almighty. Now, indeed if God's help is needed, than it will be in this high office of king. It is not without a purpose that we remind you of this solemn happening. We may remark that up to now our queen has kept her oath of trust.

Not everybody is called to the swearing of an oath. Many among you never have made an oath. Yet our confession deems it necessary to teach you about the institution and making an oath.

It does that rightly so. In the oath it is about the calling and professing of God's name in the human society. God's name, called in the oath, supports and carries that society over against the power of the lie and anarchy. That is why it is good of the catechism to explain to us what the taking of an oath contains. Especially in these times of secularisation and ungodliness of society, the church has to defend the correct use of God's name in the oath. God has given us his name to lift the name over human life. We may call on this name in all kinds of important moments in public society to affirm trust and truth. Your confession therefore justly defends the importance of the oath.

That is why we today speak to you about this. For that reason we speak about

THE GREAT IMPORTANCE OF THE OATH

With that in mind we will consider:

1. The oath in the Holy Scriptures;
2. The oath in society;
3. The oath in the church.

1. In the first question of Lordsday 37 the Reformed Church battles against the ana-baptists. That you can see right away in the formulation of question 101: But may we swear an oath by the Name of God in a godly manner? The accent here falls on the word "godly". Is that possible, asks your confession? Can you in faith and in fear of God call upon the Name of the Lord in this so often godless society? For many that was not a sure thing in the sixteenth century. Especially the ana-baptists and with them sympathizing christians had great difficulty with this. We sometimes think, that the reformers like Luther and Calvin only had to fight on one front: against the Pope and against Rome. That was definitely not the case. Soon already it was obvious that through the Reformation other powers were loosened, which with Luther and Calvin rejected Rome, but after that went their own way. Here you have to think about the ana-baptists, a more or less revolutionary trend among those who broke with Rome. The ana-baptists strongly opposed the oath.

For the oath was taken by the government. The ana-baptist had difficulty with the institution of government. This belonged, they said, with the plain every day life of nature, the life in a sinful world. They believed, that Christ had redeemed them from this. Who brought us through grace back in paradise. There was no need for a government in this. There people lived together in peace, sinless. There the government was not needed to curb sin. The government was also not needed to lead a righteous war. To that original situation without government, justice and police the gospel brought us back.

You understand that from this vision the taking of an oath became unnecessary. Does not the government take this? And that government was not recognized, Did the oath not affirm trust and truth? But that is not necessary among christians?

Don't they stand up for their word? Adam and Eve did not have to swear an oath in paradise. No, that oath belongs to the sinful deceitful society and the christians weren't they liberated from that? Especially the so called revolutionary ana-baptists went to far in this. They had established the kingdom of God in Munich. They supposed, that there were no government institutions needed anymore. Also property was from the devil: christians had everything in common. And among them their yes was yes and their no no. That did not have to be assured with an oath. You were out of the sphere of the sinful nature, through the grace of Christ, brought into the climate of grace.

Away with all those human regulations.

Yes, they even invoked Scripture for all this. Did not Christ himself say in Matthew 5: 34 : But I say to you, Do not swear at all. Did James not underline this in his letter, when he wrote: But above all my brethern, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth, or with any other oath, but let your yes be yes and your no be no, that you may not fall under temptation.

(James 5 ; 12) Did they not have the Scriptures to back them up?

Indeed, congregation, that is how it is written. Except, how

do you understand these places of Scripture? The reformed people always have refused to appeal on some loose texts. They always have read Scripture in context. That is what you have to do here. You should not be misguided by such a fragmented proof of Scripture. Your Saviour has the words, which we just cited, spoken in the sermon on the mount. There He fought against the devaluation of the oath by the Pharisees and the Scribes. Read more about this in Matthew 5. There your Saviour shows you how in his time the oath was misused by the Jews. He gives a few strong examples of this. The Jews did not only swear by God himself. O yes, if you swore by God, then you were to keep your oaths. But listen how the jews tried to get from under this. You could, they said, also swear by the heaven. That was not as binding as if you swore by God himself. And it would even be less binding if you swore by the earth, or by Jerusalem. There were even Jews who swore by their head or by their beard. Now, if you made such an oath, you could make light of the truth. Such an oath did not oblige you as much to speak the truth as did the swearing by God himself. Horrible practices, but they existed.

Now notice how Christ unmasks this haggling with the oath and with the by the oath affirmed truth and exposed it. Would swearing by the heaven or earth be less binding than by God himself? Certainly not. Your Saviour says: For the heaven is the throne of God and the earth is the footstool for his feet. The heaven and the earth have everything to do with God. God established his throne in heaven. The earth is his creation. If you swear by the heaven or the earth, you also swear by God. And those oaths by your hair or your beard? Jesus said: Dear folk, you cannot even make one hair white or black. That only can be done by God. Also your hair and your beard are under God's rule. After having unmasked this horrible mis-use of the oath, Christ continues: Let what you say be simply "Yes or No" anything more than this comes from evil.

How sharply does the Saviour here expose the mis-use of the oath and puts us under the power of the ninth commandment. A child of God does not need extra assurances when he says yes. Than that has to be "yes". And when he says no, it has to be "no". In that we have to be able to rely on each other. For that God gives us the ninth commandment and Christ binds us to that. Anything more than that is evil. Behind this is the devil and we have to resist him with all our power. Is this not a fine piece of tuition by the our highest prophet in the speaking the truth? James had in his letter enough reasons to copy this teaching and to pass it on.

But did the Saviour in that piece of prophesy from the sermon of the mount forbid the swearing of an oath for now and forever? That is what the ana-baptists say up to this day. Definitely not. Congregation, we take you with us to that night in which your Saviour was led before the Jewish High Court, just before his suffering and dying. See him standing there before the high priest Kajafas. At the high point of his interrogation he asks Christ: I adjure You by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God? Kajafas put your Saviour under oath.

He did this before the forum of the whole High Court. What then did Jesus answer? Did He refuse to be put under oath? That He did not do. He let Himself be put under oath by the highest spiritual authority of Israel and answered: You have said so. He let God Himself be called as witness for his speaking of the truth. With this He confirmed the good right to make an oath. Here you also may check the Old Testament. The Old and New Testament together are the one Word of God. Also the Old Testament is here very convincing. We think about that beautiful story from Genesis 24 in which Abraham orders his servant Eliezer to find a wife for his son Isaac. For that he has to go to the family of Abraham in Paddan-Aram. There the fear of the Lord was still alive. Abraham flatly refused that Isaac would marry one of the girls from Canaan. He had Eliezer make an oath that he would not take a woman of the daughters of Canaan as a wife for Isaac. But if he could not

find a woman who would follow him to Abraham's house and Isaac, then he would be discharged from his oath. Then, it says in Genesis 24 verse 9. then the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham. He laid his hand on the most intimate place of a man. What an inspiring moment. Eliezer lay, according to the custom of taking the oath those days, his hand under the thigh of Abraham. And before the face of God he swore that he would carry out Abraham's order.

We also point you to the meeting of the prophet Elijah with Ahab, Israel's godless king. Hear him say to Ahab: As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word. With an oath Elijah confirmed the judgment God would bring over Ahab and Israel. Your Saviour swore before Kajafas. Abraham let Eliezer swear and Elijah confirmed his message to Ahab with an oath. And yet the speaking of the Scriptures about the oath is not finished with that. On the contrary we will also point out to you, that God Himself swears. There is not a more powerful proof. At the end of Psalm 95, when the psalmist called Israel not to harden their hearts in unbelief before the Lord, this Psalm ends with these words: Therefore I swore in my anger: that they should not enter my rest.

We also point out to you the oath the Lord swears by Himself in Ezekiel 33 verse 11: As I live says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. In Psalm 95 God confirms his threat with an oath, in Ezekiel his promise. Congregation, here we let Scripture speak on purpose. It is about the great importance of the oath fought against by the ana-baptists and still is today.

What does remain of their appeal on the Scriptures? Does not Christ's own action before Kajafas speak convincingly? Don't those oaths made in the Old Testament not speak powerfully of the good right of the oath?

Now you also shall understand, that your confession on the question may we swear an oath by the Name of God in a godly manner, answers with a powerful YES. For, says answer 101:

Such oath-taking is based on God's Word and was therefore rightly used by saints in the Old and New Testament. What does come to the fore here is the unity of the Scriptures. Not only the Old Testament speaks here, but also the new. Your confession points here to 2 Corinthians 1 verse 23, where the apostle writes: But I call God to witness against me-it was to spare you that I refrained from coming to Corinth.

Again, great concerns are at stake, also for our lives in these times. When the ana-baptists rightly put that you may not raise the name of God over the society in which we as christians fulfill our calling, also all the grounds for christian politics have falling away. It does not make any sense to make a christian social witness in this society. We than with the ana-baptists have to avoid this society and pull back with a little book in a little corner. Thanks to God, this is not the case. In the oath we call on the name of the Lord, also over our social actions in justice and police, in the army and in the fleet, in civil life with the acceptance of higher and lower offices. God's name is not out of line on social cohabitation. He reorganizes that and keeps that up through the firmness of the oath.

2. With that we also have come to the second point that we, with an eye on the great importance of the oath, want to speak to you about, namely the oath in our society. Our confession confronts us with this in the institute of government, one of God's most beneficial institutions in this world. The government demands the oath, says answer 101, in order to maintain and promote fidelity and truth. It also adds something to this, that you should not miss. It continues, the government does this to God's glory and for our neighbours good.

Congregation, imagine an oathtaking. As an example, a lawsuit. Sometimes there is a lot at stake. It is about the good name of the suspect, about his guilt or innocense and a lot dependson that. Witnesses are called to the fore. They have to confirm with their declarations guilt or innocense. Now the judge puts them under oath. They have to raise two fingers of their right hand. Two fingers: God is here, all-knowing and omnipresent The witness is there too. Later on he can never say that he did not know what he was doing. He has raised two fingers of his right hand. Now he makes the oath and confirms it with the words: So help me God. Is this not something special? Here in the sometimes disorderly and noisy courtroom God's name is called upon. Someone wrote: that judge becomes a preacher of God's majesty in his all-knowing and omnipresence. Psalm 139 here becomes appropriate: O, Lord, thou hast searched and known me. Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up. Who lies here, who perjures himself, sins against the holy God. You swear before the face of God. We know: in our regime there is a possibility to make a vow instead of an oath, when one does not believe in the existence of the all-knowing God. But is this normal? It is a poor exception position, which society created for those who refuse. But the oath is number one. That has been dictated. The vow can never for whom who makes it, have the power of an

oath. In reality it is a poor substitute for the oath. And then something else, congregation, in the taking of the oath which we described, also the protestant character of our regime shows. In the roman catholic countries men swears with the hand on a crucifix or something like it, or under the calling of the saints. We swear by God allmighty, a terse reformed oath. Also in the United States people swear with the hand on the bible.

Beside this oath of declaration we know the oath of the vow. It is the oath government may ask when her subjects are called to an important position. We named in our pre-amble already the oath the queen makes when she accepts her office. So there are many other positions in which an oath from you as subject is wanted. We think about officers in the army, about judges and police people, doctors and those in the nursing profession. The government knows how those offices can be abused. It also knows how sometimes life and death depend on the good service of an office. Think only about doctors and nursing staff. It is really not for nought that from them the oath is asked. The government realizes that we live in a corrupt world. Someone named the oath: a hard witness against the sinful human nature. That is not exaggerated. As reformed people we realize that we are standing in the midst of a corrupt reality. We are not idealistic anachristians who think that the new Jerusalem can be realized today. That John van Leyden thought when he wanted to establish the ana-baptist kingdom in Munich. Our reformed fore-fathers with this Lordsday 37 are standing with both feet on the firm foundation of reality.

All this, congregation has to press you to keep the oath holy in social intercourse. Let us, when called to take an oath, show that we realize that the oath is not a formality. It is a holy use before God's face. Horrible is then also the rash use of swearing falsely. Scripture knows of touching examples of this. About such a rash oath speaks to us the story of king Saul. When it became known, that Jonathan had broken Sauls commandment to take food in the pursuit of the Philistines, Saul cried: God do so to me and more also; you shall surely die, Jonathan. (1 Samuel 14 verse 44) That was a rash oath. Luckely the people saw that and saved Jonathan's life. Another example of an oath which never should have been sworn is the oath by king Herod. Under oath he had promised the daughter of Herodias to give whatever she asked for. She asked for the head of John the Baptist. (Matthew 14 verse 7) That was a godless demand after a godless oath.

There is today in our society a strong tendency to secularise life. That is to say, men wants to push back the name of the Lord in public life. So for a long time the calling of God's name at the end of the speech of the throne was discontinued. Others demand that God's name is taken from the coins of the kingdom.

So they want you, as professing christians, pushed to a sectarian position in our public society. As reformed people fight against this with all your power. Our nation and our government

originated out of the battle for the freedom to serve God according to his Word. Our protestant oath also reminds us of what we saw a while ago. The government has as servant of God the right to ask for the oath. You as professing members of God's name have to keep hammering on this.

We as professing christians stand in the midst of our national life. We have to take a stand for the right of government to maintain as in God's instruction order and peace in society. "Against the revolution the gospel" was the Groen van Prinsterers adagium. That also holds good in the matter of the oath.

3. So now we come to the last in which we want to make clear the great importance: the oath in the church. We do not swear oaths in the church. We do not stand there as before the bearers of the offices of government, but directly before the face of God. Here it is not about the declaration of trust and truth in the human intercourse, but about our relation with each other in the community of saints. That is why with a simple yes we suffice when on decisive moments we are asked questions.

But that yes in the church, spoken before God's face, than has the power of an oath. Of that is also valid what answer 102 says of the oath: that God alone knows the heart. He knows if your yes is meant genuine. He also sees to it that you keep your word. Congregation, you have in decisive moments of your life spoken this yes in the church before God and his holy congregation. It is good that we remind each other about this. Do you remember, that when you stood at the baptismal font and you were asked if you would educate your child in the doctrine of the Old and New Testament, summarized in the confessions of the christian faith. You then as father and mother have answered yes to this question. Do you still stand behind that yes today? Do you educate your children in this doctrine? Is there in these times not enough reasons to continually remind and stimulate each other?

Congregation, you live in a time of God desertion and of church desertion. In a time in which the devil wants to pull away your children from the God of their baptism. From all the investigations which have been done about this point, it depends on how much the children experience at home if the service of the Lord by their parents is genuine. Let that yes spoken by you at the baptismal font about the education of your offspring remain a genuine yes before God.

Many among you also have said yes to the questions asked when you did confession of faith. We think about the penetrating question that you love the Lord God and that it is your heartfelt desire to serve Him according to His Word, to forsake the world, and to crucify your old nature? Are you today still behind that yes? We think about the young among us. Some of them have said that yes to that question only a while ago. Does that yes live in your life? Are you defending it when you are attacked by this world? Do you seek your strength by your Father in heaven and with your Saviour? Do you fight to maintain that yes? God alone, we confess here, knows the heart. He also knows your

heart and He knows what lives in your heart. Let not the confession of faith become a formality. Fight in the faith to keep going on the narrow path behind Christ in this world of today.

Here we also think about the yes you spoke before God and his holy congregation on your wedding day. You have promised each other as man and wife to be true to each other in good days and bad, in riches and poverty, in health and sickness, for as long as you both shall live. Is there in this time not reasons enough to remind each other of that yes? How many marriages are broken rashly in today's times? Don't you have as christians reasons to remind each other emphatically about that yes? Does the breaking of the made promise on the wedding day in God's congregation not happen? But that yes gives, which you spoke as an oath before God's face, also the strong support to hold on to each other when your marriage comes into a crisis?

There is still another yes, which we also want to point out to you. I think about the yes spoken at the ordination in the office of ministers of the Word, of elders and deacons. Do we do our office, to which God called us in his holy congregation, in accordance with the promise which we made at our ordination? Is there not a reason to also continually remind ourselves about that yes?

So now we have come to the end of Lordsday about the oath. Perhaps you have thought, when this Lordsday was read, does this also belong to the only comfort in life and death? Is the oath part of this? Congregation, also today those three parts of your only comfort, our misery, our deliverance and thankfulness, have been brought to your attention in this Lordsday about the oath. The oath: It discovers us in our falseness and untrustworthiness. That is why the government asks us to make the oath. It also points us to the way to the redemption of life. God be thanked that his name can be called upon to our support for a life in truth and trust. That is a part of deliverance. And with heartfelt thankfulness we may thank God that He in Christ gives us the strenght to also on this point of the oath fulfill the third commandment out of thankfulness. Congregation, flee in your struggle and temptations to maintain your yes in oath and churchpromise to that glorious own oath of God: I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord God, but rather that he should turn from his way and live.

Amen.

Lordsday 38.

Sunday: Feastday.

Sermon by the late
Dr. R.H. Bremmer,
Enschede, The Netherlands,

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton,
Alberta.

Reading: Mark 2: 23- 3: 6.
Text: Lordsday 38,
Psalm 63: 1,2.
After the law: Psalm 65: 2.
After the creed: Psalm 68: 13.
Psalm 92: 1,2,3,4.
Psalm 122: 1.
Psalm 100: 1,3,4.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Is the christian Sunday a thing of the past? Nowadays this is suggested to you from all sides. Sunday Churchday? A lot of people say: Is it? Who still goes to church on Sunday? Can't you see with your own eyes that the churches are getting emptier? The statistics also prove this. The roman catholic church already realized this by instituting a Saturday Mass. Did churchgoing improve? It does not look like it. Modern man takes his car on Sunday and goes into the country side. If the the weather is nice he installs himself at a picnis area or he goes to his cottage or to the campground.

Congregation, today we speak to you about the fourth commandment. Celebrating Sunday is not a matter of hobbies or old tradition. Celebrating Sunday is a godly commandment. We know: many christians especially see the fourth commmandment as something forbidden, a prohibition. On Sunday you may not do this or that. Often they have for themselves and for their children created a very difficult prohibition day.

Lordsady 38 does not do this. Also in the seemingly small details the Catechism proves to be a masterful booklet. So it is here. Question 103 says: what does God require in the fourth commandment? Take notice: Require. Not what it prohibits in the fourth commmandment. The Catechism has read the text of the fourth commandmnet very carefully. Together with the fifth commandment is the fourth a commandment that God positively, required and not forbidding, has drafted.

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy, says the Lord to his people. God in this fourth commandment speaks to you each personally, in the singular. The Lord also gives a powerful motive with it. For, He says, in six days He made heaven and earth. After that He rested on the seventh day and hallowed it. That godly motive also applied to Himself, it also applies to us. We may be followers of God in the celebration of the day of rest.

The christian Sunday out of date? How can they imagine that. Also the fourth commandment is a commandment of God for all times and for all people. It is also a beneficial commandment. God did not create his human children to race along the roads on his day. He created them to have the rest which He Himself enjoyed on the seventh day. A wonderful day, that christian

Sunday. Congregation enjoy that day, and do not let yourselves be influenced by the desecrators of that day. It is a festive day which we together with God may celebrate. It is his day. He choose that day. He has made the program for that day and He has made us his guests.
We speak to you about

THE CHRISTIAN SUNDAY AS THE DAY OF GOD

For:

1. God choose this day;
2. He gives us the the program of the feast;
3. He makes us his quests.

1. A smart catechumen asked me once: Reverend, is that fourth commandment not actually an Israelitic commandment? It speaks about cattle that is not allowed to work and of the sojourner who is within your gates. It also says, that we have to rest on that seventh day. Six days you shall labour, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a day of rest. That catechumen asked, but we do rest on the first day of the week, on Sunday? How is this? Sometimes catechumen can ask annoying questions and so do teeners of their parents. Sensible parents will not give their offspring the bum steer, neither will the minister his pupils. We have to admit that there is a difficulty here. That also give us the motive to go deeper into this fourth commandment. It is nice when you can explain this to each other. Congregation, do you know, that among the reformed people in the seventhteen century. in that famous Golden Age, an intense battle was waged about the fourth commandment? About this we will tell you something first. It can help you in conversations with your children and others.

That battle was about the question when the sabbath was instituted. Voetius, one of the great theologians of that time, you must have heard about him, said: The Lord God has instituted the sabbath at the creation. That you can see in the motivation of this fourth commandment. In there, says Moses, is that God created heaven and earth in six days, the sea and all that is in them. Between brackets: what is this always again a fascinating addition: the sea and all that is in them. It has made a great impression on Moses, that the Lord on the fifth day created the large sea animals and the living creatures that move with which the waters swarm. He emphasizes that part of God's creation work from Genesis 1 verse 21. It was also a mighty work of God: the creation of all that swarms there in the sea. Moses could well imagine that the Lord, when He had created all this, rested from all the work that He had made.

Congregation, not, that the Lord God was tired. He really did not need the rest. No, it wants to say that God was done with his work and looked on it with pleasure. That the Lord did on that seventh day and because of that He blessed and hallowed it. Is that not something special? He choose that seventh day for Himself. The great creation work was finished and now He lays his blessing on that day. He gave that day a special

purpose. God is the eternal God. He girds time and counts our days. He lays his own speed in it. Well, says Voetius, from that we may conclude, that God already had appointed at the creation that seventh day as a special day. A day for all people and all times. Voetius was not the only theologian who meddled with the fourth commandment. Also Gomarus, one of the great theologians of the Synod of Dord, did the same. You may also remember his name. Gomarus did not agree at all with Voetius. He said: Sure, God has blessed and hallowed that seventh day. That is not to say that He then already made it a day of rest. The Lord did this later at the Sinai. When He gave Moses the ten commandments. Then for the first time the Lord required to remember and hallow that day. Not before that time. You feel that this was not an unimportant point of difference. Because if Voetius was right the sabbath counts for all people and all times. Did God not institute it at creation? But if Gomarus was right, than that day only counted for Israel and you could not make a point of it, if it counted for us too. Actually who was right? If up to now you listened carefully, and we suppose this, you have understood that this is not a simple matter. If such scripturely theologians as Voetius and Gomarus, both staunch defenders of the reformed confession, could not agree, then the matter is not simple. Do you know that even the Synod of Dord got involved? Those fathers of Dord were sensible men. They made a pronouncement that still today is of significance for us. They said: the fourth commandment is partly moral and partly ceremonial. These strange words should not scare you. We shall explain them .

That the fourth commandment is partly moral, will say, Voetius was right on a cardinal point. God gave the fourth commandment for all people and for all times. But it is also partly ceremonial. There are elements in it which only concerned Israel. For God had proclaimed it at the Sinai, to his people Israel. That is why Moses speaks of the manservants and maid servants who shall keep it and of the cattle and of the sojourner within thy gates. The fourth commandment also belongs to the shadow worship of Israel. That had to bring a double burnt-offering on the sabbath. And especially: it had to keep the seventh day as sabbath. Israel began to work on the first day of the week. In a manner of speaking it worked itself to the seventh day. And then at the end of the week, on the seventh day, it rested. Precisely as the Lord rested on that seventh day. Does this not have a deep significance , that Israel began the week with work and only rested at the end of the week? Did not the Lord show in this in a fine manner, that Israel lived toward the coming of the Messiah and of the new covenant? In a way of speaking the Israelites were deadbeat by the end of the workweek. Then at last came the rest. So came, after all those ages of the old covenant with its laws and ceremonies, rest for God's people in the finished work of your Saviour. You should not belittle the beneficial influence of this fourth commandment for God's people under the old covenant. There was no other nation in the world that knew the sabbath. Only God's own people received that day from Him. And have you ever noticed,

that God did not suffice with as motivation to point to his own resting on the seventh day? Read Deuteronomy 5. There God gave through Moses for the second time, now at the end of the journey through the desert, the fourth commandment. There God motivated the fourth commandment by Israel in rousing them to remember that they were servants, you might as well say slaves in Egypt, and that the Lord, their God brought them out with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm. That is why, Moses says there, the Lord your God commands you to keep the sabbath day. No, God's people should not race from one day to the next. It was an out of Egypt liberated people. The preamble of the law, that the Lord had brought them out of the house of bondage Egypt, also works through here. Every seventh day they had to lay down their work and rest as they rested after the liberation out of that Egyptian bondage. God is also socially emoted about his people. He granted them that rest whole heartedly. He also grants you that rest.

We hope that the smart catechumen of a while ago has been able to follow us. But I can also imagine that he wants to say something. We can hear him say already: all good and well, you have shown us, that God choose the seventh day as a day of rest for all people. How is it then that we celebrate that day of rest on the first day of the week? We are not working towards the day of rest? We start with the day of rest. First we celebrate Sunday and then on Monday we go to work. How is this? Are the Seventh Day Adventists then right as they say, that this is the great sin of Christendom, that they celebrate God's day on Sunday and not on Saturday? Where does it say in the bible that we have to rest on the first day of the week and not on the seventh?

Indeed, nowhere in the bible is this said in so many words. It is precisely as with the children baptism. That came in the place of the circumcision, without it being said in the bible with so many words. And yet the church baptizes its children and does not circumcise them. So we celebrate also the sabbath on Sunday and not on Saturday. How did this come to pass? Congregation, this finds its origin in the resurrection of your Saviour. You know: the Lord Jesus died on Good Friday. Just before the sabbath began in Israel. Because this begins with the Jews on Friday evening with the rising of the first star. Before the last sabbath of the old covenant began, they have laid your Saviour in the grave. For, says John in chapter 19 verse 31, the Jews then, asked Pilate, since it was the day of Preparation, in order to prevent the bodies from remaining on the cross on the sabbath- for that sabbath was a high day- that their legs might be broken, and they might be taken away from the cross.

Your Saviour has lain that whole sabbath in the grave. Later after the sabbath, when it began to become light, He arose. That whole great last sabbath of the old covenant your Saviour was in the realm of death. He took with Him in that grave the whole guilt of his people.

Also the guilt of the strict mutilation of the sabbath as the Scribes had done among Israel. That whole last great sabbath

He lay motionless in the realm of death. And then it became Easter. Then your Saviour rose out of that realm of death. Then He rose to life. On that Eastermorning He took along for us the happy glad sabbath of life.

So the day of rest moved from the last day of the week, hardly unnoticed, to the first day of the week. And what did this first day already immediately get after the resurrection of Christ: a central place in the life of the christians.

On the evening of that first day Christ appeared to his diciples without Thomas. A week later, when Thomas was there, He appeared anew. The risen Christ then already seized that first day of the week. On Patmos your Saviour appeared to John again on that first weekday. So the elevated Christ leads his church of the sabbath on Saturday to the day of rest on Sunday. From the last day of the week to the first.

There lies a deep meaning in this for you, as congregation of the new covenant. Israel lived towards the end of the week. At last rest on that last day. You, as congregation of the risen Saviour, may live from the Sunday, from the first day of the week. The light of his resurrection shines from the Sunday over all our workdays. Soon on the first day of the week the christians met. For them Christ's resurrection day was a promise for that whole following week. Tertullianus, one of the first christian writers, wrote tersely, without the Sunday there cannot be christians.

Congregation : your Sunday is a feast day. God choose it. Christ seized it through his resurrection. You, as God's congregation may celebrate that day from the resurrection of your Lord. Let no one rob you of this day. There is a reason for this warning. For also this fourth commandment has often been violated during the history of Israel and of the church. One time the Lord with all power had to warn against the desecration of the fourth commandment. The Lord told Jeremiah to stand in the gates of Jerusalem and to warn Israel of that desecration. He has to say: Thus says the Lord: Take heed for the sake of your lives, and do not bear a burden on the sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem. And do not carry a burden out of your houses on the sabbath or do any work, but keep the sabbath day holy, as I commanded your fathers. (Jeremiah 17 : 21,22)

That is the one side of the desecration of the fourth commandment. But there is also another side. Of that the Scribes made themselves guilty. They made it a day that had to be kept in a strict and slavish manner. At the same time they thought of ways to circumvent their own rules. So they declared that on the sabbath you could not go any further than 2000 yards. That was the distance from the far tent in the desert to the tabernacle. At the same time they circumvented this law by declaring, that when you had reached the end of your sabbath journey and had waited ten minutes, you again could make such a sabbath journey.

Your Saviour was very angry about this desecration of the fourth commandment. When the Scribes remarked that his diciples were plucking ears of grain on the sabbath, Christ lashed them with

the word: the sabbath was made for men, not men for the sabbath. so the Son of men is lord even of the sabbath. (Mark 2 : 27,28) You can desecrate the sabbath by making the day of rest a day of work or a day of pleasure. That is the one side. You can also maim it by human rules which frustrate the festive and rest character of the sabbath.

Many christians have also made the Sunday into a day of hard to accomplish burdens. may you cook on Sunday, they asked themselves. No, they said, you have to do this on Saturday. But then the question came: Are you allowed to warm it up on Sunday? Others asked are you allowed to go for a walk on Sunday? Many again said, no, but they walk to church and now they go there by car. These examples may be rather strong. They are only meant to show you where you end up if you make the Sunday a strict kept day.

2. Put over against all this what is here in answer 103.

What a speed and vision is in this. Not a word of what is allowed or nor allowed. Into this the confession does not enter. With one word it characterizes the Sunday: It is a day of rest.

How you have to rest, is not defined. The word day of rest is sufficient. Resting is: not working. This answer speaks further to two sides. First to the side of the government. It has to take care that the ministry of the gospel and the schools are maintained. That was in the time of the Catechism a task of the government. Now it is the task which lays on the shoulders of the church in which the government finances the schools.

However this does not take away the task of the parents to care for good reformed schools. But as answer 103 has put this point in a safe place, it rushes to something else, to the central setting on the Sunday of the church service. In that your confession seeks the heart of the accomplishment of the fourth commandment. This answer says: out of your lazy chair or comfortable gardenchair to the House Of God, to the hard church bench.

Answer 103 speaks to you personally, congregation. It emphasizes : that I especially on the sabbath, that is on the day of rest diligently attend the church of God. That is now your fulfilment of the fourth commandment. Notice the fine formulation. Answer 103 does not say: that I have to go to church but I shall diligently come to God's congregation. In your mind you see that congregation before you : Men, women, boys and girls, children. Together they form God's covenant congregation. There now is your place, says this answer to the growing up boys and girls. Once and a while they grumble if they have to go to church twice. They then ask : it this now necessary? The Catechism answers here, that it is very necessary. The Lord wants to see you there pupil, You belong to it. The Lord also there wants to see your folded hands. He wants to hear your voice with the singing. There He wants to reach your heart. What do you say? You rather sleep in? While the Lord calls you? He is also your God. Through baptism you are incorporated into his covenant and He wants to meet you, there in that congregation.

Have your ears wide open and also your eyes when the sacraments

are used. Later you will realize how important it is for your life that your parents took you and encouraged you to go to church.

The church service stuffy? Not at all. If it is good then there is already excitement in the meeting of the congregation before the service. The organ plays, the congregation waits and there then enter the minister of the Word and the elders and deacons. You are blessed by God at the beginning of the service. You sing as opening psalm a hymn of praise. The minister of the Word opens the Scriptures. You hear God's Word being read and proclaimed. Aren't you totally involved in this? We said a while ago that there is speed and vision in this answer. Take a look how one follows the other. Is the public prayer of which answer 103 speaks, not a special part of our Sunday service?

Hear: the Lord God is called also on behalf of you. Hear: the minister of the Word does on behalf of you confession of guilt and sin. If Thou Lord, remembers the iniquities, Lord, who shall exist? He also pleads on behalf of you on the promise of forgiveness : But with You there is forgiveness, so the Thou will be feared. You together with the minister of the Word and with the whole congregation pray for the need of all of christendom as our formprayers express.

Is that not a wonderful sabbathwork, of together with the congregation publicly lay before God the needs of the church and people and of whole the world?

So we come to the central point of the Sunday service, the preaching of the Word. Answer 103 says: Listening to that is excellent sabbathwork. Congregation, the preaching of the Word puts you to work. It takes effort to really listen to a sermon. It also asks from the minister of the Word good preparation. If all is correct the preaching does two things. It explains God's Word. It shows you the progress of history of the salvation in Christ. It opens the Scriptures for you. But at the same time the preaching goes into the present situation in the world in which the congregation now lives. It unmask the spirit of the time and satans work in that. It shows you the narrow way behind your only Master through the chaos of this world. It confronts you with the law of God, also in this fourth commandment, it builds you up in the faith.

Answer 103 immediately adds to the hearing of the preaching: the use of the sacraments, Is that word "use" also not an effective description to name your activity as God's congregation? There is excitement in the church when a child is baptized. There is also excitement in the church when the Lord's Supper is celebrated. The Holy Spirit works through the sacraments. He activates you to anew see and believe God's promises in their firmness and reliability.

As congregation of God you are working hard on Sunday.

You are also working in what the confession names it: give christian offerings to the poor. That is also an excellent sabbath work. You also may think about the need in the third world, a horrible need. The deacons must also keep this in mind. They also do this when they place the far neighbour before your attention. To show charity to your neighbour far or near

is also Sunday work, sabbathwork.

Aren't you busy? Did we not draw the pattern of the Sunday for you? We also think here about the afternoon service with its preaching of the Catechism, your own Catechism. Do not neglect this. It activates you to live from the only comfort in life and death. You being a Christian receives a powerful support and stimulation in the preaching of the Catechism. So your confession points your Sunday celebration to the church-services. And what is outside of that? Do you have to receive further instruction? For that we will give one hint. Our forefathers gave for the definition of what they did on Sunday and what they did not do a speaking indication. They said: on Sunday allowed works are those of necessity and charity. Those are quite often combined. Think about the work of doctors and nurses in the hospitals. You have in this twofold typifying a good handle for the institution of the your Sunday celebration.

3. So now we come to the last part. We discussed God's choice of this feastday and we showed you his feast-program. Now we point you to the quests You celebrate your Sunday together with God. About this the Second of this answer speaks. Answer 103 says: the fourth commandment requires that from all the days of your life you rest from your evil work. You can't sit with a pious face on Sunday in the church and during the week lie and cheat. Celebrating Sunday with God makes you a quest of your heavenly father, also on Monday and Tuesday etcetera. Answer 103 continues, you let the Lord work in you through his Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit He has seized you. Now He works from the Sunday on you, every week anew. You are on the way to the eternal sabbath. You are starting that now, already in this life.

Is this not a mighty perspective? Hebrews 4 verse 9 says: So then, there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God. God already celebrated his day of rest with man in paradise. There Adam and Eve already went into the rest which God gave himself and them on the seventh day. How wonderful shall it be later in the eternal sabbath on God's new earth and in the city of light of the future. That remains for you, that is awaiting you, says Hebrews 4. Every Sunday God already points you to this. It has been obtained for you by your Saviour. The light of his resurrection shines now already shines over your life. In a while you shall celebrate the eternal wedding with God and the Lamb. Now our lives are trapped between two Sundays, time and again. In a while it will be always Sunday. But, be also warned. We think about what God spoke to Israel in Psalm 95, looking back to their disobedience and stubbornness in the desert: Therefore I swore in my anger: that they should not enter my rest. (verse 11)

You do not have to fear this threat if you do with which answer 103 ends: As quests of God through faith now already begin in this life the eternal sabbath.

Amen.

Lordsday 39.

Against the revolution: the gospel.

Sermon by the late
Dr. R. H. Bremmer,
Enschede, the Netherlands.

Reading: Romans 13: 1-18
Text: Lordsday 39,
Hymn 7: 1, 2, 6, 9.
After the law: Psalm 143 :2
After the creed: unknown,
Psalm 78: 1, 2, 28,
Psalm 34: 5,
Psalm 128: 1.3.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton,
Alberta.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the most fascinating figures in our history in the previous century was Mr Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer. Our christian people have gained a lot, thanks to him. In a time when liberalism was king in politics and propagated a neutral state, he fought for a school and a state with the bible. He saw that only submission to the gospel of Jesus Christ offered a future for our people.

The Lord had given Groen a sharp and penetrating mind. He was at home in the bible and in the history of our nation. Because of that he was able to formulate his political directions and apply them in concrete situations. He wrote his political vision down in a book with a typical title: Unbelief and revolution. In that he showed in a sharp manner that revolution, the overthrowing of the by God given authority, comes out of unbelief and rejection of God's revelation. He showed in a bright light what led to the horrible bloodshed of the French revolution and the Napoleonic times. He warned our nation (people) not to continue in that direction. One of the watchwords, with which he hammered, was: Against the revolution: the gospel. He called himself an antirevolutionary and the party which he led the Anti-Revolution party. It wanted in principle to choose against the revolution, against the overthrowing of authority.

Congregation, today you are confronted with the fifth commandment of the law of the Lord. This happens in a time in which from all sides the theology of the revolution is preached. Yes, surely imagine : the theology of the revolution. This only could criticize and reform our society. Whoever preaches such a revolution theology, does not realize what he is doing. Groen showed what a sea of blood and tears this had brought over the European nations. Was it different after his death? Listen to the nations of Eastern Europe which shook off that marxist yoke. And the national-socialistic revolution in Germany? Through what a sea of suffering did the nations of Europe go in the second worldwar.

Again: you are called to think about the fifth commandment. This deals with the authority that I show honour, love and faithfulness to my father and mother and " to all those in authority over me ". Authority which norm is the gospel, is beneficial and definitely not tyrannical.

I preach to you today

THE BENEFICIAL MESSAGE OF THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT.

1. In relation to parents and children;
2. Governments and subjects;
3. About the limit of the authority.

1. Many explainers of the Catechism say that with the fifth commandment the second table of the ten commandments begins. The Catechisme agrees with this in Lordsday 34. The first four commandments teach us, it says in answer 93, how to live in relation to God and the following six what duties we owe our neighbour. That is also correct. Only: we also could make another division. Notice how only the fourth and fifth commandment are formulated as a command, not as a prohibition. All the other commandments begin with: You shall not. Only the fourth commandment God formulated in a commanding manner: Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. And this fifth commandment begins with: Honour your father and your mother. Therefore we could divide the ten commandments by first taking the first three commandments together. They put God central in our lives. In the fourth and fifth commandment than comes to the human society: keep my day holy in your society and honour your father and mother. After that in the last five commandments our neighbour is central. Moses does this too in Leviticus 19 verse 3: Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and you shall keep my sabbaths: I am the Lord your God. God lays in the fourth and fifth commandment the foundation of our human society.

Then there is something else you should take notice of in this fifth commandment. It is clearly formulated in the singular. God comes to each Israelite personally. You, Israelite, son or daughter of my people, have to honour your father and mother. It is also noteworthy that here the Lord places our mother beside our father.

As you must bear in mind what a slighted position the woman had in that old-eastern world, is it so much more remarkable that the Lord places her fully beside the man, the father. The Lord here uses for honour a special word. God says: honour your father and mother. That word honour attracts attention. God does not say: love your father and mother. He also does not say: obey your father and mother, however both are included in that word honour. No, the Lord God here uses a word, that we also meet in the Old Testament if it is about the Lord Himself. You must know the expression the glory of the Lord. In Hebrew the word is kabood: the kabood of Jahweh. The bible uses that word for the column of cloud and the column of fire above the ark during the journey through the desert. In that column of cloud and that column of fire the Lord revealed his presence, his glory. That word kabood actually means: weight, heaviness. We also say: you have to give someone the full pound. Now, so we also have to give the Lord the full pound. Is is His right.

That word God now uses himself with the relation to our parents. You have to give them the full pound, give to them to what they are entitled too. In a manner of speaking: God lays his kabood, his glory on them. The old minister J.C.Sikkel used the beautiful word "crown" for this. God places a crown on the heads of our parents in this fifth commandment.

Oh, someone may think: what awful old-fashioned. Something like: children have to hear, see and be silent. And as far as the government is concerned: command is command. There you have that old-fashioned preaching of an empty authority. Authority would only be there because of authority.

Who thinks like this, surely is mistaken. Do you know how God through Moses bases the authority of the parents over the children? He does that in Deuteronomy 6 where the Lord commands parents to imprint the children with the law of the Lord, the thora. They have to talk about this when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. Parents have received authority over their children, but that authority gets meaning because the parents imprint in their children God's law. And do you know, that God himself has written a beautiful comment on the fifth commandment?

In the book Proverbs. This is really a special practical book. In this you read of many proverbs about the relation between parents and children and vice versa. You have to notice in your home bible reading how often a proverb begins with the words " My son ". The father, who wrote this book, is at the same time teacher and the teacher in this book the father. Read Proverbs 6 verse 20: My son, keep your father's commandment, and forsake not your mother's teaching. Bind them upon your heart always; tie them about your neck. The proverb-poet here with those last words means: as jewelry. There are also very severe proverbs in this book. Listen to Proverbs 20 verse 20:

If one curses his father or his mother, his lamp will be put out in utter darkness. And Proverbs 30 verse 17: the eye that mocks the father and scorns to obey a mother, will be picked out by the ravens of the valley and eaten by the vultures. The Proverbs-poet is very realistic. He knows how difficult children can be for their parents. Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, says the proverb-poet, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.(Proverbs 22 verse 15) That does not mean to say: Hit it with the whip. But: discipline is necessary.

That same proverb-poet, congregation, knows that it can be good between parents and children. Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also and he praises her. Proverbs 31:28 Mothers can be proud of such children and vice versa.

God knew what kind of people, that Israel was, there at the base of the Sinai. Also in regard to the fifth commandment. God knew this already from the fall of men in paradise. The root of all sin against this commandment lies in the disobedience of men to the test commandment in paradise. Because men rose up against God, later he rose up against all the authority God put over him. Who rises up against God, also breaks the fifth

commandment. On the moment that men trespassed the love-commandment towards God, he also sinned against his neighbour. Who are your first neighbours, congregation? None other than your parents. God gave you that concrete father and that concrete mother. They were the very first neighbours with whom you had to do in this world. The family therefore is a practice-school in the obedience to the commandment to love your neighbour as yourself. I did not pick out my parents. God gave them to me and God commands that I show them honour love and faithfulness. God, we saw before sets honour in front. If it was only about the love for our parents, it could depend on if I had a sympathetic, a loving father or mother. But in this sinful world there are also difficult fathers and mothers. God charges me to show them honour love and faithfulness, says your confession. Do not miss that word "all". I do not have to honour half, and show them a bit of love. No, your confession puts this command in the atmosphere of the absolute: All honour. Congregation, the Scriptures give you horrible examples of the trespassing of this commandment. A warning power goes out from this for you. Think about Shem and Japheth who, when their father Noah was drunk, still showed toward him all honour love and faithfulness. Ham did not do this and the Lord cursed him. Take the story of Absalom. The tearing up of his family brought a great suffering over David and revolution over Israel. But on the other side, Scripture gives also fine examples of parental love. With what a reverence did Joseph present his father Jacob to Pharaoh. When Bathseba visited Solomon about the revolt of Adoniah, the king ordered that a seat be placed at his right hand for the queen mother.

Is it different in the New Testament? Congregation, hear the house rules which the apostle Paul gives in Ephesians 6 and in Colossians 3 for the mutual relationship of parents and children. Mind: Paul, himself was single and childless. He has done the church of Christ a great service to place this fifth commandment in the light of the fulfilment by your Saviour. He writes in Ephesians 6, Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. And then he adds: Honour your father and mother (this is the first commandment with a promise) "that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth. With that he transposes the promise of living long in the land of the promise now in the newtestamentic: so that it may be well with you and you live long on the earth. The apostle very emphatically speaks to the children in the church. In a manner of speaking, he sees them sitting in the church: the boys and girls. He says: Obey your parents in the Lord, in the Kurios Jesus Christ. Was Christ himself not submissive to his parents?

Joshua, the Hebrew name for Jesus, Joshua, says Joseph: give me that saw. Yes father. Joshua: do some errands for me: yes mother. That is how it went in the carpenters house of Joseph in Nazareth. He, who the king is of all kings and the lord of all lords, was not embarrassed to do the dishes for his mother or to clean up the shop for his father. On the cross He still thinks about his mother. Woman, see your son, He says there

to Mary, and to John: son see your mother. He has into death on the cross in our place fulfilled this commandment in his actual and meek obedience. His suffering on the cross and his finished fulfilment of the love-commandment are behind this call of Paul to obey our parents in the Lord.

So a christian family life style bloomed in the God's congregation. This commandment puts the education of our children in the light of the gospel. When I learned to walk, the hand of my father and of my mother would grab me, if I seemed to stumble. So this commandment teaches me to walk in the service and the covenant of God. Your father and mother have taught you to pray. They taught you to read the bible. They took you along to church. They also showed you to love your brothers and sisters. Of course: every generation does this in its own way. Grandparents should not interfere with their children about the education of their grandchildren. As grandparents you could give good advise and talk about it with your children.

You, as parents, this answer 104 calls to educate your children in good teaching and discipline. That does not happen by itself. We as parents may in our prayers ask for light and wisdom.

This commandment, congregation, cuts to two sides. Paul in Ephesians 6 does not only think about the children but also about the fathers. He writes in verse 4: Fathers do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Lately there rightly is pointed out, that the father-image that the child takes with it in its further life also is of great meaning of the image it forms of its heavenly father. Parents should not dread it to ask forgiveness of their children if they had mistreated them. And children, if necessary, have to ask for forgiveness of their parents. Let there be with us parents "soft hands and friendly eyes".

2. Up to now we especially have spoken about the relation from children to their parents and vice versa. Your confession does not stay with this. It extends this commandment also to all those in authority over me. It is God's will to govern us by their hand, say the last words of of answer 104.

The family is the smallest cell of society. But there are more relationships in society with authority relations. For that this commandment also counts. A while ago we together read Romans 13. There says the same Paul, who spoke about the relationship of parents and children: Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

He then continues: Therefore he who resists the authorities, resists what God has appointed and those who resisit will incur judgment. (verse 1,2)

You must realize about which authority the apostle here speaks. Here it is about the authorities in the Roman empire of those days. To make it concrete with one word: about emperor Nero. Paul says about that Nero: every person has to submit to the authorities. And the apostle Paul writes about him: Fear God, Honor the Emperor. (1 Peter 2 : 17)

Congregation, there is no other way. It pleases God to have us governed by their hand. There were for the men, who wrote the Catechism, also many reasons to preach with power the submission to tough authorities. In the reformed movement of their time an ana-baptist tendency was stirring. Think about the kingdom Sion Jan van Leyden wanted to establish in Munich. They fought with the sword in the fist for a new, alternative society. They rejected the authority of governments. In many places they started a revolution. They wanted to create an ideal society without authorities. The reformers resisted this with all their power. It is God's will to govern us by their hand, the Catechisme confesses.

Article 36 of the Belgic Confession emphatically confesses that God through the authorities will restrain the licentiousness of men. The reformed people, about this point, stay with Romans 13. Paul there names the authorities servants, liturgen it says in the original, of God, they are God's servants for your good. (verse 4 and 6.)

Does that mean to say, that we cannot be critical of the government? Does the fifth commandment preach a slavish submission to our government? Scripture does not leave any doubt that government persons can be criticized if they abuse their power. We do not obey them because they are better persons than we, their subjects, are. No, it is God's will to govern us by their hand. Is it not a great grace of God to govern us by an orderly authority? Revolutions have brought chaos and misery in this world. Revolutions always turn into tyranny. Out of the French revolution came Napoleon, out of the Russian: Stalin. That is why it also counts for you what Paul also writes in Romans 13: Pay all of them (meaning governments) their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due. Verse seven. Paul himself appealed in his court case to the emperor, while he knew that emperor Nero was an hard man. Police and army are necessary in this world. Let your prayers not slacken off for our governments and its servants, congregation. Pray for them who are in authority. Pray also for our queen and her ministers. Who wants to wrest the sword from the government, which God gave it, delivers society to decomposition and chaos.

Again, the fifth commandment does not exclude criticism on authority. Answer 104 shows this clearly. It tells you emphatically to have patience with their weaknesses and shortcomings. It is only a question of what position you take. You never may explain the fifth commandment in relation to the government as: command is command, you have to submit to that. In connection to this it is very instructive to notice what the apostle Paul writes in the letter of the Colossians about the relationship between slaves and masters. Also there he lets the knife of God's command cut to two sides. To the slaves he says: Slaves, obey in everything those you are your earthly masters, not with eyeservice, as menpleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord. But at the same time he says to the masters: Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly,

knowing that you also have a master in heaven. (Colossians 3:22, 4:1) Is that : Authority is authority? Does not the beneficial fifth commandment speaks to two sides?

Here we touch the heart of what is being preached to us in the theology of the revolution. Jesus would have been a greatrevolutionary. Our Saviour would have laid dynamite under the Jewish establishment of the Pharisees. Christians should support freedomfighters and guarillas in South America and South Africa.

In our country they preach in connection with this the socalled civil disobedience, through which they, by way of strikes and traffic blockades, want to press their will on the government. But the gospel of Jesus in not a gospel of bloodletting and chaos. It calls the government and its subjects to obedience to God's beneficial commands in the Lord.

That is also valid in God's church. It also pleases God that we are governed by people in the church. He has entrusted the leadership and management of his congregation to elders and deacons. Also their office work is serving work. They may keep our Saviour himself before their eyes in the service of his people. On the evening before his suffering and death He took off his clothes, took a linen cloth and girded himself with it. After that he put water in a basin and began to wash the feet of his diciples. He said: For I have given you an example that you also should do as I have done to you. (John 13: 15)

What can the office bearers in God's congregation learn a lot from our Saviour. When the diciples began to dispute who among them would be the greatest, He said to them: The kings of the Gentiles exersize lordship over them and those in authority are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. (Luke 22: 24-26)

Very intrusively He asked: For which is the greater, one who sits at the table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at the table? But, Christ than continues, but I am among you as one who serves. (verse 27) So also have we as ministers of the Word, as elders and deacons, to be in the midst of the congregation as servants. Self-denial is needed for that and looking up to Christ who preceded us in this.

3. As an ending there is a limit to authority. This answer speaks about this too. It call us to submit ourselves to their good instruction and discipline to those in authority over me.

There can be sitiations, in which submission is prohibited.

That same apostle Peter who wrote, fear God and Honor the Emperor, has spoken before the Sanhedrin the great words:

We must obey God, rather then men. (Acts 5 : 29)

There are limits to the authority of parents, of governments and church office bearers. If they asked from us what is clearly against in conflict with God's Word, we have to say no.

Sometimes it is hard to know where that limit is. For years our fore-fathers have born the tyranny of Philip the Second during the eighty year war. In that national psalm Wilhelmus, William of Orange confesses: the king of Spain I have always

honored. But there came a time that he and our fore-fathers took up the arms. It could not go on and was not allowed to go on. In the last stanza of the Wilhelmus the Prince confesses once more that he would submit himself to the king as long as possible: Before God I will confess and to his great power, that I have never despised the king. But there came a moment that this could not go on nor was allowed to go on. Wilhelmus says this in the last stanza: Then that I have to be obedient to God the Lord, the highest Majesty, in righteousness. In the same inclination men and women have put their lives on the line in the battles against that ungodly national-socialism and for the freedom to serve the Lord according to his Word. So we ourselves have said no in 1944 to ecclesiastical decisions which were not founded on God's Word. There is a limit to the obedience to them who are in authority over us. There are situations in which with God's Word in the hand, no has to be said. Then we are not frantic revolutionaries but with Groen van Prinsterer: anti revolutionaries.

Amen.

Lordsday 40.

The Sixth Commandment: That I to my neighbour.....

Sermon by the late
Dr. R.H.Bremmer,
Enschede, the Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton,
Alberta.

Reading: Genesis 4: 1-16,
Text Lordsday 40,
Hymn 7: 1,2,7,13
After the law Psalm 106: 2,
After the creed Psalm 93 : 1,
Psalm 133 : 1,2,3,
Psalm 85 : 4,
Psalm 72 : 2.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thou shall not kill. That is short and terse the sixth commandment. But does it make sense to preach this commandment in our world? Is it in a matter of speaking: useless? Thou shall not kill, says the Lord. If there is one commandment over which humanity rolls, than it is this commandment. Just take the two world wars in this century, in which we live. Is it not horrible how many people have been destroyed? In the last war alone more than 10 million Russians were killed through war violence and extermination. Millions of Jews were gassed and brought to death.

Not only during wars people are killed. We also think about the terrorism through bombs in many places in this world. There runs trail of blood through Northern Ireland, Lebanon and South Africa and again and again in Israel. Also in our own country more and more murders are happening. Your confession here in Lordsday 40 does not only stand still with the killing itself. It is in this sixth commandment also about what is behind it, about what answer 106 calls: the root of murder. This commandment touches upon what lives and works in our heart. It also can be seen in the relation of people with each other in society. It also touches upon the treatment of each other in God's church. God speaks in this sixth commandment directly to his covenant people, his church people Israel. Does it make sense to talk to each other about this commandment, now that it is put this way? Yes it makes sense. It is a commandment of your God. Here He comes to you. He, the holy and majestic God, who here powerfully holds this sixth commandment before us. He maintains himself in this commandment over against the godliness of mankind. Here He discovers, using an old fashioned word, mankind in its guilt over against God in this commandment. God stands with all his power on his commandment. Your confession in its explanation of this commandment shows how deep this goes. It uses the word require not for nought in question 105. The Catechism there asks: What does God require in the sixth commandment? At the same time it shows in the effect of this commandment, which way the Lord shows us in our relation with the neighbour. There is a great depth in this Lordsday 40.

Today we speak to you about

THE PROFOUNDNES OF GOD'S REQUIREMENT IN THE 6 TH COMMANDMENT.

Which we get in sight as we pay attention to:

1. How God discovers us in our guilt;
2. Shows us the way of redemption;
3. Puts our task in society before our eyes.

1. The sixth commandment says: Thou shall not kill. Actually in Hebrew a more forceful word is used. There it says literally Thou shall not murder. God here uses a word that speaks of killing someone with a premeditated plan.

Congregation, to whom did God speak this commandment? Were there at the Sinai a troop of villains before God's face? Did God aim here to a gathering of people of whom you have to say: It is really necessary that God comes to them with this commandment? Were they people that just had committed a murder? No way. God here directs himself to his own people, that is standing before Him at the Sinai. Here He speaks to his own people, that He liberated from Egypt. Also above this commandment is written: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. God definitely did not direct himself to the individual, who forgot himself and committed a murder. Here He speaks to the good fathers and the caring mothers. He directs himself here to the mass of the people, but also to the princes and nobility among Israel, also to Moses and Aaron. To all of them.

Why then did the Lord come to his people with this commandment? Well, God knew what kind of people he was dealing with. He knew Israel through and through. He gauged their hearts. You should not forget that God, when He gave his law to Israel at the Sinai already had gone through a lot with men and with his people. God knew who men was and what men thought.

Had God not created men for life in the glorious paradise that He gave them as a home? Had God not created men to his likeness and to live in fellowship with Him, His Creator and Covenant God? God did not create men only to be there and no more. He did not throw them as a thing, as an object, in this life. He created him to live in many relationships in love to God and in love to his neighbour.

What did men do in paradise? Hardly he was created as man and wife or he committed a murder on his Creator and Covenant-God. You may be a little surprised. Perhaps you think: how can you say this, that men committed murder on God? Is that speaking too rashly? Do you know, that you can murder someone without ~~murdering~~ ^{killng} him? Can people die due to the treatment through another one? Men can ruin the life of his neighbour in a horrible fashion. So it also was with God in paradise. When Adam and Eve ate of the fruit which God forbade them, they kicked God on the heart. They declared God dead. We cannot imagine how awful this has been for God. His human people, which He had created in love, with whom he had established his covenant in love, they violated his commandment. They wanted to be as God. And if the bible shows us only one thing, then it is this,

through the striking at God, men became a murderer of his neighbour. Congregation, the bible is an exceptional realistic book. It does not hide anything if it is about God and about men. That is also the case here. Not for nought follow in the bible on the creation of men and his fall the story of Cain and Abel. The very first story after the paradise story is the story of the murder of Cain on Abel. In a manner of speaking: the smell of paradise was still around men. Adam and Eve had not forgotten the mother promise. When Cain was born Eve said: I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord. With this she had an eye on the promise of the seed of the woman, which God had given her. She hoped that with the way of the birth of this child it would fulfill the Messianic promise.

Now and how did it go with Cain and Abel? You know that story? When Abel offered one of the first-born of his sheep, the Lord had regard for his offer, but not for Cain's offer. Then Cain became jealous of his brother. He took him along to the field and killed him. Yes, that is what it says, unimaginable, he killed him. So, suddenly. Hardly had men been striking God or he murdered his brother. And that was not the end. And when God came to Cain and asked: Where is your brother Abel? Cain answer stonhard: I do not know. Am I my brothers keeper?

Horrible words, congregation. Here the bible confronts you with a like God created man, who another like God created man kills. Cain was jealous. He could not see Abel. He could not stand it that God accepted Abel's offer and not his. He shed the blood of his brother Abel. Both were sons of Adam and Eve. Both grew up with as background God's paradise. And still one lifted up his hand against the other, against his brother.

For the first time blood was shed on the earth. How serious God takes this He lets hear later, when he said to Noah:

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image. (Genesis 9: 6) Your Saviour later speaks of all the righteous blood that has been shed on the earth, from the blood of Abel, the righteous, to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Who touches man, who is created to God's image, touches God.

When God says to Israel: Thou shall not kill, God surely thinks about this horrible story, so shortly after the ousting of men from paradise. Man is not a thing, a matter which you can do away with. That you can do with a rock or a branch lying before your feet. That you clean up. You shove them aside. But man is the image bearer of God. For him is Immanuel, our Saviour, who became flesh and came in this world. Not for nought we heard the Saviour speak about "all" that righteous blood that has been shed on this earth since Abel. There runs a trail of blood through the history of mankind. Do not say, now yes, that is an individual, a single criminal who trespasses like this.

We said it before: the bible is a realistic book. Does not that trail of blood run through the whole Old Testament? You must know the story of Joseph and his brothers. Weren't they going to kill Joseph. Think about the story of Saul and David. Saul was a by God anointed king. How did he treat David? If he would

have had the opportunity, he surely would have killed David. He threw his spear at him to pin him to the wall. What did Saul do to himself? He fell upon his own sword on the hills of Gilboa. And David himself? What did he do with Uriah the Hittite? He had him killed through Joab by exposing him to the arrows of the Ammonites. That was David, the man of God's heart. You may think, now yes, that was the Old Testament. Then it was a rough time, a life hardly counted. Was it different in the New Testament? How did the leaders of the Jewish nation treat our Saviour? Of the Pharisees it is written that after the resurrection of Lazarus they took counsel how to put Him to death. (John 11: 53) Him, the Son of God, the Redeemer of Israel. And they have done it too. They brought Him before their High Council and sentenced Him innocently to death. They cried before Pilate: Crucify Him, crucify Him. With satisfaction they stood around his cross, mocked and insulted Him.

And Paul? How did he behave at the stoning of Stephen? He enjoyed his death and still breathing threats and murder against the disciples, asked the high priest for letters. (Acts 9: 1) Up to now we spoke of the trail of blood that runs through all the Scriptures. But the bible does not stop with this. God penetrates still deeper in his Word: into the heart of man. If there has been one, who preached the depth and the far purport of this commandment, than it was the Saviour himself. On the sermon of the mount He spoke this mighty word: unless your righteous exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. That the Saviour here meant the sixth commandment, He shows us clearly. Christ spoke: You have heard that it was said to the men of old, you shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment. The scribes figured that they were through with this commandment as long as they did not commit murder. The Saviour continues and says: But I say to you. He lays in those words all the power of his Messianic authority: But I say to you. And then follow the impressive words: that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment. And whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says: Fool to his brother shall be liable to the hell of fire. (Matthew 5:20-22)

So Christ has put the depth and the sharpness of this commandment in the light. It is not only about the deed of murder. It is about what there is in our hearts over against our neighbour and what our mouth blurts out. Against the background of these words of Christ, this commandment gets his discovering depth. Your confession connects in its explanation of this commandment to these words of Christ, the sermon on the mount. That immediately starts at the beginning of answer 105. There the Catechism begins with the words: that I to my neighbour (see dutch catechism) Not: that you or that we our neighbour in general. No, directly to you: That I to my neighbour. You cannot remove yourself from this. The Catechisme here puts the knife of the sermon of the mount on the throat. And hear then that it is not only about the deed of murder. For then follow

the words: that I do not rob my neighbour of his honour, not hate, injure or kill. That certainly does not only touch the criminal who grabs an axe and smashes someone's skull or shoots him down with a gun, how serious this may be. No, I may not even dishonor my neighbour with thoughts, words, gestures, injure or kill.

Congregation, in this commandment it is not only about the protection of life in general. Who explains the Catechism like this, puts himself on "one" line with the humanism of today, that in general will stand up for life. It is not only about to put the value of a human life in the light. The Catechism speaks about that neighbour which God put beside me and with whom I come into contact. Also for him Christ came in this world to save him if he believes in Christ. And then should I, even if it is only in my thoughts, dishonour or hate him?

Who is an exception to this commandment? Who can justify himself before God? What kind of thoughts sometimes live in our hearts? Take the jealousy and envy, which often is hidden in our hearts. What often are people jealous of each other. How often they curse each other. The competitor who earns more than I: the colleague who makes a promotion; the brother or sister in the congregation who are regarded more highly than I.

Answer 105 also pays attention how we can dishonour and hurt each other with "words". Sometimes words are like knives with which we strike the other in the heart. We can knock the other one out with words. Our selfishness can play a role with us, also in the words which we use when talking about our neighbour. If the other party treats us friendly and nice, then for sure we are also friendly and nice. We admire them. But oh boy, if he punishes us or is against us. Then that I of ours sometimes as from a friendly angel becomes a biting snake.

No, congregation, your confession does not spare you in this explanation of this commandment of God. It lays the depth of God's requirement in this sixth commandment inexorably bare. Look at answer 106. There your confession goes even deeper. It penetrates there to the root of murder. Horrible matters come to the fore, spirits from hell. Listen: envy, hatred, anger, and desire of revenge. God hates these sins, says answer 106. They are the root of murder. That comes out of this. God keeps them for as being murder itself. Once again: He hates them. Does your confession here go to far? Is there no hate among christians? Think about of what we mentioned before: the relation of his brothers toward Joseph, the hate of Saul towards David. What can there be a lot of hate and grudges among families. What can anger embitter life. How can a cool reserve and ignoring of the neighbour sicken his life.

Thou shall not kill, spoke the Lord to his church-people Israel. That commandment also touches us in the communion of saints. God gave us to each other as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ How do we judge about each other in that holy communion of saints in which the Lord bound us to each other? We have the communion of saints high in our standard and that is good. But how do we treat each other in that communion? Sometimes disputes and

quarrels drag along for years in the congregation. Thou shall not kill. Congregation, how the confession here bares the depth of this commandment. Who has an eye for this, that God in this commandment it is also about the root of murder, deep in our heart, realizes his guilt over against this commandment. Lord, our heart is malicious and guilty..... That I to my neighbour..... Lord, we pray do not let us go, also not in the guiltiness over against this commandment of Thee. Forgive us our trespasses, Lord.

2. At this, the deepest point of our guilt to this commandment the explanation of Lordsday 40 suddenly makes an unexpected turn. Read answer 107. There the confession leads you suddenly to a totally different country. It leads you from the barren cold land of anger, hate and quarrels to the friendly and sunny land where the Spirit of your Saviour reigns. In the second part of answer 107 we enter that land. God's friendly face shines in that over us. No, says the Catechism, the Lord in this sixth commandment is not only about that we do away with the spirits out of the abyss, hate, anger and envy, out our lives. He wants more from us. He commands, and what a power lies in this word, He commands that we love our neighbour as ourselves. And now open your ears. He wants that we will be to our neighbour patient, peaceful and gentle and more so: also merciful and friendly. It is like that along the dark clouds of our anger suddenly the sunlight of God's grace plays. You know what Psalm 84 says about your Covenant-God: for the Lord God, says the Korahite, who is speaking there, is a sun and shield. He knew this, this Korahite. He, as a Levite served in the sanctuary. All day long he saw how the Israelites brought their guilt-offerings to the Lord. The Lord God is a sun: He warms and delights, through his forgiving love, his people and let his friendly face shine over them. And also: He is a shield. He protects and preserves his people in distress and death.

And should we also in this not show his image? Does this commandment not call on us to be a sun and shield for our neighbour? You are called here to be patient. That is a difficult matter. Patience: that is to say that you not immediately, a la minute, expect results from your relation to your neighbour. You have pointed out to him his faults and sins. You have proved to him his wrongs. Now you wait patiently for the fruits of that. Patience we as office bearers have to have with congregation members who we have to admonish. Parents have to have patience with their children. And children have to be patient with their parents, when something is wrong in their relationship. Do you know who does not have patience? That is the fanatic. He does not know about patience in his relation to others. He does not know himself. He lashes with his words and sometimes literally lashes. The scribes were fanatics. They chased in their law-fanaticism our Saviour into death. Paul also was a fanatic before Christ stopped him on the road to Damascus. What has the Lord a patience with us. What does He have to endure much from us. Should then we not on our turn have patience with each other?

Not only patience, also peace we should practise among ourselves. The Lord God has made peace with us through the blood of the cross. Should we then not practise peace and gentleness over against each other? Do you know where you can learn that peace and gentleness? Nowhere better than in the school of Jesus Christ. He himself has said: learn from me, for I am gently and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Matthew 11:29) And then the friendliness here is recommended to us. The Catechism does not mean a sugarsweet goody-goodness. It is the friendliness we have to demonstrate to a person who is unfriendly to us. The apostle Paul wrote to his Philippians: Your friendliness be known to all men. (Translated from Dutch) (Philippians 4: 5) Indeed congregation, it is a very wonderful country to which answer 107 leads you. And it says that in that country we have to protect him from harm and even that we have to do good to our enemies. The apostle tells us in Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

How can you conquer communication disorders, some ask themselves. Psychologists give all kinds of hints for this. Now, congregation if there is between you and your brother or sister such a communication problem, you can do away with this in a glorious and broadminded manner when you repay evil with good. Or, to say it with the apostle: to love one another with brotherly affection, outdo one another in showing honor. (Romans 12:10) Is love not inventive? It knows to find its ways to thaw out ice cold hearts? But, someone may ask: Do I not have to fight for God's right? Do we not have to oppose a brother who is mistaken? Did not Paul oppose his brother Peter to his face, because of him being wrong in the matter of gentile-Christians and their circumcision? Gal 2 verse 11. Yes, it can be necessary. But always with the firm will to save the brother by letting him feel that it is not about our business and our right, but about the right of the Lord God.

You are asking yourself: how do I get from that barren and cold land of hate and anger to that friendly land of love, peace and gentleness? Well: there is only one answer for this: to go through the narrow path behind you Saviour, behind Him who for us hung on the cross between two murderers. He has been counted with the criminals, also with the trespassers of this sixth commandment. He really loved his enemies and prayed for the transgressors. He has completely fulfilled the law of the Father in his actual obedience. He has in his passive obedience borne the punishment for our trespassing of this commandment. Only through faith in Him and in his assured work, can we fulfil this commandment.

3. Also you can see your calling in this life on this point of this commandment. At the end of answer 105 there is that small sentence that the government bears the sword to prevent murder.

If God entrusts the government with the sword to prevent violence in our society, don't we have the calling as congregation of Jesus Christ to support it through our prayers and our obedience? Here we also think about the murder at the beginning of life

and at the end of life, about abortion and euthanasia, burning questions in our time. Also we think about the war-problem. Our reformed fore-fathers as one have rejected the attack-war. They definitely were not militarist. But if it was about right and safety to defend against tyrants, they stood on the right with all their power to support the government in a righteous war. Has the atom-equilibrium of the last few years not kept the nations in peace? Do we have to break the right of government with banners and demonstrations? No way. We shall support it with civil obedience and combat civil disobedience with strenght. God's congregation has a tremendous task in this world. Through its witnessing and its obedience to the sixth commandment it may be a fire-place (vuurhaard) of love and life amid this violent world. Thou shall not kill. A great commandment, congregation. It discovers us in the ungodliness of our hearts in which the root of murder does its evil work. It pushes us to Him, who also fulfilled this commandment for us and in our place with the full devotion of his love and assurance. It also shows you the way to the land of love and peace. It stimulates us to support with all our power the government and its power of the sword. Beloved. The sixth commandment is a great commandment. It is also a glorious and liberating commandment. Praise be to the God of the sixth commandment.

Amen.

Lordsday 41

Honour the marriage.

Sermon by the late
Dr.R.H.Bremmer,
Enschede, the Netherlands,

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton,
Alberta.

Reading: The Song of Solomon. *4:11-15*
Text: Lordsday: 41,
Hymn 7: 1,7,12,13,
After the law: Psalm 19: 3,
After the creed: unknown,
Psalm 119: 1,12,40,
Psalm 128: 1,2,
Psalm 51: 3,5.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

If you ever get to Rome, then you should take a look at the Sistine chapel. This belongs, to put it plainly, to today's world wonders. Unimaginable what an enormous amount of people squeeze through this chapel daily. They come from all kinds of countries. Against the ceiling of this chapel the greatest painter ever to come out of Italy, Michael Angelo, painted an impressive series of biblical pictures. They begin with the creation of man. God is depicted on one of these pictures as a regal figure on the one side, Adam and Eve on the other. Do you know what is so strange? Eve stretches her arms entreating out to God. She, as the woman, now has become the prey of the passion and violence of the males. Only with God is there for her help and relief. She represents, in that entreating aiming to God for help, the woman of all ages. And we know, congregation that God sympathized with her. And not only with Eve, the woman, but also the man Adam. When man through the fall brought marriage in distress and still does, God has in Jesus Christ taken pity on the fallen human generation. In Christ He has maintained his law, also in the seventh commandment about which we talk today. Perhaps there is not one commandment which has been more trampled on and violated by men than this seventh commandment. But nowhere else does God's mercy shine more than here. Violated and sickened lives He saves and renews in his mercy in Christ Jesus.

Here think about the story of the adulterous woman in John 8. She was caught in adultery. The Pharisees and the Scribes were soon done with this case. According to the law of Moses, this woman had to be stoned. But Jesus? What is He going to do? You know his answer: Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her. (verse 7) So He unmasked the hypocrisy of those men. They went away ashamed, the eldest first. But to the woman Jesus said: Go and do not sin again, verse 11.

In that mood the Saviour wants us be over against this holy commandment. Looking up to God's mercy in Christ and praying for his renewing and sanctifying power. Then we shall keep in this marriage trampling time the by God instituted marriage in honour. We speak to you about

MARRIAGE IN HONOUR.

1. God has it instituted:
2. The devil tries to destroy it:
3. It is sanctified in Christ.

1. Take good notice, congregation, of question 108. This is strikingly formulated. Mostly your confession asks with the explanation on the commandments: What does God require in this commandment? Or also what does He forbid? Here, at the seventh commandment, your confession asks : What does the seventh commandment teach us? Your Catechism wants to say: There is a piece of education in that seventh commandment. It gives instruction concerning marriage. That is obvious from the answer. In that our confession declares that all unchastity is cursed by God. That is why we have to detest it from the heart and live chaste and disciplined lives. and then follow the words to which that "teaching" is referring too: namely both within and outside holy marriage. It is too bad that with the last fixation of the text of the Catechism a word was left out. In the old text it did not say: in the holy marriage, but in the holy state of marriage and outside of it.

With that your confession made an important move for then and now. Marriage brings the married people into a certain state of life, a certain legal status. And about that your confession emphatically says that it is holy. With other words: it has been instituted by God, it is sanctified by God. That is why this commandment touches all of us in the church, married as well as singles. For all of us marriage is a holy by God instituted position in life. Your confession had more than enough reasons to emphasize with that word "teach" in question 108. The christian church through all the ages often had difficulty with it. Only think about the institution of the celibacy which goes back to the first ages of the christian church. Behind this was that people actually considered, the life of men and women, it heartily knowing each other inside marriage, less holy than the ascetic life of monks and nuns.

Already the church-fathers considered the sexual desire of each other in marriage in such a way unholy, in any case less holy than if you abstained. That is why the roman catholic church raised marriage also into a sacrament. God gives in this a special grace to live as married persons, so it teaches.

Without that special grace the cohabitation of men and women in marriage, God would not be pleased. And how many men and women in the roman catholic church groan under the yoke of the institution of the celibacy today?

The church of the reformation, here broke with this radically. Imagine. God himself has instituted marriage and then the married state would be less holy before God than the unmarried state? Because of that the emphatic speaking in answer 108 about the holy married state. The church of the reformation did not think about condemning the sexual life as such. It does condemn here the sinful manner it is dealt with.

It had read the first chapters of the bible really well. What

does it tell us wonderfully how God created man and gave him marriage. God created man, says Genesis 1 verse 27, in his own image; in the image of God He created them. That is the first what God revealed to us about the creation of people. He adds to that: as male and female He created them. Scripture wants to say: being a man and being a woman is a very special facet to that great creation work of God. God did not create us as angels. Those do not have a sexual distinction. They are only holy spirits. God created men as man and woman. Every person's sex has been determined. You are a man or a woman. So has God wanted that. And men and women are both in full created to God's image. That belongs to the foundation words of the bible. Later on the Jewry did not understand this. In the morning prayer at the synagogue the men-congregation thanked in the Jewry: We thank thee God that thou has not created us as a woman. But that is four-square over against what is revealed here in Genesis 1.

How fascinating Scripture describes now to us in Genesis 2 how God went to work with this. Scripture does not leave it with that only statement that man and woman are created to God's image. If you read that second chapter of the bible, you are astounded by God's wisdom and greatness. First there is again that self-deliberation of God. God speaks by himself: It is not good that man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him.(verse 18)

First notice the words: It is no good, that man should be alone. That definitely does not contain that a man could not live without marriage. God means with this: there is something wanting in my creation work. I have to continue with the creation of man. I am going to add a variation, a difference, to my creation work, of which a human never would have thought off. The word in the original that has been translated here as help (KJV) we also could translate as helper. Congregation, think about Psalm 146 where the poet says: Happy is he whose help is the God of Jacob, That we can also translate with: who the God of Jacob has as an helper. The modern word partner we can easily introduce to clearly explain what the Lord here means.

It is not God's idea to provide Adam a " little helper ", someone who will wait on him hand and foot. You have to read this in connection to the first words of God that it not good, that man is alone. He only comes to full developement when God giveshim the help, that helper. So they both come to development.(ontplooiing) Someone once put it into words like this: God did not create man as lone-some, but two-some.

Hear now, congregation, how God went to work. He did not just place Eve beside Adam. No, God works step by step. First He lets all the animals pass before Adam and tells him to give them names. So they went before Adam: the lion and the lioness; the bear and the she-bear. As male and female they passed man. Adam saw it. What were those animals created in a great variation: time and again as male and female, in pairs. So the Lord God stirred in Adam the sense: they are together and I am alone.

Then The Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man,

says verse 21 of Genesis 2, Impressive. Adam's own activity is totally eliminated. The Lord went to work. God took one Adam's ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the Lord God made the rib, which He had taken from man, into a woman, says verse 22 and very emphatically it says: and brought her to the man. God took Eve by the hand and brought her to Adam.

Adam is estatic. The first man was prophet, priest and king. Adam serves in his prophetic office as he reacts to God's gift of Eve with the words: This is at last bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Also in the name-giving of Eve, Adam lets hear how she is on the same creation level as he. He is the man. Isj is that word in Hebrew. Now he says to Eve:

I am Isj and you are Isjah. We belong together.

Yet Adam is not finished speaking. He continues: Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and cleave to his wife and they become one flesh.

Adam's words underline what we said before. Both, man and woman, are created to God's image. The man, says Adam, shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. He does not "take" her. He does not subdue her. He adds her to him and cleaves to her. We should have expected the reverse. From now on he is not a lone-some but a two-some. And than those words: and they become one flesh. Congregation? More profoundly and touchingly man could not have brought this into words. Everything for marriage is in this. These words definitely not only look at the sexual becoming one in marriage, even though this is also expressed. It encompasses a lot more. You could translate that "one flesh" with: to one existence, one being. Or: to one history. It is a reality, which extends itself over the whole lives of the man and woman in marriage. God calls two people together to make for their whole lives one history. It expresses the physical as well as the spiritual unity of man and wife in marriage.

Look back once more at Genesis 1. What there about God's words and his command to men as man and woman is told, now takes place, after the creation of Eve. And God blessed them and said to them: Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.(Gen 1: 28) God himself wrote, in a way of speaking, that first chapter of his creation work. He also created in the bodies of men and women the wonderful gift to beget children. Because man and woman are one flesh, together they now go and make history. Children and grandchildren are coming. God builds through marriage the human race.

So is marriage an institution and creation of God. It all falls together with what God created under these mighty words that God saw everything He had created, and behold, it was very good. Was the church of the reformation not right when it here, in answer 108, spoke of the holy state of marriage? Do you know who immediately, at the beginning of the christian church, made a stand for this? No one less than the apostle Paul. He himself was single, but not for a moment he has thought, that he because of that, he owned more holiness than the married ones.

In 1 Timothy 4 vers 3 he opposes with all his power those who

in that young christian church considered marriage less holy than being single and therefore forbade it. How did they ever get to think this way? For everything created by God says Paul is good and nothing to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving; for then it is consecrated by the Word of God and prayer. 1 Timothy 4 and 5.

But, you may think, how about the fall into sin? Does there not lay the root of all sinful desires? Now you can speak about the institution of marriage at the creation of man, but what happened after this? Did not the fall of men into sin and guilt especially occupy just that sexual life of men with his tempers and passions? Indeed, congregation, sin has worked destructive in marriage and sexual life. Scripture does not hide any of this. Also in this the bible is a realistic book. Think about the history of the patriarchs. What a misery did sin bring in the marriage of Abraham with Sarah and with Hagar. The same is valid for the marriage of Jacob and Rachel and Leah and their maids. The bible here clearly shows how destructive sin can work in a marriage. Also think about the story of Judah with his sons and Tamar.

God saw that and God knows that. But just because of that God now comes here at the Sinai with this seventh commandment. Thou shall not commit adultery, says the Lord. He sees all those Israelites stand before Him. He knows what is happening in the lives of these men and women, also in their marriages and outside of it. God really goes into this deeply. He explains it further later through Moses in Leviticus 18. What horrible sins happened already in Israel, his Israel, that He led out of Egypt. All those horrible sins, which confront us today, were already there. Bestiality, adultery, incest, horrible sins which ruined what God had created good. Up against this God threw up a dam. Thou shall not commit adultery. says the Lord. He brings this commandment in position over against all those sins. With this He holds on to what He has created good. He comes in between, He separates with commandment good and evil with his people. To this connects your confession here in answer 108. It says, we must therefore live chaste and disciplined lives, both within and outside of the holy marriage.

In this way God has kept the marriage of his children holy all through the ages. Let us then, as congregation of Christ, hold unto this with all our strength. In this day and age it is been kicked against from all side. Ach, recently a professor in sociology said on television, the marriage of one man and one woman is old fashioned. Now we are coming to the time of a network of friendships. It would be out of date to speak of a lifelong engagement of one man and one woman. Those who talk like this, do not know what they are saying. They despise the blessing, which God lays daily in the marriage, his institution. There is a young couple before the pulpit, congregation. They do not know what the future will bring. They promised to be true to each other and love each other and they marry before God and his holy congregation. Is this not something to thank the Lord for when young people begin like this?

They made the promise to be true to each other and to love each

other untill death parts them. They can count on God. We add to this: if God does not call us to marriage, this should not frustrate us. Then He blesses us in being man and us in being woman in his calling to the unmarried state. What can unmarried persons be a blessing for others, also for the children of others. They also can take in the congregation of Christ their own place in the edification and the life of that congregation.

2. But some may think, how come so many marriages get wrecked? Also in Christ's congregation time and again we are confronted with the evil of divorce. God has instituted marriage, yes certainly, but how that married people live together as dog and cat and sometimes, just like that, part company? Is it realistic what you so far brought forward about marriage?

Congregation, where else would be the cause of all the marriage misery than with the devil? Is he not permanently busy to ruin what God had made good? Does not the apostle Peter say, that he goes around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he could devour? Does he not time and again try get two people mad at each other, who began their marriage full of joy?

Yes but, someone asks, if you discover, that you do not love each other? Does marriage then not become a squeezing band, in which it becomes impossible to live?

On this point we help each other when we realize what marriage love really is. Many people have a romantic notion of it.

It would be a kind of love which goes far above the normal love from person to person. Is this so? Here you must remember, that God gives this commandment in the second table of his law.

From the fifth commandment on it is about love to your neighbour.

This neighbourly love is also the root of the true marriage love. You can never learn better about this than from your Saviour. When He had washed the feet of his disciples, He spoke the words: A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. (John 13 :34) That is also in regard to the love which Christ asks from us in marriage over against each other.

He asks for mutual love of men and women in marriage, who perhaps have a thousand times a reason to reproach each other, and become mad at each other. Christ asks for a neighbourly love that forgives and accepts each other again every time something went wrong. This neighbourly love in marriage springs from the love to Him, who amid his disciples was as one who serves.

Congregation, do not give the devil the opportunity to ruin your marriage. Pray for help and strength to resist him.

Hold on, when there is marriage distress, to Christ with all your strength. Do this in Him in who you began your marriage.

That resisting of the devil has to be there already at the very beginning of a marriage. Let our people, our growing up boys and girls, go to work here carefully and godfearing.

Know what you are doing when you hold on to each others hands. You think that the girl to which your heart leans is perhaps very cute and cheerful. You think that boy on whom you have

an eye, is a fantastic fellow. But not everything is said with this.

When you get married, you with that boy or that girl are going to make history, a life's history. You are going to build a family. Families, generations are at stake. Before everything it is needed that you both fear the Lord. That may sound old-fashioned but it cannot be said any clearer to our young people. The time of dating and engagement is in the life of the young also often the time of maturing to be a confessing member of Christ's church. Let your choice for each other not for a moment be detached of your choice for Christ as your Saviour. Then you are laying a firm foundation for your marriage.

Marrying? Is this necessary young people ask. Outside of our church society, you meet many young who find this old fashioned. Marrying? They find, you are better off to live together for awhile. Imagine that you do not love each other. You can end living together easier than a marriage? Do not get confused by this kind of reasoning. Who ever lives together lives as he or she who are married. They live as man and wife. But without the protection and hold of a marriage made before the government and before the church. We know that in this country a different morality is growing on this point. But we quietly declare here that this is a bad morality.

In our time there prevails the idea of remaining free. You could live together while remaining free. But this is definitely not so. The one you have lived with and later left you in the cold, remains for your whole life your ex-man or ex-woman. It is not as without responsibility as it seems.

The devil wants to wreck marriage as an holy institution of God. Think about getting children. The marriage before the government gives judicial protection to your children. Is it also not wonderful, when you are married and together look forward to the coming of your first child, if the Lord gives you this, and later have it baptized? The Lord gives his blessing on this. In beautiful language Psalm 128 speaks of God's blessing in the joy of marriage: Blessed is every one who fear the Lord...Your wife will be a fruitful vine within your house; your sons and we may as a new-testament congregation also add: your daughters- as olive shoots around your table. See so shall the man - the woman be blessed, who fear the Lord.(Psalm 128:1,3,4)

These words still have in our world just as much a great promise power as in the time of Israel.

3. Your confession in question and answer 109 does not stand still with divorce. It penetrates through to that root of all misery in this area: our unchaste, unclean heart. With this it is four square behind your Saviour himself. You have heard it was said, He says to his disciples in Matthew 5 verse 27 You shall not commit adultery. But I say to you, says Christ with all the power of his Messianic authority: but every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Who goes, when he puts himself under

the discovering power of this word, scot-free in this commandment?

Congregation, there is a lot of suffering and worrying in the wrestling to fulfill the seventh commandment. It touches our body, it touches our deepest lives. There is much distress on the point of this commandment, also among God's children.

Married and singles, homosexual and heterosexual: each has his own struggle. There is only one, who fulfilled this commandment completely and who has born our trespasses in our place. That is your Saviour himself. He was not married. As a human He went through life alone. He went with our guilt in this commandment to the cross. By Him you find forgiveness of your guilt to this commandment. His blood cleanses us from all our sins.

(1 John 1 verse 7) He gives strength to remain upright in the struggle on the point of this commandment and to conquer it.

He is, the old form of marriage says so strikingly: the Head, the wisdom and the comfort of his congregation especially in the matters of this commandment.

Never think that the evil of this commandment just lies in the sexuality. Read how the Song of Solomon speaks about the bride and the bridegroom. Together they are as rich as a king.

The bible speaks about this without any diffidence.

You are all fair, my love; there is no flaw in you, says the bridegroom to the bride. (Song Of Solomon 4 verse 7)

From her side she invites her bridegroom: Come, my beloved.

(Song of Solomon 7 verse 11)

There is something of paradise in the manner in which the bride and bridegroom speak to each other. Chastity, congregation, does not exclude the joy of sexual togetherness. It is a virtue that only can be obtained in Christ in the way of a continuing struggle, Once more we think about the painting we spoke about in the beginning: Eve, who stretched her hands out to God. Let we as men and women, as young and old, look at God who created men so glorious as man and as woman. Who with his own hand his Isjah, his woman brought to Adam. That God is a God of mercy and renewing in Christ, his dear Son, also and especially in this commandment.

Praise be to Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Lordsday 44

The tenth commandment: Give Me your heart.

Sermon by the late
Dr. R.H.Bremmer,
Enschede, the Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton,
Alberta.

Reading: 1 John 3 : 1 - 21,
Text: Lordsday 44,
Psalm 33 ; 4,6,
After the law: Psalm 34 : 5,
After the creed: Psalm 47 : 3,
Psalm 1 : 1,2,3,
Psalm 119 : 64,
Hymn 7 : 1,2,3,9.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

You all know what a trouble light is, I think. At the end of a long wire is a light attached, so that you with light you can go were you need light. As an example you want to go into a dark basement to look for something. Than you take such a light and you will see what you are looking for. You can compare the tenth commandment with such a trouble light. Up to now it was in God's law especially about the visible deeds of man. Serving idols happened visibly, killing also. With the tenth, the last commandment, it goes different. Now God penetrates into your innerself, in your heart. You shall not covet, says this last commandment. You shall not covet whatever is your neighbours. That coveting rustles in the inner part of our heart. What comes out of the heart are evil deliberations, says the Saviour. Now God lays that heart under seizure(beslag) of his commandment. The light of the law penetrates here in the tenth commandment into your deepest inner being. What has, congregation, the Lord developed his law carefully. What is there a godly order in it. In the first commandment He demands your heart for Himself: You shall have no other gods before Me. After that the Lord works that out in the hallowing of his Name, in the keeping of his day. There after He lays your neighbour under the protection of his laws The life of your neighbour, his marriage, his possessions, his name. And then in this tenth commandment, God returns to the starting point in the first commandment. There He demanded your heart for Himself. You shall only serve Him. And now, with the tenth commandment, God comes back to your heart. Your heart shall never covet something of all that is your neighbour's. King Solomon lets the Lord speak to the Israelite young people with this penetrating message: My son, give me your heart.(Proverbs 23 : 26) Well now, that is a positive translation of what God forbids here. He forbids to covet sinfulness. That is to say: He demands my heart positively. That sinful often troubled heart in me, He lays under the accent of his commandment. He demands from me, that I do away with all that sinful coveting and instead of that have a desire to all righteouesness. What lies there a compelling power in the word "require" that your confession uses here in question 113. And what that than concretely means in our daily life, that

we will now consider. We speak to you about:

GOD REQUIRES OUR HEART IN THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

That demand(requirement)

1. is discovering;
2. is humbling;
3. urges to pray.

1. Have you ever noticed, congregation, that Lordsday 44 actually does not enter into the text of the tenth commandment?

The Catechism does this with all the previous commandments. In them the Catechism time and again asks what God in that particular commandment commands or forbids. Your confession here does that different. It immediately sets the tenth commandment in relation to all the previous commandments. Me is forbidden to have the slightest thought or desire, contrary to any of God's commandments, and I am ordered to delight in all righteousness. Lordsday 44 places the tenth commandment immediately in relation to the whole law.

But it is also certainly important to consider the text of the tenth commandment itself. Or better said: both the texts of this commandment. God gave this commandment two times. The first time at the Sinai, in Exodus 20, when God gave Moses the ten commandments. After that once again in Deuteronomy 5. That was years later. Israel was then just before entering Canaan. Now you have to pay real attention how the situation, in which Israel was at the giving of the law, affected the text of this tenth commandment. In Exodus 20 the Lord places the house of the neighbour first. You shall not covet your neighbours house. after that God forbids to covet what is inside the neighbour' house: his wife, his servants, his livestock. You shall not covet whatever is your neighbour's, says the Lord.

In Deuteronomy 5 the Lord does it differently. There He puts the coveting of the neighbour first. After that follow the possessions of the neighbour. But take notice. Then the Lord uses another verb. You shall not "desire" your neighbour's house and whatever else he owns. The African translation uses a different word here for desire "hunkereren" is "crave". In the original also a word is used that expresses a fierce desire. Also God names among the possessions of your neighbour: his field. That is not mentioned in Exodus 20. Congregation, they were just before entering Canaan when Moses gave them God's law for the second time. They were going to live in that land of milk and honey. How easily they would eye that field on which the neighbour worked with his servants. Because of that God now added that field.

Two different words for coveting the Lord uses: in our New Translation : desiring and craving. That gave the roman catholic church and also the lutherans the motive to split this commandment in two. One separate commandment for the desiring of the wife of the neighbour and another for the craving of the property of the neighbour. They count these as the ninth

and tenth commandment. But to keep the count of ten for the ten commandments, they joined the first and second commandments. But because of that all the commandments with roman catholics and the lutherans are one number lower. At the last commandment they are back to ten. Calvin did not want anything to do with this. He did not split the tenth commandment but let it come to us in all its power. In those two powerful commandments: not to desire and not to crave whatever is your neighbour's this commandment speaks to me. In that double formulation lies a powerful forbidding power.

But, you may ask yourself, then can we not desire anything? Is it totally evil?

Certainly not. Imagine. May a boy not desire to find a girl that with him will go through life? May a young woman not desire to find a man with whom she will raise a family? May a married couple not desire that the Lord will bless their marriage with children? Of course. May someone in society desire to get ahead, not desire a promotion or a good job? Why not? Christ teaches us to pray: give us this day our daily bread and in that is also the desire of bettering oneself in society.

Our desiring can also touch godly matters. Think about Psalm 27 verse 4 where David shows his deepest desire to the Lord. One thing I have asked of the Lord, that I will seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple. You also may think here about the Saviour himself. He says to his disciples, just before his suffering and death: I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer. (Luke 22 : 15) Desiring as such is not sinful. The bible does not lay asceticism on me.

In your thoughts, congregation, place yourself in paradise. Did the Lord God create Adam and Eve without desires? No way. They were allowed to desire everything what God as tasteful fruits had created for them in the garden. Of course they desired to enjoy it. Only from that one tree they were not allowed to desire the fruits: the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Desiring belongs to being human.

But here in lies the break in human life and in our coveting. You know the story of the fall of man. It is described in a few words in Genesis 3 verse 6. It has penetrated unbelievably deep in human life. And the woman saw, that the tree was a delight to the eyes and was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Suddenly the coveting of the woman was not aimed at what God had given her to desire. She now coveted against God. In her deepest inmost being the sinful coveting shot up. The devil tempted her to desire of what God had forbidden. Her heart, that up to now was pure, became evil and guilty. She capitulated for the devil. The apostle John has, ages later, in his first letter put it into these words: For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but of the world. (1 John 2: 16) Both were there with Eve: the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes. That desiring

was not out of God, but out of the devil, the world. What a stream on unholy, ungodly desiring goes since the fall through the world. The bible does not hide anything. Jacob who sinfully desired his first birth right, that God had given to Esau. It pushed him to deceive his father Isaac. David who desired Bathseba as wife while she was the wife of his loyal officer Uriah. Samson who lost his judgeship through the desiring of Delilah.

Perhaps you may have seen how someone stirred with a stick in clear water ditch. Then suddenly the mud clouds the water and it becomes dirty. So the devil clouds in our inmost being time and again the godless, evil desires just as the mud in the ditch. How sharply your confession here formulates in answer 113 what it is about in this tenth commandment: that not even the slightest thought or desire contrary to any of God's commandments should ever arise in our hearts. Congregation, it cannot be more sharply formulated: the slightest thought or desire. Not contrary to any of God's commandments. That never should arise in our hearts. Your confession has shown this already in the previous commandments. It never stayed with the previous commandments only with the deed. Always it penetrated to what is behind it, to the inmost from which the deed comes. Behind murder lies hate. Behind stealing lies the desire to the possessions of the other. Behind adultery lies the desire of the woman or the man of the neighbour. All this comes deep from the heart. Your Saviour worded this very sharply when He said: For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defiles a man. (Matthew 15 : 19,20.)

Your confession here is in strong opposition to the roman catholic human view and it is good to pay attention to this. In a way of speaking Rome splits man into two parts. He exists in a natural part and in a supernatural part. Because of sin that supernatural part is lost in man, but the natural, his being man, has remained whole. You could compare it with an apple. From that you can cut off the rotten part, the good piece is left. So it happened with the fall of man. His desire of God and of his service has been lost through the fall, says Rome. But the natural desire, the desiring of natural things: that has remained whole. The roman catholic theologians say: At the most it has become disorderly. It has not become rotten, spoiled.

Against this the confession resists with all its power. All our desire-life is touched by sin and has become spoiled. That is why your confession formulates this tenth commandment so sharply. Behind our deeds lies our sinful heart. And in that The Lord now penetrates with the light of the tenth commandment. He X-rays with that commandment our heart and puts the evil into the open. No, the reformed human contemplation is not pessimistic as some reproach us. It is realistic. It discovers us to the evil and guilt that is in our hearts. That the modern psychiatry has brought to light. A man as Freud had an eye for this, that behind our deeds lay our distorted thoughts and desires. Only: here also lies the sharp abyss between the vision

of the Scriptures on man and this modern soul knowledge. Scripture says: they are sins before God. Our coveting is a deed. Sometimes our desires do not come out in the open. Even if we suppress them or push them back: they are sins before God. He created me clean and pure. He created my desire in harmony with his desire. I may desire everything what God passes on to me so generously in his creation. I however am opposing God in my desire, for my own lust and pleasure and not to desire Him any more.

The apostle Paul discovers this in you as he writes Romans 7 verse 7, I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said: "You shall not covet"

ONE, congregation, there has been ONE, who in his heart remained desiring God pure and clean. There has been ONE who kept desiring the things of this life holy and good. That was your Saviour. How has satan tempted Him to desire against his Father. What has satan used every effort also to make Him guilty in desiring. Worship me, Christ, he said and I shall give you all the kingdoms of this world. He agitated with the stick of his temptation in the holy inner being of your Saviour. But no ungodly desires began. You shall worship the Lord your God and only serve Him, answered Christ. In his heart no desires came up against any of God's commandments. He had the desire to righteousness. See upon Him if the devil tempts you in sinful desiring. Flee to his righteousness in case you wrestle with your unrighteousness. Remember that here you, with this sharp Lordsday 44, are in the part of the thankfulness. He has redeemed you through his complete obedience and through the bearing of the punishment on your trespasses of this commandment. In Him you will find true happiness in this life. Give Him your heart. Then you will find in Him the true righteousness, be truly satisfied with what God gives you in this life.

Who desires all righteousness is satisfied in God. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews rouses you to this: keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have. (Hebrews 13 : 5) Also Paul writes to Timothy: There is great gain in godliness with contentment. (1 Timothy 6 verse 6) Congregation, you live in a world that is touched with a fierce desire. Here we think about the advertising on the television. They are trying to want us to desire. What is there an awful lot of dissatisfaction in society. There is a fierce thirst for more, more and more. Let your desiring be pure and holy in Christ your Saviour. Once again, congregation, desiring is a deed. Desiring is not even as your thinking tollfree. You may in Christ strenght fight against your sinful coveting. You are called in Christ's power to desire God and his kingdom, his service. Let your thankfulness for the redemption which God gives you in Christ grow into your desire to fulfill all righteousness in Him.

2. God's requirement in the tenth commandment was discovering, we saw. He discovers us to be a sinner in this tenth commnadment. Who watches his heart so, that not even the slightest thought or desire contrary to any of God's commandments should everr

arise in our hearts? Who watches it so that it only has a desire to all righteousness? There we are: Discovered in our shortcoming in the fulfilment of the tenth commandment.

And yet, yet your confession here in Lordsday 44 is not finished speaking about God's law. It continually has set the tenth commandment in relation with all the commandments. That is why it confronts us, now it has come to the end of the explanation of God's commandments, with God's law as a whole. The Catechism we often pointed this out, is a masterful booklet. It has a powerful pedagogic intention. It is planning to explain to you the prayer after the law. And it now is building a bridge to this. It does not just want to begin abruptly with the prayer. No, it takes you by the hand and leads you to it.

That is why in question 114 it puts once more the whole law before you. Listen: But can those converted to God keep those commandments perfectly? asks your confession. The old text said it sharper: it spoke of keeping God's commandments complete. Can they who are converted to God do that? Take good notice, congregation. It is here not about people from the world. It is also not about border christians. No, the confession puts the knife in, right to the bone: it is about those who are converted to God. Your confession wants to say: we now have taken care of the whole law. We have examined all the commandments. We have confronted you with the commandments of the first table of the law: Loving God above all. We have placed you before the requirements of the second table: to love your neighbour as yourself. What have you done with it? How far did you get with it?

It is clear, that your confession here fights against the so-called perfectionism. Through the ages there have been christians who figured that they could come to a state of perfection. In the time of the reformation they were the anabaptists. There were some among them who figured that they did not have to pray the prayer: Forgive us our trespasses. You could even get this far, that you did not sin anymore. That delusion here is ripped apart by your confession. Answer 114 begins then with a powerful NO. For, it argues further, even the holiest have only a small beginning of this obedience. Congregation, What is your confession here humble. After it has discovered us in the previous question and answer to our guilt to the tenth commandment, it now humbles us. It now keeps us small over against the whole law of God. Even the holiest. Even they have only a small beginning of the by God required obedience. Open your bible and read. Read the life stories of men like Moses and Aaron. Of the man of God's heart, David. Of his son Solomon. What were there dark spots in their lives. Moses, who instead of speaking to the rock, as God had told him, in anger hit it. His brother Aaron, the first high priest, who cooperated with Israel in making the golden calf. David who for two times came into debt to God. First because of Bathseba and then later with the by God cursed census. His son Solomon, who at the end of his life let himself be seduced by his wives to worship idols.

Take for instance, congregation, a man like the apostle Paul, a great one in the kingdom of heavens. When he with Barnabas went to undertake the first mission trip, he got into a quarrel with him about the question if they would take Mark along as an helper. (Acts 15: 39) Scripture even speaks about a sharp contention between these two men. So it went in the lives of the holiest. As far as that matters James, the brother of the Lord, had self-knowledge. He writes in his letter that we all make mistakes. (James 3 : 2) Self-knowledge of the first order.

Your confession does not hesitate to pronounce a sharp judgment over us. Here it tears off the masks of pride and everything that seems like perfectionism. Even the holiest have in this life no more than a small beginning to this obedience. In this life, congregation. The old text said: As long as they are in this life. There is in these few words a comfort rich perspective. Do not get discouraged, your confession wants to say. It is going to be different later on. In the distance the land of the great Rest beckons. There shall no one be against the holy law of the Lord. But here, in this life, it is still only a small beginning.

You have to understand clearly what your confession here means with this. It is not as if we can make it quite a ways. It does not mean: that of the hundred steps of the stair to the perfection, we can only make ten. It does not look upon the rounded off part of your life in which you fulfill God's law, and not at the other part. No, answer 114 here points to Romans 3 verse 20, where the apostle writes: for no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. And later in Romans 7 Paul comes back to that with the humble words: Wretched man that I am. Who will deliver me from this body of death? Congregation, that writes a man who more than all the the other apostles has worked for Jesus Christ and his Kingdom. This does not write the unconverted but the converted Paul. But I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. (verse 23)

Is that now the end? Does answer 114 leaves us here in despair? Does the conclusion has to be: I hardly do something right about this holy law of God, which I love with whole my heart?

Congregation: now read the ending of this answer: Nevertheless, with earnest purpose they do begin to live not only according to some but to all the commandments of God.

Have you given your heart to God? Do you sing in your heart the hymn on God's glorious law with those wonderful words of Psalm 19:10 and 11: More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter than honey, than drippings of the honeycomb? Well, than it shall be a joy to you to go and live according to all the commandments of God.

3. Because one more question your confession lays on your heart. A penetrating question. You may asked yourself why God preaches these commandments so sharply to us while no one can fulfill them in this life? Does it make any sense, means this question.

You have given your heart to the Lord. You love his law more than fine gold. But if you in this life get no further than this small beginning: why does God put it so strictly to us? To put us in despair? To corner us with his commandments? God be thanked: no, certainly not. He does that, says answer 115, for two reasons, two glorious reasons. On the first place and now we summarize the first reason: to bring and to hold us for Christ. Do you hear this well, congregation? God takes you with this strict law preaching by the hand and He brings you to your Saviour. To Him of whom Paul wrote in Romans 10 verse 4:

For Christ is the end of the law, that everyone who has faith may be justified. He, Jesus Christ, He is the actual content of the law. He has completely fulfilled that law for you.

Our fore-fathers called that Christ's actual obedience. He kept the law in our place. He also bore the punishment which we because of our lawtrespassing had deserved. Our fore-fathers called this last part: his passive obedience. he suffered for us on the cross at Golgotha. There the law of God brings you. That is why God has it preached so strictly. My son, give me your heart, says God in Proverbs 23. That also means to say; give it to Christ and draw out of his fulfilled work the strength to love God's law and do this. Find with Him forgiveness for all your guilt. Here in Lordsday 44 you are in the part of the thankfulness. I have been redeemed by my Saviour, I find forgiveness by Him and I may through his power fulfill God's law.

O, yes, by Him I also learn to know my sinful nature more and more. But that does not bring me in despair. It compels me to the second part what answer 115 brings forward. I now pray God for the grace of the Holy Spirit that He may more and more renew us after God's image. Once more, congregation, is this not masterly of the Catechism? It brings me from the law to the prayer. Now it is going to teach me the prayer as the most important part of the thankfulness. Here it says to me:

Fold your hands and close your eyes and pray, pray for the strength to stay with Christ, to put your whole heart on Him. Pray for the renewing of your life to God's image. Read in your bible, pray every day. And the perfection? That comes later after this life, with God and with the holy angels and with all the saints who went before us. Later you may behold God in perfection. Jesus Christ be praised.

Amen.

Lordsday 43.

Lying is devilish.

Sermon by the late
Dr. R.H.Bremmer
Enschede, The Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton,
Alberta.

Reading: James 3 : 1 - 15
Text: Lordsday 43.
Hymn 7: 1,2,7,13,
After the law: Psalm 143: 2
After the creed; Psalm 149: 1
Psalm 101: 1,2,4,6,
Psalm 34: 6,
Psalm 119: 26.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Have you ever taken notice of the arrangement of the commandments in the second table of God's law? What has the Lord God build that refined. You know: it is about the love to our neighbour in the second table of the law. Whom we shall love with whole our heart. That is why the Lord begins with our parents. Those are direct neighbours and we shall show them love honour and trust.

Then God confronts us in the sixth commandment with the life of our neighbour: You shall not kill. In the seventh commandment the Lord protects the marriage of our neighbour. After his life this is the most important thing for him. In the eighth commandment God places the possession of our neighbour under his holy protection: You shall not steal. And at the end of the second table of the law, in the tenth commandment, the Lord God penetrates into our hearts: You shall not covet anything that is your neighbour's. Let your heart in your association with him be pure.

But before God penetrates your heart in the tenth commandment, first He lays our "word" under the seizure(beslag) of his law. And pay attention, congregation, how also here, in this ninth commandment, the love to the neighbour is at stake.

You shall not bear false witness, says God, "against your neighbour". The spoken word has a lot of power in this world. It can make or break your neighbour. God knows that. And that is why: before He penetrates our hearts of the possessions of the neighbour, He safeguards our neighbour from a lying word. You know the story of vineyard of Naboth? There you have a clear example how much power the lie has in society.

Belialsmen accused Naboth in the national assembly of Samaria that he has slandered God and the king. It cost Naboth his life.

He was stoned. And that is only one example out of the many Scripture mentions. The men who wrote our Catechism, were impressed of the power of the lie and the slandering word. You have to see how sharp they have formulated this Lordsday 43. It is the only Lordsday where in the explanation of the 10 commandments, the devil is spoken off. Lies and deceit, says answer 112, is the devil's own work. Lying is not only improper. No, lying is devilish, satanic. About the gravity of this we will reflect today. We speak to you about

LYING IS DEVILISH

1. That is why we shall hate the lie;
2. Love the truth

1. Congregation, to properly understand the depth of this commandment then first we have to explain to you how close the connection is between counsel and action. Under counsel we understand what men considers in his heart. Before he comes to action, first there is the consideration in the heart of man, if he is going to do it or not. The difference between the two becomes clear in the explanation of the commandments of the second table. Again and again God forbids in them the action of man. He forbids killing, adultery and theft. But we saw with the explanation of those commandments, that behind the forbidden action lays the counsel of the heart That God also touches with his commandment. Now God comes in this ninth commandment and lays seizure(beslag) on our word. That forms the link between our counsel and action. The matters, which a man considers in his heart, his plans, come to the fore through his words. The word, that you speak, often makes a bridge from counsel to action. What I consider and try to do often comes out through the word. Hence the special place of this ninth commandment between the sixth, seventh and eighth commandment on the one side and the tenth on the other side. God thought deeply not only with the formulation, but also the arrangement of his commandments. The word in this world has a tremendous power. For what politicians, philosophers and theologians want to attain, often the way is smoothed by their word. In that it shows that man is created to the image of God. With God these things are the same. He has made from eternity his counsel, his plans, with this world. Before the foundation of the world He made his decision. Now He comes of his counsel through the Word to his action. Through the Word He calls the world into existence. Through the Word He created the light and all the other creatures. Through the Word of his power He clears the way of his counsel to his action. So there lay the creation in all its glory called into existence through the Word of God. Pure and transparent because God's Word is pure and transparent. If we so understand what place the word has in God's creation, we also get an insight into the satanism of the lie. Because lying is not out of God but out of the devil. Your Saviour pointed to that very sharply in John 8 verse 44. There He says to the Jews: You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your Father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Can it be said in a more discovering manner?

Congregation, the origin of the lie lays in the devil. Place yourself in your thoughts to the throne of God before the revolution which the devil made in heaven. There they stood around God's throne, the archangels, the seraphs and the cherubs, God's mighty throne spirits. Isaiah describes them to us in

chapter 6 verse 2 and 3. Each of the seraphim had six wings. With two he covered his face, for not to see God irreverently. With two he covered his feet, not to leave the throne without God's strict order. With two he flew: to haste to the purpose that God pointed out to him. And hear them call to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory".

Then there it happened. One of those angels lifted up his wings from before his face and looked at God. He looked at God with a glance of jealousy and envy. He wanted to be like God, just as glorious, just as majestic, just as godly. At that same moment the battle in heaven began. The angels, who remained loyal to God, grouped themselves around Michael with his glorious name: Mi-cha-el: Who is as God. They fought against satan and his angels. You know how satan lost the battle. He was thrown out of heaven. I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven, says Christ in Luke 10 verse 18. In that He summarized what then happened in heaven and how the devil was exiled to earth. Pushed away he was from the kingdom of purity and of truth. So the lie originated close to the throne of God. So it was also spread in the hearts of the by God good created people.

Congregation: good or evil, truth or lie, are not antithesis, which eternally exist side by side. Modern thinkers want to convince us of this. They do not speak anymore of satan, but of the satanic. That would be an eternal existing character trait of the created beside the good. No way. God created the world good and without satanic traits. These come from the devil, who from his origin was created good. He did not stay in the truth, says the Saviour. And now he goes to work with all his power to drag the good created man along in the lie.

How cunning he goes to work. Hear him ask the woman: Did God say: you shall not eat of any tree in the garden? As if God had not created the garden for joyful use by men. How slyly the devil suggests here that God would harass man with such a commandment. First Eve offered resistance. But she did not exactly repeat the commandment by exaggerating. She says: God only has said that we shall not eat of the tree which is in the midst of the garden nor touch it. With these last words Eve already exaggerates. Satan strikes: God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. It is one great gross lie which the devil pronounces here. In that lie he dragged Eve and later Adam along.

The word, congregation, we saw, is the link between council and action. Before the fall Adam's word was pure. He gave the animals names according to their nature. What he considered about the animals in his heart, he expressed it to the outside by appointing(benoemen) them. When God brought Eve with his own hand to Adam, he expressed what Eve meant to him with pure words to the outside : these two shall become one flesh.

Now that satan has twisted reality in his lying word, he dragged man with him. From now on men is untruthful and corrupt. What is Scripture realistic in this. It does not leave any doubt, how lying men has become. Take the the story of the patriarchs.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: they are described to us as pious men, bearers of God's promise for all the coming generations. But o, how time and again the lie also penetrates into their lives. When Abraham fears that his life is in danger by Pharaoh of Egypt, he lies, that Sarah is his sister. With Abimelech of the Philistines he lies again. What a power the lie had in the life of Jacob. It harassed his whole life. When he noticed, that Isaac wants to give the covenant blessing to Esau, he deceived his old father by suggesting, that he is Esau. In turn his sons deceived their father Jacob in the story of Joseph. They said that a wild animal had killed him, while they had sold him to Egypt. So the lie works destructive in the patriarchal generation.

Does it amaze you that the Lord at the Sinai included the ninth commandment in his holy law? How careful the Lord God also formulated this commandment with the proclamation of his law. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour, says God. What God has not done with the previous commandments of the second table of the law, He does now. He expressly names the neighbour in this commandment. Lying directly touches my neighbour. That is why God expressly places him under his protection. God involves with the formulation of the ninth commandment the administration of justice. There the lie makes itself wide by false witnessing. What can this have tremendous consequences when at court a lying witness account is given. That can decide over death and over life. During the time in which God gave this commandment, men did not have at his disposal the refined means of the technic to bring to light the truth and the lie. The testimony before a judge then meant a lot. God knew how in the courtroom the testimony over against the neighbour could tip the scale. Money and possessions, someone's good name, even his life could be at stake.

Anew, congregation, what has this commandment among the churchpeople Israel not often been stepped on. We already pointed out to you the story of Naboth and his vineyard. In the New Testament it are the false witnesses who got Stephen his death-sentence. They said: This man never ceases to speak against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth, will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us. (Acts 6 verses 13 and 14)

What has the lie played an awful role in the trial of your Saviour. Stephen received the same fate as his Master. When Christ stands before Caiaphas, the highpriests bring two false witnesses to the front, who say: This fellow said: I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days. (Matthew 26 : 61) If anywhere, than here comes the devilishness in the trespass of the ninth commandment to the fore. In the lying testimony of these two witnesses Israel, God's covenant people, violates this ninth commandment.

Violation of this holy commandment brought God's own Son, Israel's Messiah, to the cross.

The lying answer of these witnesses brought Israel to its godless council to kill the Saviour in their godless action. So they

could drag Him to Pilate. Hear there on the Gabbathe, Christ over against all this gives testimony to this ninth commandment. For this I was born and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who hears of the truth hears my voice. There He stood, your Saviour. Regally He gave testimony to the truth over against the lie. But Pilate sneered: What is truth? He, the Roman scepticus, despised the truth.

Congregation, do not think: that was Israel. They have rejected Christ, we believe in Him as our Saviour. Does not the lie permeate in the christian congregation of the new covenant? What happened shortly after Pentacost in the new-testamental Pentacost congregation? You know the story of Ananias and Sapphira. Does not this married couple show how fast the devil sowed the lie in the hearts of the Pentacost congregation? Especially there, in the through Jesus blood sanctified congregation, satan throws the lie in the hearts of these two churchmembers. But hear Peter go against this with power: Ananias, you have not lied to men but to God. And to Sapphira he says, that she tempted the spirit of the Lord.(Acts 5:4,9) It matters very close in the congregation which lives out of the truth of the gospel.

A while ago we read James 3 together. Let the warnings of this servant of God and of Christ penetrate in you. Who does not make mistakes, writes James, is a perfect man. And then come the speaking examples with which James shows us the power of the lying tongue. Are these warnings taking out of thin air? He shows how small causes have great consequences. A small rudder steers a large ship. A small bridle guides a big horse. So the tongue is a small member and boasts of great things. A small fire sets a great forest on fire. Directly to us he than writes: Also the tongue is a fire, it is the world of unrighteousness. And later on: it is a reckless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father and with it we curse men, who are made in the likeness of God. Let it be told to you. Also the following: from the same mouth come blessing and cursing, a powerful warning.

The ninth commandment comes to us with great power. It puts us, every one of us, guilty before God. The Lord here lays seizure (beslag) on your tongue, on your word, as a transition from counsel to action.

God is true, writes the apostle Paul in Romans 3 verse 4, and every man be false. What can a man act refined, more than he really is. Don't we often wear a mask behind which our falseness hides? Do we always act as we really are? What is to that question your answer? When our neighbour is close, we compliment him. But how do we speak about him behind her or his back? Now read how the confession in this ninth commandment exposes us in the naming of the trespasses of this commandment. It calls us not to twist one's word, not to be a slanderer or gossiper. judge no one rashly or unheard. Does lying and deceit not happen in Christ's congregation? Let the sharp knife of this commandment go over your life, congregation. The explanation of this ninth commandment makes all of us sinners. But beside this: it pushes

you also to the cross of Him who through the trespassers of this was chased into death. The devil had no hold on Him. He is the way, the truth and the life. Flee with your sins against this commandment in his finished work.

2. Answer 112 also shows you how on the through by Christ's blood sprinkled ground the truth grows. Hear what this commandment positively requires of you: That in court and in everywhere else love the truth, speak and confess it honestly, and do what I can to defend and promote my neighbour's honour and reputation.

Congregation, the ninth commandment lays it on your heart to love the truth. That you cannot do for one moment without your Saviour. He himself is the truth. Truth is not something abstract. Many understand truth only as saying with words the right state of a matter. But with that not everything has been said about the deep content of the truth. When Scripture speaks about the truth, there is also something liberating, something redeeming in it. God is truth and God's Word is the truth. It is the truth which gives to your life a firm unshakable foundation.

I have to confess that truth in my speaking and witnessing.

I have to stand up for that truth of God in my life. Answer

112 says: I have to speak and honestly confess the truth.

For the truth of God I have to take a stand in society.

You are as congregation of Jesus Christ amid a bad and lying world. In that you may witness of God's truth. You should be dragged along through the public opinion. That already God told Israel in no uncertain terms. Read Exodus 23 verses 1 and 2.: You shall not utter a false report. You shall not join hands with a wicked man, to be a malicious witness. You shall not follow a multitude to do evil: nor shall you bear witness in a suit, so as to pervert justice. You should not be towed along with the public opinion. The ninth commandment is of present interest. The lie can seize a whole nation. Who does not think here about the German nation in the thirties. Germany was a highly developed country. With Luther the Reformation had made deep inroads. It was a cultural talented nation. And yet Hitler and his minister of propaganda Goebbels seized (onder beslag) the whole nation with the lying dogma of national socialism. They saw the great importance of radio and newspapers for the spreading of their godless ideas. What has the German nation then been towed along.

Are such lying powers not threatening us today? The power of the media has since the second world war been intensified. From the television a great suction power is emitted. Is then there not the more reason to arm ourselves against all this spiritually? In 2 Thessalonians 2 verse 11 the apostle Paul writes, that God sends upon them a strong delusion in the world, that they- the inhabitants of the world- believe the lie. God lets his judgment come over this world, because it does not repent itself to the truth.

Congregation, you are warned. For the mass-media of today, the same is valid as with the art of printing at that time:

they are a step to heaven and to hell. They can be used for the proclamation of the gospel but also for the propaganda of godless ideas and for a life without norms. Television broadcasts about peace and war, about ethical matters, about South Africa and Israel can be very suggestive. Again: you are warned. Perhaps you may say to yourself: what can we do against this? We answer, arm yourself congregation. Be mobilized spiritually. Confess the truth in this lying and bad world. Form your own scriptural judgment about what happens in politics and ethics. Know of scriptural information. Open your ears with the preaching of the Word. Study what is going on in this world. What kind of newspaper do you read? Not a paper that slowly but surely influences you and your family to the spirit of these times? Should we not be thankful that we daily can receive scriptural information through as an example Nederlands Dagblad? In that paper you can find answers to the questions of today. What is here also a task in the preaching of the Word. This should not be timeless, but has to be in the midst of today's life. You may ask of your preachers that they go into the questions of today and over against the lyingspirit of today put the truth. When the church in its preaching powerfully and scripturally confesses God's truth, around this preaching grows a confessing congregation, which in its turn carries out the truth into this world. Such a congregation emits a great power in our society. Lastly: the ninth commandment does not only mobilize us to the outside, to society, it also activates us to the inside, in our relationship as congregation of Jesus Christ. Look at the end of answer 112. There the confession stimulates you to do what you can to defend and promote my neighbours honour and reputation. Your word as the link between counsel and action has to serve your neighbour in a true neighbourly love. Just as the Lord, at the cross of our Saviour, has discovered us to our lying nature, we shall do more in our own mutual relationship, also as congregation members, serve each other with the truth. The apostle Paul brought this powerfully to the fore in the letter to the Ephesians. He says in chapter 4 verse 25: Therefore putting away falsehood, let everyone speak the truth with his neighbour, for we are members of one another. The lie covered the Ephesians as a cloak when they were still heathens. They lived in the sphere of the lie. The apostle now stimulates them powerfully to put off that dirty lyingcloak and over against each other to speak the truth. In Colossians 3 verse 9 he says it very terse: Do not lie to each other. Aren't we each others members? Don't we together form the body of Christ? We are given to each other. We have to serve each other by promoting each others honour and good name with all our strength. Congregation members can break each other and do each other harm. Congregation, fight against this, with all your strength. May we not judge each other? Don't we have the calling to bring to light all the abuses in the church? Certainly: we have that calling. Only: let yourself be governed by Christ's word: Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck that is in

your brother's eye, but you do not notice the log that is in your own eye? (Matthew 7 : 1-3)

On one point we want to draw your attention. With the keeping of the ninth commandment there is much at stake. Your confession says in answer 112 that you, when you do not avoid all lying and deceit as the devil's own work, you are under the penalty of God's heavy wrath. It points there to Proverbs 12 verse 22. There Solomon says to the pupil he is teaching in the fear of the Lord: Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight. And at the end of the Revelations of John Scripture says that outside the new Jerusalem are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters and every one who loves and practices falsehoods. (Revelations 22 verse 15)

Again congregation, you are warned. Hate the lie and love the truth. Let Christ, your Saviour who is that truth, be central in your life. Than you shall through his strength combat the lie in your life and find forgiveness by Him for your trespasses also of this ninth commandment. Congregation:

Buy the truth and do not sell it. (Proverbs 23 : 23)

Amen.

Lordsday 42.

The eighth commandment: Not taking but sharing.

Sermon by the late
Dr.R.H.Bremmer,
Enschede, the Netherlands.

Reading: Luke 16 : 1-15
Text: Lordsday 42.
Hymn 7: 1,2,7,9.
After the law: Psalm 15 : 3,
After the creed: unknown,
Psalm 62 : 1,6,7.
Psalm 37 : 9
Psalm 33 : 4.

Tranlated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton,
Alberta.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Have you ever looked at your money up close? I mean those guilders and thalers which go through your hands daily. When you do this than you see on the one side of our coins the image of the queen and on the other side the value of the coin itself. But you will discover something else. When you look at the edge of the guilder or the thaler, there you read the words: God be with us. Our fore-fathers placed these words on their Dutch and Sealand coins during the time of the revolt against Spain. There lies something of a prayer in these words. You are confronted time and again when you have such a coin in your hands. They prayed, those fore-fathers, that God would be with them also through the means of money.

Now there have been suggestions to leave this inscription out. What has God to do with our money? Behind this criticism lies the secularization of today. It is not allowed to use God's name in public life.

Fortunately these words are still on our coins. Our fathers realized: God has everything to do with our money. We are accountable to God what we have done with our money. Our money comes from God. That is also the background of the eighth commandment. Thou shall not steal, says you heavenly Father. The money comes from Me. That you may spend to my honour and to the wellbeing of your neighbour.

What is there a cohesion in the commandments which the Lord gave us in the second table of his law. First He has in the sixth commandment put our lives under his protection: You shall not kill. After that He takes our marriage under his care: You shall not commit adultery. And now, in this eighth commandment He brings your money and your possessions under his protecting hand: You shall not steal. Your confession brings to the light in answer 110 also the depth of this commandment. God does not only forbid the stealing and robbing which the government punishes. The eight commandment is not an article of the criminal law. It touches your heart, just like the other commandments. The Lord forbids in this law greed, all the use

of money outside of Him. He requires from you, says answer 111 to use that money to serve and to the help of your neighbour. After all the money comes from Him. So we think about this commandment: as we speak about:

GOD AND OUR MONEY

We see:

1. That money comes from Him
2. That we may not abuse;
3. That we have to spend in love to Him and to the neighbour.

1. Congregation, you being a churchmember has a financial base. Have you ever thought about this? We come together in our churchbuilding and that costs money, also the organ that accompanies our churchservice. There is a lot of money needed in the church. The service of the Word has to be provided for. The deacons need money for the work of mercy. And then mission, it also asks your financial input. And further there is the never-ending stream of asking for help for many church and christian agencies. You throw all those requests in the wastebasket? Money is indispensible to keep up our churchlife and the christian relief work. From where come those ten dollar bills, those dollars and those cheques? Perhaps you may think: that is simple. We earn them or we get them through another kind of payment. That is true, but not everything is covered with that. Congregation, you get them from God. He governs the money-stream as it goes about the world. Think about Psalm 24:1 There is written: the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein. What do you think? Is that not about your money? It comes from the Lord. He is the Great Economist of this world. He also keeps it up economically.

Have you thought about, what it was like in paradise?

Of course: there was no minted money and everything that goes with it. But who looked after the livelihood? That was your God. Everything Adam and Eve needed for their physical livelihood came from the Lord. What are those first pages of the bible important. There the Lord God laid the foundations for our lives today. God looked after Adam and Eve abundantly. He created for them the garden of Eden with all its abundance. One of the paradise rivers flowed around the land of Havilla and, says Scripture, the gold of that land was good. There flowed four cristal clear rivers. All kinds of trees grew out of the earth. There were fruits in abundance. God was not stingy with his human children. He gave them an abundance of goods.

The Lord God also gave Adam and Eve a task in paradise. They had to build and take care of that garden. God involved men with the care through Him. Paradise was not a land of plenty in which men had nothing to do. On the contrary. Adam and Eve had to roll up their sleeves. For that managing and taking care off of God's creation we have a beautiful biblical word.

The word steward. You know that from the parable of the Lord

Jesus, in which He speaks about the unrighteous steward. We will get back to this later on. A steward manages the property of his master as if it was his own. He gives himself one 100 percent for this. Now, like that, Adam and Eve were stewards of the Lord. You know how well they served as stewards.

The Lord had given them permission to eat of all the trees in the garden, but not of that one, of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. On that tree lay a prohibition. But when they did eat of that tree, they stole from God. Yes certainly, the first human being stole in paradise. He did not only want to live of what God put at his disposal. He stole the forbidden fruit out of the hand of God. He stole from God himself.

Adam and Eve were not allowed to steal. God had especially forbidden this to them. They did not need to steal. God gave abundantly. And yet they stole. There in paradise, there began the sin against the eighth commandment.

Perhaps you may think, now yes, that was in paradise. In those circumstances we do not live today. Read the bible further, congregation. It is not only full of what touches your spiritual life. It also speaks of the material side of our existence.

Take the people of Israel. What had God blessed his own covenant people especially materially. You can compare that with what God gave Adam and Eve in paradise. You could say it like this:

for Israel paradise came back in the by God promised land. Notice all the rich promises God made to Israel. He promised to bring them to a land overflowing with milk and honey. What a glorious promise. Honey comes from flowers and milk from fertile grassland. All that God gave his people. Every Israelite in Solomon's time sat under his own vine and figtree. (1 Kings 4 : 25) Could it be more beautiful? Every 50 years God made his people a fresh start. All the land than again came back to its original owner. It was not so, that in Israel the rich became richer and the poor poorer. No, who lost his land got his inherited possession back. Who had bought it, had to give it back. And than the sabbathyear, once every seven years, all the debts were remitted. All the slaves became free. The land was able to rest for a year. God watched out for the exhaustion of the land. God exceptionally cared for his people. What liberal laws God also gave for the poor. The corners of the field were not allowed to be harvested. Ruth was allowed to glean after the reapers of Boaz. There you see God's good laws in practice. The Lord said: there will be no poor among you, (Deuteronomy 15 : 4) They were not allowed to wrong each other but they shall fear their God. (Leviticus 25 : 17) There lay some of the glory of paradise in these laws for Israel.

Congregation, that is now the background of this eighth commandment. You have to read this in the light of the heading that God placed above the law: I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

When God proclaimed his law with this evangelical heading, He already had those stipulations for the economical life of his people in mind. They did not have to steal. God looked after them abundantly. For everything what they received in the promised land, was from the Lord and came from the Lord.

The bible tells you, how powerfully the Lord held unto this commandment. He did not let himself be mocked with this eighth commandment. Remember the story of king Ahab, congregation. He stole the vineyard of Naboth. Mind you: God had given him all he needed for his kingship. And yet he stole the vineyard of Naboth, his heritage in Israel. What has the Lord punished him for this. God let him be told by Elisha: In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick your own blood. (1 Kings 21 : 19) And that happened.

Then think about the story of Gehazi, the servant of Elisha. Elisha did not want to receive one cent from Naaman the Syrian for the curing of his leprosy. The Lord had cured him. But Gehazi by the way of a lie got two talents of silver and two festal garments from Naaman. The Lord punished him severely. The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave to you and your descendants for ever. (2 Kings 5 : 27) Also think about Achan the thief. He stole the gold from Jericho that was destined for the Lord. God does not let himself be mocked with his commandments. It was theft on God's holy ground.

You may think: well that was in Israel in the old covenant. What do we have to do with the stipulations which God gave to Israel? Those you cannot realize today anymore? Indeed we cannot do that and the Lord does not dictate this to us. But the basic thought: that the Lord looks after us and that He gives us enough and that we today shall not steal and have no need to steal, is also definitely valid for us,

How we now, in the new covenant, use our money, the Saviour shows you in the parable of the unrighteous steward in Luke 16. What is that a fascinating parable. There was, says Christ a steward was wasting the goods of his master. He was literally throwing money away. His master found out and the steward noticed that. He saw the anger of his master and the coming firing from his position. You have heard when we read the Scripture, what that steward did. Very smart. He summoned the debtors of his master. To the one, who owed his master a hundred barrels of oil, he said: write 50 in the I O U. To the other, who owed his master a hundred bags of wheat, he said: quickly write down 80. So he made them co-guilty to the fraud and the theft. He thought; these are now my friends. When the master fires me, then for my living I can go to them. The master, when he heard about this, commended that unrighteous steward for his cunning, says the Saviour. Now look, says the Lord Christ, at the children of this world. They are wiser than the children of the light.

Then suddenly, congregation, your Saviour comes with the application of this parable. This is not easy to understand. You really have to think hard about this. But it is surely worth it in connection with the eighth commandment to go into details. Listen well to what Christ then said to his disciples. This: And I tell you - hear the Messianic power in those words: And I tell you - make friends for yourselves by means of the unrighteous Mammon, so then when it fails they may receive into eternal habitations.

Congregation, may be you look somewhat amazed at these words.

What does the Saviour mean with this? Look at them a little closer. The word Mammon is clear. That in the New Testament is the word for the money-power in this world. Simply: the money that daily goes through your hands. Your tens, your loonies and toonies, your bank account. Christ names that money the unrighteous Mammon. The Saviour knows this really well, that money is used for bad business. Not for nought is there the saying: Money that is mute, makes straight what is crooked. What a lot of evil is often done with the money we receive and spend.

Now, says the Saviour, with those the unrighteous steward made friends, with the unrighteous Mammon. But, wants the Saviour say with these words: You, children of the light, you also get to do with that unrighteous Mammon just as the people of this world. That steward used it for a bad purpose: to make friends for when he would get into trouble. You, children of the light, also have to use the money, but now for the good. For my sake, for my Kingdom. For the poor and the miserables, which I leave to you. For the upbuilding of my church. For the spreading of the gospel among people whom never have heard about Me. Well we can use our money in all kinds of manner for the cause of Jesus Christ. And then the Saviour gives you, congregation, at the same time the view on what the fruit, the consequence is of the using of the Mammon for his Kingdom. He says: So then when it fails they may receive you in eternal habitations.

Congregation: your money has eternity-value. Your christian use of the Mammon has consequences to far over the borders of life and death. Hear: so that, says Christ, when it fails.... That is to say, when your life is at its end. When the money does not go through your hands, not is used anymore for Christ and his cause. because you are going to die, "they may receive you in eternal habitations".

Is that not said beautifully by your Saviour? Later they are ready, says Christ, later, above they are ready to cry welcome to you, with God. They already have gone before you, the many, who have helped you with the Mammon. Who have served you in all kinds of ways with your money. They are ready to welcome you above, by God. The poor and miserables, the sick and the handicapped, the people who through you got acquainted with the gospel and were won by it. They will heartily welcome you, above, with the Lord. What a contrast with what that unrighteous steward out of the parable did. He made himself friends to have it good down here on earth. You may make friends with the eye on the great future, with God.

And listen. What do you think? Have you ever been short for this glorious purpose? Hear what the Saviour asks his apostles in Like 22 : 35, When I send you out with no purse or bag or sandals, did you lack anything? No, the Saviour wants to say. You always had sufficient? You always have able to give, regardless how difficult your situation was from an economical viewpoint. And the disciples answered: Of nothing.

Congregation. Adam and Eve were not allowed to steal, for the forbidden fruit was God's. They did not have the need to steal, for God gave in abundance. Ahab and Gehazi and Achan the thief:

they were not allowed nor had a need to steal, for God gave them in the land of milk and honey more than enough. Is it different for you? Does the Lord not look after you generously and in abundance? Christ's question may also be asked of you: have you ever been short for the cause of his Kingdom? How do you answer?

2. And yet, congregation, and yet. What is there much stolen in this world. Also by christians. What is your confession here in Lordsday 42 a sharp judge of men. Hear the first sentence of answer 110: God not only forbids theft and robbery, that the government will punish. O yes, criminality in this world is huge. Daily the newspapers mention cases of fraud and corruption. They speak of gross thefts from houses and cars. Sometimes they surprise us of the refined manner how people steal in this world. Your confession says: the government punishes this stealing and robbing. God also punishes this. Who of these gross grasping thieves thinks of God? But He is there and whom ever lays his hands on the possessions of another shall experience that God punishes.

Answer 110 does not leave it with this. Your confession knows that churchpeople hardly ever are guilty of that gross, disgraceful deed punishable by God and the government. That is why this answer 110 continues. It says in no uncertain terms that God also punishes all those wicked schemes and devices by which we try to gain possession of the goods of the neighbour. Notice that word "we". That is not there for nought: wicked schemes and bad devices by which we try to gain possession of my neighbours assets. WE. It also happens among you, churchpeople the Catechism wants to say. Hold the mirror before you, congregation, in case you might think: but this is not valid for me. It does show what happened in the society of the sixteenth century, in the time of the Catechism. Deceit with weights, coins, measure, products and usury. Let us read that list in today's reality. We name two things. What are thereoften shady practices going on to get benefits. What often is time stolen from the employer. What is it sometimes difficult to be an honest and righteous christian in business, in society with people in finacial dealings.

Who may think, that he or she is outside all of this, should look what answer 110 adds to this: in whatever way God has forbidden it.(Dutch Catechism) And what these ways are your Catechisme leaves that to your judgement. They are many. Let also the last sentence of answer 110 penetrate in you. God also forbids all greed and all abuse or squandering of His gifts. Are these sins not found among churchpeople? Apostle Paul, great judge of men, knew better. When he tells Timothy about the requirements for office bearers, he writes: such a person should not be a lover of money. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3 : 2 In the last days men will be lovers of self and than again follows that word: lovers of money. How powerfully the apostle fights against this serious evil. Not for nought he writes in 1 Timothy 6, that those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare and again he hammers on the theme

of the love for money: it is, he writes, the root of all evils. The apostle continues, it has dreadful consequences: it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs. 1 Timothy 6 : 9,10.

What do you think? Did the apostle not have a reason to be so powerfully opposed to this evil and to open the eyes of Timothy for it, if it did not happen in the congregation? You are warned. Your confession makes a special mention of this evil. Once again you should think about that nice word of steward from the beginning. It is not simple to be good stewards over what God has entrusted to us. In our time much is being said about societycriticism. We have to make a different society, some christians propagate. For that they listen to Marx and other socialists. No one shall deny that in the early days there were no social wrongs. Our fore-fathers from the seventeenth and eighteenth century made fortunes in the slave-trade and the exploitation of the third world. The owners of factories earned lots on their workers. We may be thankful that a lot has changed in regard to this point. The wellknown socialist Proudhon proclaimed the thesis: ownership is theft. That is not true. But possessions very often make egotism. With the blood of the slaves beautiful buildings have been erected in the "Golden Age". The beautiful homes of the industrials were often possible at the cost of a poor standerd of living of the workers. On that we as christians can have criticism. But let us not believe that our welfare state does not bring temptations. The poet of the Proverbs shows us where the true cause of our prosperity lies. Not in a theory in regard to the upbuilding of the society, but with the Lord. He says in Proverbs 10 verse 22: The blessing of the Lord makes rich, and He adds no sorrow with it. And God's blessing then only comes over our lives as we as good stewards look after the money that we have received from Him.

3. Now we come to the last part of what Lordsday 42 wants to bind unto our hearts. After powerfully having told us what God forbids in the eighth commandment, your confession speaks in question 111 about what God requires of us in this commandment. It did this also with the other commandments. On the one side it shows us which sins God detests, on the other side it teaches us how we shall behave ourselves positively. And again the emphasis falls on our position over against our neighbour. In the commandments of the second table of the law of the Lord it is about love to our neighbour. Your confession takes you along in question and answer 111 from the hard and cruel land of robbery and theft to the soft and sunny land of the seeking of the wellbeing of our neighbour. Very delicately: that I must promote my neighbour's good wherever I can and may, deal with him as I would like others to deal with me. Like this it also can be done, the Catechism wants to say. If you live out from Him who because of us was robbed of all possessions: out of Christ. He was nailed nude on the cross. Soldiers threw dice

for his clothes and robbed of all possessions He put up his life for us on the cross. Do not forget for a moment: your Saviour also has completely finished for you this commandment. He had loved his neighbour perfectly and all what He had, his life, given to redemption and liberation of his neighbour. He did not live a moment for himself. He never sought himself. He denied himself to the last.

Who sees his life in the light of Christ's life, has to admit: I have appropriated much in this life which was not for me. He never did. He has given back to the Father what people had stolen from God. He bore the punishment for our trespasses of this commandment. He did not take, but He gave. Everything. His life.

Should I than not seek from his finished work what can and may promote my neighbour's good? Hear the words of your Saviour, that the apostle Paul cited in Acts 20 : 35 at his parting of the elders at Ephesus. He reminded them that he never had coveted gold or silver or clothing from anyone. Through hard work he had looked after his own life's needs. He had made true, he says, that the words of Christ had to be put into practise: It is more blessed to give than to receive. Pay attention to that word blessed. Receiving it in this life can be a blessing, but it is more blessed to give, generous to all sides.

We should not take what we can get, but give. Giving in God's kingdom to all sides. Parents, teach your children to give ample as you give them the money for the collection. What a power goes out from this small act in God's kingdom for all of their life. Teach your children early to like it to give for special purposes. Teach them to spend their pocketmoney wisely. Taught young, is here also done when old.

That is why your confession ends this Lordsday with these striking words: that I work faithfully, no, not so that I can pay off the mortgage on my house. No, not so that I can buy a car sooner. Also not so that I can buy exactly such an expensive dress as sister so and so. No, so that I may be able to give to those in need. Not taking but sharing. God be with us, also in the spending of our money.

Amen.

* (Canadian silver dollars had the inscription: "Dei Gratia, i.e. By the grace of God. The paper money that replaced them and now with the loonies and toonies, no such inscription anymore.)

Dear Reverend.

Jan. 7, A.D. 1997.

The Bremmer's stayed with us in 1983. After one week they moved on to Salt Lake City to see the Mormon Temple. During his stay in Edmonton he preached twice in the now Prov. Church. His son John, a doctor in english, did the translating for his father. I asked him if I could make copies of his sermons for our Preach the Word series. He agreed. Of that copy I made your copy. Rev. Visscher send me a complimentary copy for the hassle. That was nice of him. As most of our churches now have their own ministers, reading is not as prevalent anymore. Also these sermons are now over 13 years old, no one remembers that far back. It really does not matter, the "drift" of the sermon is what counts. I have translated an Easter sermon, may be you can use the "drift" of it.

I am signing off, this snowbird is going to Southern Arizona but has to be back for a visit to the Cross Cancer Clinic on April 11. Whatever, regardless how difficult: The Lord is good.

May be by that time the snow will be gone. High hopes.

Sincerely yours,
Ralph Winkel.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'RW' or similar initials, enclosed within a large, loopy circular flourish. A horizontal line is drawn below the signature.

Lordsday 45.

Of the prayer.

Sermon by the late
Dr. R.H.Bremmer,
Enschede,
The Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton, Alberta.

Reading : Daniel 9 : 1-19.
Text Lordsday 45,
Hymn: no comparable,
After the law: Psalm 147 : 7,
After the creed: Psalm 103 : 8,
Psalm 145 : 1,4,5.
Hymn: no comparable,
Psalm 130: 1,4.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Have you ever heard about prayer wheels? Perhaps you may think: what kind of things are that? We will explain it to you. You will find those prayer wheels with the Buddhists. They are round paper or cardboard cylinderform things, which you can put in front of you and let it turn. They stick papers with written prayers on it, so that, as it turns, in a very short time you make many prayers at the same time.

In the Buddhist temples there are even large stone cylinders, on which many prayers are etched. The Buddhist monks pull these cylinders with strong ropes around. That are their prayer wheels.

Congregation you of course understand, what the leading thought is of that. It boils down to this: the more prayers you can direct to Buddha at the same time, the better it is. If you recite them, you can only do so one by one. But if turn them round and round, you do a whole lot at once. With the roman catholic rosary you have something simular. With the aid of such a rosary, a string of beads, the catholics pray ten Our Fathers and fifteen Hail Mary's, one after the other.

There it is also about the multitude of prayers.

This idea of prayer the Catechism cuts off. The Reformation broke radically with the view, that with our prayers we have to pray very often, about many prayers. And especially the Reformation weighed it heavy that prayer is from the heart. In the Middle Ages that was practically worn away. Prayer had become the speaking of certain prayer-formulations and as often as possible. This, Luther and Calvin have resisted, with all their power. You can also hear this in question 117 where the confession asks what belongs to a prayer that pleases God. There is something in that question that scares us. So there are prayers which are not pleasing to God and here there is a warning against this. Praying is a faith, a heart matter. To have us realize this, the Catechism does not right away go into the discussion of the Lord's prayer, but first it speaks a whole Lordsday about the prayer as such: this Lordsday 45. After this your confession deals with each prayer from the perfect prayer seperately. These are wonderful Lordsdays, these Lordsdays about the prayer. There is more than enough reason to listen to this with an attentive heart.

Today we speak to you about

THE PRAYER THAT IS PLEASING TO GOD

We look into:

1. Why we pray (question and answer 116)
2. How we pray (question and answer 117)
3. What we pray (question and answer 118 and 119)

1. Congregation, don't you find question 116 a little bit strange? Why is prayer necessary for a christian? Praying is a normal thing to do, you think. Does it have to be told to christians that praying is necessary? Why does the Catechism not discuss first what praying actually is? How you have to pray. Enough people have difficulty with this. Why was that not put first on the order paper? And then the matter of the hearing of our prayers. Does this not have priority over this question 116 about the necessity of the prayer? We can understand that you ask this question to yourself, congregation. But first pay attention how the your confession speaks to you. It asks why the prayer is necessary for christians. The odd time your confession uses that word christians is to indicate you as believers with it. Think about Lordsday 12 with that wellknown question 32: Why are you called a Christian? And then follows in the answer the description about the close tie which is between us and Christ. So close is that tie that we are called christians after Him. In answer 98 the Catechism uses this expression again, now with the explanation of the second commandment. It says there, God wants "his Christians"(dutch catechism instead of His people) not be taught by the means of dumb images but by the living preaching of His Word. And now here: Prayer is necessary for Christians. What does that name lay a close tie between us and the Saviour. We are as christians anointed with the Spirit of Christ and that also touches our prayer life. Especially for us, as christians, who belong to Christ, prayer is necessary. But again, congregation, does this not speak for itself? Is prayer not a life's need for the christian? Is prayer not unseperately bound to you being a christian? Wish this was true, congregation. Is there among christian not often what our fore-fathers called with that typical word: prayerless?(biddeloosheid i.e literally: without prayer) And not only because of indifference, but also because a difficulty has originated with praying. We want to pray but we do not know what to do with it. We get stuck.

Let us name a few difficulties which can cause prayerlessness. In the first place quite often you meet the question in the congregation: Does prayer really help? Does it have an effect? Especially those who have difficulty with the election, are wrestling with this question. God has everything, people reason, in his counsel, his plan determined. My purpose shall stand, and I will do all that I please, the Lord says in Isaiah 46 verse 10 (NIV) and how than can prayer help?

Everything is firmly fixed by God. You can't push a thumbtack into a piece of concrete? So you can pray for faith and trust but if the Lord has decided not to give you this faith, what is the use of praying?

There is yet another difficulty you meet so often. I have so often asked the Lord if He would free me from a certain sin, or of a certain character trait, but it does not help at all, someone said to me. That sin returns all the time and I suffer because of it. Or we pray for the recovery of a sickness either for ourselves or for one of our loved ones and that prayer is not heard. Has that prayer any use?

Sometimes there are difficulties with prayer out from the secularisation of life. This penetrates our prayer life with questions like: Is it necessary to pray for what you need? You will get it anyway. Social services will look after this. Or you get to hear that all things now run according certain laws of nature and that you, with prayer, cannot change any of it.

That is why congregation, that this question why praying is necessary for God's Christians, is not a strange question. He forces us to realize why it is necessary.

Perhaps you would not think so but the seniors among us often have difficulty with prayer. It is the same as asking for a present on your birthday. When someone has become old he cannot make a list of presents anymore. He already has everything that would fit on such a list. So it is with prayer. When you are young, there is so much to ask from the Lord. You are at the gate of life. You have to do an important exam. You have applied for a job or you are unemployed. A lot depends on that application. You would like to go steady or be able to marry. What are there many things in your young life to ask from the Lord. With the older people it is different. They already have received so much from the Lord in their lives. They often have many reasons to thank so what shall they still ask from the Lord? Sometimes older brothers and sisters have a problem with this.

Now you have to see how your confession answers all those questions. Listen it says in answer 116, listen, prayer remains necessary. There are two reasons for this and now listen closely to the first reason. Prayer is plainly necessary because it is the most important of the thankfulness which God requires from us. Congregation, there it is. May be you blink your eyes. How is this, you may think. Is prayer the most important part of the thankfulness? If answer 116 now said that thanking is the most important part of thankfulness, that we could understand but praying?

And then something else. Perhaps you may ask yourself: why does the Catechism come with this at this stage? Praying the most important part in the thankfulness? We already have been busy with that thankfulness in a lot of Lordsdays. Did we not begin with this in Lordsday 32? After that. we have discussed, one by one, the ten commandments as works of thankfulness for the Lord and now, way at the end, now the confession speaks about prayer as the most important part in the thankfulness. How do

I understand this? Well, congregation, to find an answer to that question, you have to remember what we first have said about the structure of the Catechism. In this booklet it is about to explain to you, the three main points, the three principals of the christian faith. In the first place: what we shall believe about our triune God: the Apostels Creed. After that how we shall serve the Lord: the ten commandments. And at th end: how we shall pray to God: the Lord's Prayer. These last two principals, the law and the prayer, your confession now discusses under the heading: the thankfulness which we owe God.

Now, congregation, the ten commandments have been explained, one by one. God's commandments showed you the way in the land of thankfulness. Now it becomes a matter to do these commandments. Now the Lord says, in a manner of speaking, get at it. Now you show that you are my thankfull children. Make the redemption, which you have received from Me in Christ, now visible in your life. Do you remember that last question of the previous Lordsday question 115 from Lordsday 44? This was aimed directly at your heart. Why, the Catechism asks, does God have those ten commandments preached so strictly even if no one can keep them in this life? Well, congregation, through that terse question the confession pushes you to the prayer to be renewed to the image of God.

How could we keep God's commandments out of our own strength? Is it not, that they push to go to God and ask from Him for the strength, which we need for the fulfilling of his commandments? How shall we as an example keep the first commandment to only give the honour to God than only in the way of prayer: Hallowed be Thy Name by me. How shall we hallow God's day, truly hallowing, than by praying: Thy kingdom come also through me, by me hallowing your day, Lord. How shall we keep our heart pure before the Lord, according to the requirement of the tenth commandment, when not daily pray: Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, Lord. So the law comes to rest in our prayer. Christ comes to us with a treasure full of promises. Out of that we now may draw strength through prayer to do God's commandments out of thankfulness. Is this not glorious? I may discuss in my prayer my life and my path of life with my God and lay that before Him. In that I may show that I am thankful for the redemption which He gives to me in Christ. The poet of Psalm 116 expresses this spontaneous show of thankfulness like this: How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness to me? He cannot repay any of this. How could he? He can do something else: I will lift up the cup of my salvation, and call on the name of the Lord. (NIV) He calls upon the Name of the Lord, in praising, praying and thanking. That is his thankfulness-answer. When a doctor has helped and cured us, the next time, when we need help, we do not go to a different doctor. That would be grossly unthankful. And should we not in our thankfulness to God show in our prayer by laying before Him our whole path of life? Whom else can we ask for strength and help?

How severely the Lord insists on this expression of thankfulness.

Psalm 50 also shows us this. Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats asks the Lord as if He needed them. Very sharply the Lord puts over against this: Sacrifice thank-offerings to God, fulfil your vows to the Most High; and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me. So the true expression of thankfulness in our prayer is born out of our redemption. There is yet another reason why our prayer is the most important part in the thankfulness which we owe God. Your confession here continually speaks in the plural. It is about the prayer of the christians: plural. It is about the most important part of the thankfulness which God requires from us. Congregation, praying is not only a personal matter. It is also a jointly requirement. Every Sunday we as congregation range ourselves together before God's face. The minister of the Word prays for all. That prayer continues in our home prayers, in our prayer at the table and in our personal prayers.

Not everyone is able to put \$ 10.000.- on the table for service of God and for God's church. Not everyone is able to have a lot of time available to work in God's Kingdom. Not everyone can work for the evangelization. But what everyone can do is to fold his or her hands, close the eyes and pray to God.

Psalm 25 verse 1 uses for prayer the beautiful expression: To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul; in you I trust, O my God. Now, that all the young people can do and the elderly brothers and sisters. That the sick and healthy people can do. In prayer we can all unite to God, we all together can bring this sacrifice of thankfulness. What can a child sometimes pray concrete and spontaneous. It can move you deeply.(emote) What can a simple person send up a powerful prayer in the congregation to God. That are thankfulness-sacrifices which are pleasing to God. And with that, congregation, the rest of answer 116 is actually already explained. For what follows now, that God moreover will give His grace and the Holy Spirit only to those who constantly and with heartfelt longing ask Him for these gifts and thank Him for them.

Golden words, congregation, and chosen with care by Ursinus and Olevianus. The drafters of this booklet lay here in a few words open to us the daily covenant intercourse between God and us. Those few words: his grace and the Holy Spirit contain everything what God will give to us as treasures in his covenant. His grace: that is the acquittal of our guilt. The Holy Spirit: that is the hallowing of our lives which the Holy Spirit works in us.

Of course: you can ruin such a precious sentence with sharp arguements. For example there has been asked: how can you pray for God's grace and the Holy Spirit while you do not have them yet? With such reasoning you not only ruin the Catechism but also the bible. Your confession here speaks from the reality of God's covenant and the gospel. Here it points to the promises of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 7 : 7 and 8: Ask and it will be given to you: seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. Who really prays and seeks, does not stay a seeking soul but becomes a finder of God's Kingdom.

God himself has promised this.

Also think here about the word of Jesus from Matthew 25 verse 29: For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. We never should ask ourselves: do I belong and worry about this. This has brought many to despair and misery. Those are questions of unbelief. Your confession says it clearly: God will give his grace and Holy Spirit only- pay attention: only- to those who constantly and with heartfelt longing pray to Him for this.

Yes certainly, congregation, we have to pray for that. God orders us to pray. That is stated up to three times in this Lordsday. In answer 116: God requires from us prayer as the most important part of the thankfulness. In answer 117: we shall call on the God for all He has commanded us to pray. In question 118: What has God commanded us to ask of Him. Let this penetrate in you, congregation. God has commanded us the prayer. He has knowledge of our prayerlessness. He breaks through this with his three fold commandment. An explainer of the Catechism added to this: God's commandment to pray is as most profound an order as the resurrection from the dead. Was he wrong in this? Congregation, you remember what we in the beginning of this sermon told about the Bhuddist prayer-wheels and about the romancatholic rosary. How it is with your prayer? Has it become a mechanical routine? Do you suffer under your own prayerlessness? Ask the Lord for his Spirit to liven up your prayer anew. The prayer of God's congregation is of the most most importance for its life in these times. A prayerless church is a powerless church, a church which petrifies. But a church that realizes what a power prayer gives and also daily practices that prayer, send up to God, is a power house in God's Kingdom.

2. That is why we are glad that our confesssion gives us concrete pointers, how we have to pray. The Catechism does not leave us here in the cold. It asks you directly: What belongs to a prayer which pleases God and is heard by Him? It wants to say with this: this is the least you have to know about prayer. There is also, as we saw at the beginning of this sermon , a critical note in that question 116. Keep well in mind, the confession here wants to say, that not every prayer is pleasing to God. It has to meet some clear conditions and answer 117 lets us hear them. There are three, congregation. Your confession in answer 117 puts them neatly in a row. In the first place: we must call upon the one true God only, who has revealed Himself in His Word, for all that He has commanded us to pray. Here the confession polemicizes strongly against the roman catholic prayer practice. No, the Catechisme here wants to say, no, don't pray to the saints, no praying to Mary. For us as protestants there is at the same time a warning in this. Mind you, the confession wants to say: no praying to a vague God's idea, not to a great Unknown. Praying is not playing in a great lotto. You pray to Him who has revealed Himself to us clearly in His Word as our Father in Jesus Christ. Wonderful to be allowed

and be able to pray to such a God. The address of our prayer is known worldwide: above, with God.

Then the second condition follows for our prayer. We have to know thoroughly our need and misery so that we may humble ourselves before God. We do not come as an angry claimer to God. We have to humble ourselves before Him, That means to say: we make ourselves small before Him. We have nothing to claim. But we may ask humbly. What a difference between this prayer and modern man. He claims, requires. He hits the table with his fist. He organizes actions. And now the prayer, congregation. He does not hit the table with his fist. He does not claim. He humbly and honestly asks. He lifts up his soul to God. He realizes his need and misery. Hear how the Psalmists pray and with that show their selfknowledge and humbleness. Psalm 130: Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. O Lord hear my voice, Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy and than the following words: If you, O Lord kept a record of sins, O Lord who could stand? Congregation also hear Daniel as he speaks his impressive supplication in Daniel 9. When he has come to the end of his prayer he says: We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but on the ground of thy great mercy. And then follow the thrilling words: O Lord listen. O Lord forgive. O Lord hear and act. That are prayer-wheels in the right sense of the word. And anew I want you to pay attention to the fact that the confession here clearly speaks in the plural. WE have to know our need and misery. WE have to humble ourselves before God. It is a matter that touches whole God's church. WE as church have to really know our need and misery. What our need and misery is? Is that not often the prayerlessness, our shortcoming of a true faith, our slackening off in the service of God on Sunday and through the week? Are we standing outside the need of all of christendom in these times? Is leaving the church a sin that is only found outside of our churches? Congregation, there are many reasons to humble ourselves before God in dust and ashes, to speak with Abraham. Then follows the third condition for the prayer which is pleasing to God. We must rest on this firm foundation with our prayer that God, although we do not deserve it, will certainly hear us for the sake of Christ our Lord. He has promised us this in his Word.

Again we think about the difficulties with prayer which we spoke about in the beginning, congregation. Praying does not help, say many people and they stop with it. You cannot change anything of God's counsel, says the one and it paralysed his praying. Look now, how frankly your confession speaks about the hearing of prayer. God will, for Christ's sake, certainly hear our prayer. That is the firm foundation which we have for our prayer says your confession.

Look at the great believers, congregation. God said to Abraham that He was going to destroy Sodom. And what Abraham do? Did he say: God has decided this in his counsel, you cannot do anything about it? No, certainly not. He pleaded with God if He would yet save the city if there were 10 righteous people

in it. And if they would have been there, God certainly would have done so. The king of Nineveh ripped up his clothes and went in sackcloth and ashes, when Jonah proclaimed the destruction of that great city. It helped. It rued the Lord what He had announced over Nineveh. Congregation, remember the at first childless couple Isaac and Rebekah. Isaac, is written in Genesis 25, prayed the Lord for his wife Rebekah and then thg Lord was intreated by him. God has in his council tied our prayer and his hearing together. Our to Him outstretched hand, our calling to Him, He has taken up in his eternal council. That is why the Catechism can say, that God will certainly hear our prayer for the sake of Christ our Lord. Also here think about Joshua's prayer for the standing still of the sun and the moon in the battle against the Canaanites. There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the Lord listened to a man. (Joshua 10 verse 14) Such hearings may encourage us.

Very directly your confession points to your Saviour. His figure rises up before you. He is our Intercessor by God, our Mediator, who stands behind our so often weak and vulnerable prayer. Our praying comes before God as if it came out of his mouth. He takes it over and purifies it and bears it to the Father. He has laid in his finished work a plead-foundation (pleitgrond) about which the Father simply cannot get around. He himself has said to his diciples: Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. (John 15 verse 16) They are only a few words with which we conclude our prayer: for Christ's sake, or: in Jesus' name, but we are standing with these words on the firm and unshakable foundation. There lay in those concluding words of your prayer promises. You may know that what you ask from God is born through the Mediation of your Saviour.

3. So now we get to the last part: What has God commanded us to ask from Him. Your confession says it short and terse: All the things we need for body and soul. The new text of the Catechism put the body first. We are no angels. We have to live to serve God. Like in the perfect prayer our temporary necessities of life belong. My sick leg, a sphere of labour through which I can care for my family, support if I get into economical trouble, renewing of my life. A christian does not pray for luxeries. He also does not pray for prosperity above the norm. But we may surely ask for a wonderful holiday. Your confession then points to the Lord's prayer. It names that beautifully, the prayer which Christ himself has taught us. Indeed: the Lord's prayer is as a model for prayer unsurpassable. It attracts attention that our reformed fore-fathers, who fought against all the routine and rut in prayer, practically concluded all the forms and each official prayer in the churchservice with the Lord's prayer. Dr. Abraham Kuiper rightly wrote in his book about the churchservice that not a Sunday should pass in which in the church the Lord's prayer is not prayed. Congregation. With the last and powerful apostolic end-admonition we conclude: Pray continually. (1 Thess 5: 17)

Paul does not mean by this that you have to pray day and night. No, it is an apostolic stimulation to a regular and persevering prayer. At home pray your table prayers and your day opening and day closing prayer. Pray on healthy and sick days. Pray as congregation of Jesus Christ. And if you have difficulty with it, if yet in your heart the thought tosses and turns: has prayer any use, read then once more thoughtfully this Lordsday 45 with the places in Scriptures to which it refers. There you learn more and more about the "why", the "how" and "what" we shall pray.

Amen.

"Seek ye My face." O LORD, so Thou hast spoken,
 And in response my heart says unto Thee,
 "Thy count'nance do I seek in prayer unbroken."
 Do not, O LORD, now hide Thy face from me.
 In anger turn Thy servant not away,
 Thou who hast ever been my help and stay.
 Forsake me not, for I on Thee rely;
 O God of my salvation, hear my cry.

Psalm 27 : 4, Book of Praise.

Dear Reverend,

April 15, 1997.

During my stay down south I was able to translate Lordsdays 47, 48 and 49. I had hopes to finish all of them but somehow this did not happen. My visit to the Cross Clinic was a real happy event. I went there with lead in my shoes, but after being told that I was still in the remission stage, I floated out of building. In August I have to go back for further tests, like I wrote before, whatever may happen, the Lord is good. He gave me a beautiful time in Yuma, Arizona. Blessings.

I also have included with 47, 48 and 49 an article read by a Baptist minister on Palm Sunday as a sermon. He elaborated about the last two paragraphs: Resurrection and the Editor's note. It was a moving experience to listen to this "sermon". You could hear a pin drop during this service. This church does not have a church service on Good Friday.

I never realized the horrible suffering our Saviour had to endure. On top of this physical pain there was God's wrath to pay for our sins. How can we ever be thankful enough?

Praise the Lord.

Sincerely yours:

Ralph Winkel.

Lordsday 46.

Eye to eye with God: the addressing of the Lord's prayer.

Sermon by the late	Reading: Luke 11: 1-13.
Dr.R.H.Bremmer,	Text Lordsday 46,
Enschede,	Psalm 25 : 1,10.
The Netherlands	After the law: Psalm 26 : 1,
	After the creed: Hymn 30: 6.
Translated by	Psalm 138 : 1,3,4.
Ralph Winkel,	Psalm 146 : 3.
Edmonton, Alberta.	Hymn: 47 : 1.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Have you ever noticed how careful and penetrating the Catechism has formulated the Lordsdays about the prayer? It uses eight Lordsdays for this, from Lordsday 45 to Lordsday 52. In Lordsday 45 your confession discussed with you the prayer in general. That Lordsday ended with the Lord's prayer, the prayer that Christ himself has taught us. After this the Catechism is now going to explain to you prayer by prayer of the Lord's prayer. It does this by repeatedly splitting every prayer in some separate prayers, which are contained in it. With that the Catechism lets you see in about how many matters God's church prays the Lord in each separate prayer of the Lord's prayer, However that does not apply to the addressing with which the Lord's prayer begins. Our Father, who art in heaven, has Christ taught us to say as addressing God. This Lordsday 46 now explains this addressing to you. With that it has to get your attention how central the Catechism sets Christ himself in this Lordsday. HE, says question 120, He has commanded us to address God as Our Father. HE teaches us immediately at the beginning of our prayer respect and trust in God. HE teaches us, says answer 121, not to think of God's heavenly majesty in an earthly manner. It comes in the explanation of this address to stand before us to teach us what the praying of this perfect prayer means for us. Here you are confronted already in the address with what the Master will teach you in praying these six prayers. In that address Our Father, who art in heaven, actually the whole perfect prayer is already contained. That address puts you eye to eye with God your Father.

Here you may think about the conversation between the Lord and Abraham his friend in Genesis 18. God there appeared as Angel of the Lord to Abraham. He proclaimed to him the birth of his son Isaac and departs in the direction of Sodom. While Abraham went with God, the Lord told him, that He was going down to see how great her unrighteousness was. Both the angels who accompanied the Angel of the Lord went on. But Abraham stood before the Lord. And than you read in verse 23 the words: Then Abraham approached Him (drew near: R.S.V) and said. He drew near. In a manner of speaking he went and stood eye to eye with the Lord. After this Abraham made his touching prayer for Sodom. Congregation, once again: "he drew near".

That you also do, when you begin your prayer with the words: Our Father, who art in heaven. You are placing yourself straight before the Lord, before your heavenly Father. Then you let the six separate prayers follow with the praise exaltation and the concluding word Amen. What has the great Architect of the Lord's prayer structured all this so refined. Today we will concentrate on that address. Your confession explains it soberly and at the same time powerfully. We speak about:

CHRIST COMMANDS US TO ADDRESS GOD AS OUR FATHER.

1. He lays a firm foundation under your prayer;
2. He gives you a powerful hope to hearing; (verhoring)
3. He stimulates your love with it.

1. It must have been noticed by you that of the reading of the Scriptures from the gospels, that the Lord Christ has taught his disciples the Lord's prayer twice. The first time in Matthew 6 in the sermon on the Mount and the second time in Luke 11. Critical scholars say that it is nonsense to believe, that the Lord Jesus indeed has taught his disciples the Lord's prayer twice. Luke, they claim, later added it to his gospel on the precedence of Matthew, and gave it then another place, much later in the teaching of the Saviour. But is it strange that Christ taught his disciples the Lord's prayer twice?

It goes to show how important He felt it was.

Now check at what occasion the Saviour taught it to his disciples. The first time He did it on the Sermon on the Mount.

Congregation, you know in the first great speech which the Lord Christ gave to his disciples from the mountain in Galilee.

In that He spoke to them about the three main themes in the service of God: About the giving of alms, about fasting and prayer. With all three these attention-points your Saviour fought against the hypocrisy, the double dealing of the Pharisees and the scribes. Christ turned against this very sharply. Why did the Pharisees and scribes give alms? Only to be seen by the people and to receive the applause from people. Look at that generous man. Look how much he gives. So he did with fasting. There many showed a sombre and a not fit to be seen face because they were fasting. They wanted to be seen by people and be praised by them.

Your Saviour fought against all religious show (ostentation) which was put on to receive the honour of people. That He also did with prayer. With that He made front to two sides. His disciples should not be as the hypocrites who in public in the synagogues and on the corners of the squares stood to pray. They also should not be like the gentiles, says Christ. They seek it in prayer by using many words.

No, says your Saviour, when you pray, go into the inner room, into the most inside room where people cannot see you. There you pray to your Father. You do seek Him in your prayer and not the applause of people. And after this teaching in general, Christ goes on and says: You pray thus so and then He lets follow

the Lord's prayer. So Christ already taught his disciples at the beginning of his work in Israel the praying of the Lord's prayer. Is it now so strange that your Saviour has taught his disciples the Lord's prayer once more? Do we have to be critical about this? There is not a single reason for this. Look at Luke 11 congregation. There the gospel clearly shows why Christ taught his disciples the Lord's prayer twice. It happened, says Luke in verse 1 of this chapter, when Jesus himself was praying. When He ceased, one of his disciples asked Him: Lord teach us to pray as John taught his disciples. This asking disciple apparently thought of a special prayer beside a John-prayer. But the Saviour does not go into this. He again taught them the Lord's prayer as He had taught them before in the sermon on the mount. Only the fact that the perfect prayer was taught twice by the Saviour, first in the sermon on the mount and after that in Luke 11, shows you what a great importance your Saviour attached to this. And both times Christ uses the word Father in the address. In Matthew more detailed than in Luke. In the latter the Saviour only used with the address "Father". With Matthew He added the words "Our" and "who art in heaven".

Congregation, we are used to it to address God as Father. We already have done this from the first time our parents taught us to pray. We are familiar with that Father address to God. But, someone rightly wrote: when Christ taught his disciples to address God as Father, He turned a most important page in the book of God's revelation.

You should know, that in the times of Jesus it was unusual and certainly not self-evident to name God Father. You know how Israel in the old covenant addressed God with the name Lord, Jahweh in Hebrew. The I am who I am, means that name. I am the God on whom you always can rely. That was the usual name for Israel's God. Besides this Israel would use the Father-name the odd time. That were absolutely exceptions. So says Isaiah in chapter 63 verse 16: But you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us; you, O Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name. In Isaiah 64 verse 8 the prophet anew uses the name Father for God: Yet, O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand. There are only a few places where God is addressed as Father by the prophets. It is for them important to show God in his majesty as the Former as Creator of Israel.

The greatness and majesty of God weighed so very heavy in Israel, that as time went by that familiar name Jahweh was not used anymore. Added to this was the strict keeping of the third commandment especially in the time after the exile, this brought Israel to making the speaking of the name Jahweh to a taboo. When in the Torah or in the prophets the name Jahweh came up, the later scribes read the God's name Adonai, that means Ruler, Master. In those later ages God was never addressed as Father. Now here your Saviour commands the disciples two times. in Matthew 6 and Luke 11, to address God as Father.

Do we say too much when we speak here of the turning of the page

in the history of God's revelation? While up to now the names which with God was addressed especially proclaimed his omnipotence and greatness, Christ lays us the Father-name on the lips, with all its intimacy and the tender love which is contained in it. O, yes, your Saviour could have chosen other names. He did not do this. He decidedly choose this name. He takes this, congregation, from his own covenant-relationship with his Father. He takes that glorious name, which with He addresses God and lays that on our lips. This last part we should not, with the use of the Father name, for a moment forget. It makes the privelege to be allowed to use that name so much the greater. You may address God with the name with which the Saviour himself addressed God. That He did already at the beginning of his life on earth. When Mary reproaches the twelve year old Jesus, that He had left his father and mother, Christ answers: Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?(Luke 2: 49) He, Jesus had full knowledge that God was his Father, a very different father than Joseph.

Especially in the gospel of John Christ speaks freely about God as Father. Think about the words in John 14 verse 2: In my Fathers house are many rooms. What does this lay a close tie between the Father above and Christ below. At the same time He is busy to include you and me in that close tie. A little later He says to Thomas: No one comes to the Father except through Me. And then take that penetrating conversation between Christ and Philip when Philip asks: Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us. Philip wrestled still with the thought that God only was great and majestic and so far away. He wanted to have the Father closer. Then hear the liberating and faith raising answer of the Lord Christ: Don't you know me Philip even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father.(verse 9) So close is the tie between the Father above and Christ below. In that close tie He now also involves us.

You also find that same addressing of God with the Father-name in the suffering story of your Saviour. When He wrestled in Gethsemane He seizes especially that Father-name when He cried: Father if you are willing, take this cup from Me; yet not my will, but yours be done.(Luke 22 verse 42) How He also clings to that Father-name when He cried out at the cross: Father, in your hands I commit my spirit.(Luke 23 verse 46) So Christ has obtained that Father-name for you and me. We had lost that Father-name through our fall and rebellion against God in paradise. We revolted against the Father. Is it then not grace congregation, that Christ now hands to us again that Father-name on the foundation of his assurance to use this freely? Yes, not only you may use that name. He commands us this, says answer 120 correctly. He says to his diciples: You pray in this way. What lays your Saviour with that address, that commanding address, an unbelievable firm foundation under the Lord's paryer that now follows. You are going to pray for the hallowing of God's name. You are going to ask for the coming of the Kingdom.

You are going to wrestle for the happening of God's will. You will ask the Father for all your physical and spiritual needs. You speak to God about that. You point with this to your Father. You do this very personally. I think about the beginning of the 25th Psalm. What express the words David uses there the nature of our prayer so refined: To you, O Lord I lift up my soul; in you I trust, O my God. Do not let me put to shame. Congregation praying is speaking directly to God, standing eye to eye with God. Praying is not musing by yourself. Prayer is also not to give God and the people information about your needs and nothing else. No, it is to lay those needs concretely before God and praying Him asking, wrestling with Him to provide you in that. We continually set the Lord before us as to speak with David in Psalm 16.

Yes but, so many ask, do we have to base that Father-name on Christ's suffering and dying? Nowhere it is stated in the Lord's prayer that we may, for Christ's sake, call God our Father? Is it not of its own accord that God our Father is because of our creation? Is that Father-name not already given to us in the first article of faith: I believe in God the Father, the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth? Who has difficulty with this we remind you of the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15. There is spoken about a son, who left his father's house and the inheritance, which was his, squandered in a distant country. When he there in his depravation came to his senses he said: I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. What perfectly beautiful does your Saviour here draw in this parable the situation in which we ended up as people through our fall into sin and through our rebellion against God. Also at the same time how God takes back that fallen man to be his child. Of that parable it has been said: It is only about the relationship of the son to the father, of fallen men to God. Here it would be as in the Lord's prayer no speaking of Christ's redeeming work for us. Who speaks like this forgets that Christ himself tells this parable and then already had in view his suffering and dying for us.

The same is valid for our use of the Father-name in this address of the Lord's prayer. Very emphatically your confession puts this into words, as it says, in the center of answer 120: God has become our Father through Christ. Congregation, they are only a few words but what a treasure of grace your confession here put into words. The wellknown Danish theologian Kierkegaard once wrote: About the depth of that being Father of God, you never finish thinking. I would, he wrote, after my death sit eternally on a cloud and always cry: Hallelujah, because that God is my Father. What is in this address a faith tension. That your confession speaks about in the beginning of answer 120. To awaken in us at the very beginning of our prayer that childlike reference and trust toward God which should be basic to our prayer. Two elements are there in this address and they go hand in hand. It is about childlike reverence and about childlike trust in our prayer. It is the tension between God's

greatness and majesty on the one side and his love and grace on the other side. They both come to us in this address. You see the tension between that reverence and that trust in the conversation between the Lord and Abraham in Genesis 18 about which we spoke before. As Abraham continues to ask God for mercy for Sodom, he says at a certain moment: Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes. (verse 27) Dust you blow away and ashes you throw in the garbage. That is how Abraham felt before God. It is the reverence of which your confession here speaks. But at the same time there is the trust that God shall hear him. That trust makes us to go freely to God in our deep reverence to Him. The apostle Paul has put that trust in God as Father in his letter to the Philippians into words: And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4: 19) Is that not enough reason to put in such a God as Father your trust? My God writes the apostle : it is the "my" of the faith that lays the hand on God's promises. And: that God will gloriously look after all you needs. Not niggling, not haggling, but gloriously and not forgetting one of my needs. And on top of this according to his riches: He is a God who disposes abundance. Here it is the same of what David said in Psalm 23: My cup is overflowing. What marks this address whole the Lord's prayer, congregation, to a faith-command. Of course: we also will continue with the by us, our own formulated prayers to the Lord. There are all kinds of situations in your life in which you can go to the Lord with your own prayer. At the beginning of the day, with the closing of it in the evening, at your meals, there you go with your own prayers and with your own concrete needs to your Father. But we say with this: let not a day pass without praying this prayer to the Lord. And let in the church not a Sunday pass without praying the Lord's prayer.

2. So now we have seen how this address lays a firm faith-foundation under our prayer and under the six prayers which now follow in the perfect prayer. Answer 120 draws out this faith-address that God became our Father through Christ, a conclusion. This says: God will much less deny us what we ask of Him in faith, than our fathers would refuse us earthly things.

That is the perspective of the hope which is included in this address. If I call God my Father, says here this answer, than in there is for me the assurance of the hearing of it. On this I may and I have to hope. Congregation, hope you do with an eye to the future. I place in the present, here and now, my trust in God as I pray. At the same time I may hope that He hears and answers my prayer. That hope is not a vague trust, certainly not. The hope does not disappoint us, writes Paul in Romans 5 verse 5. That is certainly valid with the hope of hearing. Lordsday 46 here points to Matthew 7 verse 7 to 11. Your Saviour has spoken those words at the end of the sermon on the mount. They surely refer back to what He earlier said about praying and the Lord's prayer. What a powerful stimulation

give these words to the hope of hearing of our prayer. Listen: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. Unseparately Christ binds here our praying and our hearing together. As I seek, as I seek the fulfilment of God's promises, I will surely find them, saus my Saviour. If I knock by God, He opens. For everyone - pay attention to the word everyone - who prays receives and who seeks, finds and who knocks, the door will be opened.

You may think by yourself: yes, but that is about prayer in general. What has this to do with the address of the perfect prayer? Listen than closely to what Christ let follow on these words and where the end of answer 120 clearly alludes too. Listen, asks the Saviour of his apostles, listen. When among you a father has a son and that boy asks for bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he in his hunger asks for a fish, would his father give him a snake? Christ than goes another step further. He adds to this; if you, then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him. How much more, says my Saviour. How much more. He meanns by this our heavenly Father who in his hearing us our earthly fathers and mothers far exceeds. The confession concurs with this with the words: how much less will He deny us what we ask of Him in faith. Yes, congregation, listen good to the words, that our heavenly Father us will give the good. Who decides what is the good is for us in every situation of our lives? What does the Saviour leave this gloriously to my heavenly Father. I may leave it to Him to fill in what is good for me. That He will decide for me out of his goodness.

What lies the hearing of our prayer close to the heart of the confession. Answer 121 picks this theme up again when it explains what the words "who art in heaven" mean for us. We shall, explains that answer, expect from His almighty power all things we need for body and soul. There the words "who art in heaven" point too. You have an almighty Father. Does He not govern from his throne heaven and earth? And to impress you more of his almight, your Saviour here uses the plural: Father in the heavens. (dutch Catechism "hemelen") What does that plural give a wide view on the Father above. It lets you see his throne as the centre of his heavenly glory.

O, congregation, the almight of God. We consider it often too little. What is it a reality. What does it guarantee you the hearing of your prayer. We have the great prayers from the old and the new testament, who counted on it. Elisha threw himself down on the Carmel before the Lord with his head between his knees. seven times he prayed for the hearing of his prayer for rain. Seven times he send his boy to see if his prayer was heard. And you know it, after the seventh time the boy saw a small cloud the size as of a mans hand rise up from the sea. A short while later the rain came down.

Also the New Testament speaks of strange prayer hearings.

(gebedsverhoring) When Peter was thrown into jail by Herides, the congregation continually prayed for him. An angel of the Lord came and liberated him out of the jail. He went to the house where the congregation was together and prayed for him. When he knocked on the door, the congregation could hardly believe, that it was Peter. (Acts 12 :16,17) They actually did not take their own praying and the hearing of it serious. Let us not doubt in difficult situations in our life. Continue in the prayer to your Father. In that Father-address lies a firm plea-foundation for the hearing in sickness and need situations. We here also ask for your prayers for the psychic sick. What is there a lot of suffering in depressions. Bear your sick with these needs before the throne of the Father.

3. Now we come to the last part what we still have for you. We saw how in the address of the perfect prayer lies a powerful foundation for our faith. No less - and that in the second place - this address opens for us a perspective of hearing. Now in the third place it also stimulates our love. Congregation, pay attention to the word "our". So you address your heavenly Father: Our Father. Christ breaks with this "our" through all prayer-individualism. I do not pray only for myself. I should not limit the circle of my prayer-thoughts to myself and to my nearest loved ones, Christ puts us in the whole space of the brotherhood. With this He connects to the Psalms of the old covenant. In that you now also find the interaction between the personal prayer and the joint prayer. Take Psalm 25: in verse 1 David prays personally: To you, O Lord I lift up my soul. But when he closes this prayer-psalm in verse 22, he prays: Redeem Israel O God, out of all his troubles. You find the same in Psalm 130, that beautiful pilgrimage psalm. First the temple-goer appears before the Lord with strict personal need: Out of the depths I cry to you O Lord. Lord hear my voice. But when he gets to the end of the psalm, he cries: Israel, hope in the Lord, and He will redeem Israel from all its iniquities. In Israel as covenant people this pilgrim knows himself to be assimilated.

You and I, we are as congregation of Jesus Christ children of "one" Father. You have been taken up in the great family of God. You speak in that community and together with that community to God. You lay its cares and needs before his throne. And even with that we do not limit ourselves with this address. Calvin has in his Institution (Book 111, chapter 20,38) called upon the church of his times to include in that word "OUR" by the Father all men who lived on earth. We do not know, he says, what God has decided about them but it "is pious and human to wish the best for them. That also has its consequences for the following prayers. We not only bear the need of God's church but also those of this whole wide world before the throne of the Father. That word "Our" opens our wallets, congregation. What is there much distress in this world. Daily we are confronted with disasters and misery. What are there many reasons to call on God as our Father for the needs of this world and at the same time let our prayers show this in our gifts.

* So shine at the sky of this address of the perfect prayer three stars, congregation. The star of your faith, of your hope and of your love. Our Father, who art in heaven, we say when we have folded our hands and pray the perfect prayer. Now I may freely pray all those following six prayers. I have a Father above, who in advance through his Father-name guarantees the hearing (verhoring i.e make happen) of my prayer. He has promised that for myself, for my brotherhood and for his wide world. I may go to the Father for all three with great boldness.

Amen.

Our Father, clothed with majesty,
Who, dwelling in eternity,
Hast set Thy glorious throne on high.
In Christ, Thy Son, do we draw nigh,
In humble prayer to seek Thy face
For Thy paternal love and grace.
Hymn 47 : 1. Book of Praise.

Lordsday 47.

The first petition: Hallowed be Thy Name.

Sermon by the late
Dr. R.H.Bremmer,
Enschede,
The Netherlands.

Reading: Psalm 8,
Text Lordsday 47,
Psalm 9: 1, 16,
After the law: Psalm 5: 6,8,
After the creed: hymn: no comparable.
Psalm 8 : 1,5,
Psalm 145 : 3,
Hymn 47: 1, 2, 9, 10.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton, Alberta.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the most impressive parts of the Old Testament is the "calling-vision" of the prophet Isaiah. It describes for us in Isaiah 6 how he was called to be a prophet. Isaiah came in the temple and he saw God sitting on a high and exalted throne. The train of his robe filled the temple. Isaiah also saw that the Lord was surrounded by seraphs, magnificent angels. They stood above the Lord. Each one of them had six wings. With two they covered their faces. With two they covered their feet and with two they flew. And they were calling to each other:

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory. God's liturgical spirits were impressed by God's holiness and majesty. Isaiah on his turn, cried out: Woe to me, I am ruined, for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty. In the confrontation with God's holiness Isaiah realized his own uncleanness, his unholiness. At that moment one of the seraphs flies to him. He has taken with a tong a burning coal from the altar and touches with this Isaiah mouth. He said: See, this has touched your lips, your guilt is forgiven and your sins taken away. The fire of the altar has sanctified Isaiah. Now he can take action as a prophet. He receives the mission to go to the people with God's message.

Congregation, you may see this as a background of the first petition which we will now consider. It is not trifling what your Saviour teaches you to ask from your Father in this prayer. He lays you the prayer on the lips: Hallowed be Thy name. Can sinful people do this? Isaiah realized intensively that he is a man with unclean lips. Without the cleansing of his sins by the coal of the altar he could not have appeared as a prophet of God.

How can we than hallow God's name in our lives, in our words and deeds? That is only possible because this prayer follows the address of the perfect prayer. It is about the hallowing of the name of Him of whom we have confessed that He through Christ's redeeming work has become our Father. Christ lays in this first petition Father's holiness, Fathers's glory in our hearts. We may and we can hallow Father's name out of the power of Christ's finished work. It is about Father's honour and glory. From that point of view we will think about this first petition.

We speak to you about

THE FIRST PETITION IN THE LORD'S PRAYER

- 1. Lays God's honour to our hearts;
- 2. Motivates us to proclaim God's honour;
- 3. Stimulates us to direct our lives to this.

1. In Lordsday 46 we discussed with you the address of the Lord's prayer. Christ teaches us to address God as Our Father in heaven. In this and in the following Lordsdays your confession explains the six seperate prayers of the perfect prayer. The word petition may sound somewhat old fashioned. It simply means: a penetrating question to the Lord. Hallowed be Thy Name, we pray in this first petition. The Saviour with this formulation connects very close to the existing Jewish prayer-practice. The so-called Eighteen-prayer, which the Jews pray in the synagogue, has as the third petition: holy is thy name and holy art Thou. o God and saints praise you every day. In a somewhat shorter form the Saviour copies this in: Hallowed be Thy Name. And especially He lets his diciples direct this prayer to his and their Father. This close and tender address the synagogue did not know.

Congregation, your Saviour has consructed the perfect prayer very carefully. This first petition begins with the word "Thy": Thy name be hallowed. With that the following two petitions begin: Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. The Saviour places with this God cause before your attention. It is about his name. his Kingdom, his will. God himself is central in this first part of the perfect prayer. ✓ Christ teaches us to make God's cause our own. We entreat for the hallowing of his name. the coming of his Kingdom and the doing of his will.

With that compare the second three petitions of the perfect prayer. In that we lay our cause before the Father. There it ia about our bread, our debts and our reconciliation. By laying ✓ our needs before God in our prayer, we make in the second three petitions our cause to be his. God's cause comes first and than our needs follow.

There is something else we have to pay attention too with the construction of the Lord's prayer. That touches the sequence of the first three petitions. In that Christ places the hallowing of God's name first. How could it be different? I cannot pray for the coming of Fathers Kingdom when his name is not hallowed on earth? There, where his name is hallowed, comes his Kingdom. That cannot break through when God's name is blasphemed and mocked? So it is also with the third petition. Father's will can only be done on earth where his Kingdom comes and his name is hallowed. For where Fathers name is hallowed and his Kingdom comes, there the citizens of that Kingdom do his will happily and readily.

There is still another point you have to pay attention too when it is about the sequence of the petitions of the perfect prayer. Christ connects very close to the law of his Father. There is a close connection between law and prayer. Precisely as in the

first three petitions of the Lord's prayer God is central in our prayer-attention, is that the case with the first commandments of the law of the Lord. In the first and the second commandment of the law God himself stands central for us. You shall have no other gods before Me, says the Lord in the first commandment. You shall not make a graven image of Me. And is in third commandment God's name not central for us? Is this also not valid for the fourth commandment about sabbath? In the whole first table of the law the Lord God puts himself in the centre.

Now to that Christ closely connects in this first petition. There it is also about God's name. God's Kingdom and God's will. So Christ has in the construction of the Lord's prayer connected himself closely to the law of God.

After we have seen which an holy sequence there is in the perfect prayer and how carefully Christ constructed it, the content of this first petition asks for our attention. What does the Lord Christ mean when He teaches us to pray for the hallowing of Fathers name? Is that name not holy? Can the holiness of that name be increased? We will with an example make it clear to you what Christ here means. Congregation, take the sun. It has been created by God with the light it radiates. That does not for one moment become more or less. As always the sun beams forth its glorious light over this world. But between us and the sun a layer of cloud can slide. Also fogs can take away our view of the sun. They can diminish its glow for us. So it is also with God's holy name. That name is holy for God is holy. But people can defile and violate that shining holy name of God. Anti-godly powers, coming up from hell, darken the glory of God's name on this world.

In this first petition you pray against this with all your power. Against the darkening and the defilement of God's holy name in this world. Here you beseech that God's name, holiness and glory, again will shine over this world. Contrary against all the mutilation and defilement of that name. Your Saviour here lays the the holiness of Fathers name on your heart. This has to be most important to you. Because of that He teaches you to pray. You must know the meaning of the word hallowing in the Scriptures? It not so easy to express this in words. But especially because Christ lets us begin praying with the prayer of hallowing God's name, we feel prompted to reflect upon it.

✓ Congregation, holy has in the Scriptures always the original meaning of setting apart. Apart of the godlessness and wickedness of this world. At the same time there lies a positive meaning in like: the devotion to God. Directing yourself to God. You find this word with its double meaning of the setting apart and the devotion especially in the Old Testament. It speaks of holy things as an example the ark of God or the incense altar. They are things which God seized for his service. Take the priests and the Levites. They are holy persons which God had set apart from the people of Israel and devoted them to his service. They stand under the seizure of God's holiness. So the Lord wants to be hallowed by people in his service. He wants to be acknowledged by them in his own majesty and holiness.

There are some speaking examples in the history of the people of Israel. Think about what happened during the journey in the desert at Kades. When the people there had a shortage of water God charged Moses and Aaron to speak to the rock. Then water would flow from the rock. Moses did not speak to the rock, but struck it. There came water, abundantly even, but God's anger burned against Moses. Hear what the Lord said: Because you did not trust in Me enough to honour Me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I gave them. Numbers 20 verse 12.

Here you are at the heart of the meaning of the word hallowing. Moses did not let God be God before the people of Israel. He did not hallow God, did not acknowledge his Godly holiness, in the giving of his instruction. He did not dedicate himself fully in the doing of what God had instructed him to do. He struck the rock instead of speaking to it. With that he violated God's holiness.

You find the same in the story of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, in Leviticus 10. They brought unauthorized fire on God's altar. That is why God killed them by lightning. They died before the Lord, the Scriptures say. Hear to what God spoke through Moses to Aaron: Among those who approach Me, I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honoured. (verse 3) God wants to be acknowledged reverently in his godly majesty and holiness. Apply all this to the first petition, congregation. In that you pray for the hallowing of God's name. Here your Saviour sets that Father name, which He has taught you in the address of the Lord's prayer, in a great perspective. It is an affectionate name, that Father name. You call on Him as his children. He lays a close connection of trust between Him and you. However you may not forget for a moment, that our Father in heaven is an exalted and holy Father. The splendour of that intimate name has to be proclaimed over the whole world. When the Lord revealed that intimate and loving name with the word Jahveh first to Moses, he immediately added: Moses, take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing. is holy ground. Where God reveals his name, it is fitting for Moses to be reverent and adorable to that name. Our Saviour wants to teach us with the first petition that our heavenly Father at the same time God is to whom praise and adoration is due. That is why Christ immediately after the address Our Father, let follow the petition of the hallowing of that name.

Congregation, that also means, that we lift up God's holiness over the world and proclaim his greatness and majesty. His name is greater than all names of men. You know how Islam upholds the name of Allah above everything. We as Christians can learn from this. And how much more glorious is the name of our Lord than the stiff and unmovable Allah of the Muslims. Through the ages names of people have been exalted, like flags, above this world.

Think about names like Nebuchadnezzar, Ceasar Augustus, Napoleon Bonaparte and those of Hitler and Lenin. Names of people highly exalted by the nations of this world. What is left of the

bearers of these names? They are inserted in the history books and decayed in the dust of the earth. After a short or long period of time they became only history. High above all human names we may exalt the name of our God and King. To do this freely and powerfully, we pray: Hallowed be Thy Name.

Your confession explains this first petition, and also the next one, in a very fine manner. It splits each separate petition of the Lord's prayer in a few separate petitions. By this it shows what a deep content each of the petitions have in the Lord's prayer. It also does this in the first petition. Each of the separate petitions begin in answer 122 with the word "Grant" First: grant that we rightly know Thee. Then we ask to sanctify God in all his works. You could also place the word "grant" before this. In the third place we ask: Grant that we may direct our whole life to the honouring and praising of God's name.

What lies there a pressing appeal on the Lord as we in the first place ask: Grant we may rightly know Thee. Congregation, here you stand, as prayers before God throne. You addressed Him in your prayer with: Our Father. Now the first thing you asked of Him is: give us the grace, that before all things we learn to know Thee as our Father.

Don't we know God? Haven't we just called Him by his Father name? Are we praying to a strange and to us an unknown God? Why do we have to pray for this? Well, congregation here it is about the nature of our knowing of the Father. It is not about a knowing of God that pacifies our curiosity. Here we also do not ask to be allowed to penetrate in the depths of God. Here it is in the confession about a knowledge of faith. Here I pray to learn to know my Father in the practise of my daily life. Here I ask to learn to know in the heights and depths of my life. Here your confession does not teach to pray for a theoretical knowledge of God but for a finding, a practical knowledge. Here you pray to learn to know God in his grace and his mercy. You could have heard a lot about somebody and have read about him, but if you than meet him personally it is still different. You take a look at him in an other way. Grant that we may rightly know Thee, you pray here, in the happy days of your life but also in the days of sorrow. In healthy days but also in the days of sickness and worry. Let us learn to know Thee in all the situations of our lives as our Father in your covenant.

Congregation, what governs our life? What are we pursuing? What is it all about in our lives? Does materialisme rule our lives? Is it about that people honor us or find us to be nice? Why do we go to church and read the Scriptures? Who and what is central in our lives? Here we pray, grant us first that we rightly know Thee. Thee. Our Father. Before and above all other things in our lives. If it is about that in our lives, than we become more and more desirous to learn to know the Father from up close. From his Word and his promises. From his guidance of our lives. In his love and in his trust. In our walking with Him in the covenant. In what He means to us in our lives. Because of that, let this first petition live in your hearts

congregation. Father grant, that we learn to know Thee in the treasures of your covenant. Then we do not go to church and to the Lord's Supper out of habit, but to meet our Father there in the proclamation of his promises and in the sealing of this in the Lord's Supper. Then we time and again are looking forward to the Lord's Supper as a pinnacle in our life in faith. Then God is for us the living God, our Father in Jesus Christ. This first petition pushes us to the surrender of our lives to Him. So our confession lays in this first petition Father's honour and Father's love on our hearts.

2. Then also you cannot refrain from proclaiming Father's honour and majesty to the outside. That is the second part of what answer 122 brings to our attention. Also there we could add the word "Grant". Grant that we Thee, our Father, sanctify, glorify and praise Thee in all Thy works. In all those works of Thee in which your omnipotence, goodness, righteousness, mercy and truth, shine gloriously. Your confession is so filled of God's glory, that it just about stumbles over the words. It wants to show you how great and glorious your Father is in all his virtues and works. We have not only learned to know Him out of his Word but also out of his works in creation and re-creation. You should pay attention to what a clear order the Catechism has brought in the summation of God's works and virtues. The first three: God's omnipotence, God's wisdom and goodness refer clearly to God's mighty creation work. In them those three attributes shine gloriously. Take the atom. What an unmeasurable powers are locked up in it. It is one of the greatest works of God's hands. Beside this put the web of a spider or look at God's great animals like the elephant and the giraffe. They are all the work of his omnipotence, wisdom and goodness. Consider the greatness of space, of the constellations like the Milky Way and the heavenly bodies that move within it. All of this are the mighty works of God. Together we have read Psalm 8. Hear the poet of this Psalm praise and laud God because of the greatness of his works. With the summation of it David becomes estatic. He cries out: O, Lord our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. You have set your glory above the heavens. Besides this he then proclaims so tenderly God's glory in the creation of us, children of men. He sings: From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise. What a beautiful Psalm. David begins this Psalm by proclaiming the praise of God's name in his works. He ends with this too. At the finish of this Psalm he cries anew:
O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. Congregation, especially in our time God's omnipotence, wisdom and goodness in his works become well known. In these times the treasure-rooms of God's creation are opened. Science penetrates in the depth of God's creation. Before we pointed at the atom. We also point out to you the penetration of science in the early beginning of human life. What a responsibility lays all this on the men and women, who in science and experiments are busy with God's work in his creation. We also think about the environment that in these times asks and gets

so much attention. We as christians also have to take great care of this part of God's creation. The sloppy and destroying manner in which we go about the environment is the opposite of the praising and lauding of God in his creation. This second "Grant" lays God's creation work close to our hearts. This is also valid for the last three attributes of God which your confession here names: his righteousness, mercy and truth. This especially in regard to God's work in the history of this world. A christian reads his newspaper attentively. He may ask of his newspaper to describe to him the happenings of this world in the light of God's Word. That newspaper reports to us, if all is well, his mercy and truth in the daily happenings. Lord, we pray in this first petition hallow your name in the governing of the nations, in the leading of this world to the great finish, to the new heaven and the new earth. To your victory over the ungodly and demonic powers in this world. Lord, we pray: Aren't Thou governing this world? Haven't Thou shown your righteousness in the sweeping away of the blasphemers of your name, of the tyrants who have harassed your mankind? Where are they now, congregation, tyrants like Pharaoh of Egypt, the blasphemer of God's name: Goliath? Rulers like Napoleon and Hitler?

Lord, Haven't Thou saved in thy mercy your people Israel time and again? Haven't Thou kept thy church through the ages in your mercy amid persecution and oppression? Haven't Thou let your truth be triumphant over all the falsehoods of men? There lies in this petition a powerful eschatologic purpose. Here you pray the world to its end, to the new Jerusalem with its golden streets and pearly gates. Here you think about Revelations 6, the opening of the book with the seven seals, which there is described. When you pray: Hallowed be Thy Name, you pray for the breaking open of those seals, for the riding out over this world by the horses of the judgment-day. But at the same time you pray for the riding out of the horseman(rider) on the white horse, which leads, which rides out victoriously and so that he is victorious. He, your Saviour, who lays this petition on your lips, is the rider who leads. He leads this world to the finish. You are not only spectators from a distance looking at what is happening on this world. This first petition involves you with all its power. You are in this petition God's co-workers in the preparing of this world for the finish.

3. Now Lordsday 47 comes to the last "Grant" that lies in this first petition. We pray as last: Grant us also that we may so direct our whole life-our thoughts, words and actions-that Thy Name is not blasphemed because of us but always honoured and praised. God's holy name can be because of our sinful doings be blasphemed. Is that not shameful? Here your confession clearly alludes to David's sinning with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah. At this occasion the prophet Nathan flung in his face: But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the Lord show utter contempt.

Congregation, you live in a glass house. Your neighbours, your colleagues, the people around you are watching you. Is that alone

not enough reason to pray with this third "Grant" that because of us God's name is not blasphemed but honoured and praised? Grant that we may direct our lives to this. The old text of the Catechism here used two words: Grant that we may arrange and aim our lives that because of us Thy name be praised. It is the image of someone who lays an arrow on a bow and carefully arranges it and aims it to its target. So the first petition wants to see your life-style: as a careful aiming and arranging of your life to God's honour. That is what you pray for with this first petition. In this you ask: Lord, grant that through me, a sinful and weak child of Thine, your holy name still be honoured and praised.

When you pray this with heart and soul, God will hear this and then from you as congregation of Christ great power will go out in this world. A while ago we ask for your attention to the opening of the seals in Revelations 6. There are 6 of them. Later in Revelations 8 the seventh seal is opened. You know: there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. The angels got a lump in their throats because of what was going to happen. For an angel now comes to hurl the fire of the altar on the earth. That is the fire of the prayers of God's church. There came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake on the earth. God's last judgments begin. Heaven held unto its heart. It is the hearing of the first petition which now begins. Holy, holy, holy, cry the seraphs, is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory. Now this will become reality on the last day. Congregation, upon your prayer, the hearing of this first petition:
Father, hallowed be Thy Name.

Amen.

Lordsdays 48.

The second petition: Thy kingdom come, o Lord.

Sermon by the late	Reading: Revelations 19: 11 - 21
Dr. R.H. Bremmer	Text: Lordsdays 48,
Enschede,	Psalm 89: 1, 5,
The Netherlands.	After the law: Hymn no compareble
Translated by	After the creed: Hymn 43: 1,
Ralph Winkel,	Psalm 122: 1,2,3,
Edmonton,	Hymn: no compareble
Alberta.	Hymn: no compareble

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

A while ago we have read that mighty vision from Revelations 19. Here John sees a white horse rushing into the world. White is the color of victory in Revelations. The rider, who sits on it, judges the world and makes war in righteousness. He looks majestic, his eyes are like a blazing fire and on his head are many crowns and He has a name that no-one knows but Himself. The robe He wears is dipped in blood and now comes his name: the Word of God. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the gentiles. And hear, congregation, what is written on his thigh: King of Kings and Lord of Lords. It is clear, that John sees Christ in a vision in his victorious way through the history of the world. What a speed has this rider and He runs over all the opposition. Who can stop Him? Sometimes we think: what will be happen to God's cause in this world? Will Christ find faith when He returns? We live in a world, here in Western Europe, where unbelief increases. How many have said farewell to faith and to God's church? And yet: this rider goes out to be victorious. It is the same horseman who John saw in Revelations 6 at the opening of the first seal. He also rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest. About Him you have to think when Christ teaches us to pray in the Lord's prayer: Thy Kingdom come. In this petition it is about the conquering power of Jesus Christ in his Kingdom. He teaches us to pray for the coming of his Kingdom against all opposition. It is about that we keep pace with this rider in his speed to the victory.

Christ has given this second petition a separate place in the Lord's prayer. In the first petition we have asked God for the hallowing of his name. That is first and foremost. How could we pray for the coming of God's Kingdom if we not hallow and put his name central above all in our prayer? In the third petition we pray that God's Kingdom indeed seizes our lives through the doing of God's will. And between this first and this third petition, Christ now lays this second petition on our lips. Lord God, we now pray: let thy glorious Kingdom come over the whole world. Let the rider on the white horse ride out and walk over all your opponents. Lord God, throw the kingdom

of satan down and let your Kingdom be victorious. For that govern us through your Spirit and your Word. Let this whole earth be filled with your fear so that the perfection of your Kingdom comes and Thou be will be all in all. Congregation, what is there a fine resemblance between the rhyming of this petition, which also goes back to Luther and the way in which your confession explains this second petition in Lordsday 48. With one glance you see it. Today we speak to you about

THE PETITION FOR THE COMING OF GOD'S KINGDOM.

1. Through our personal lives;
2. Through churchlife;
3. With the view to the finish.(completion)

1. Here Christ teaches you to pray: thy Kingdom, the Kingdom of God, come. Surely, God is King. The Psalms speak about this in an impressive manner. Take the beginning of Psalm 93: The Lord reigns He is robed in majesty and is armed with strength The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved. Or Psalm 95: For the Lord is a great God. The great King above all gods. In his hands are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to Him. The sea is his, for He made it, and his hands formed the dry land. And hear Psalm 97 exult: The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad, let the distant shores rejoice. Or Psalm 99: The Lord reigns, let the nations tremble; He sits enthroned between the cherubim, let the earth shake. These " king " psalms sing about God's royal glory, as the Creator of heaven and earth. If you want to see something of that royal glory of God, you have to turn to the first chapters of the Scriptures. There God's creation-glory is described. He created heaven and earth and reigns over them. And not only that. He made man to be his viceroy over this earth. God spoke to man:
Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over all creatures that move along the ground. Hear Psalm 8 sing about this: You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet. (verse 6) So God reigns over the creation with man as his viceroy.

Our old reformed theologians named this kingdom of the Lord over all things: the Kingdom of his power. Powerfully God reigns over his world in the beginning of the history of man. Not over the earth alone the Lord reigns as King. Also over the heavens He has dominion. There legions of angels sing the praise of Him, who sits on his throne.

So it was in the beginning of the history of the world. But it did not remain like this. Congregation, you know what happened in heaven. There came a revolt against God, rebellion against the King of the world. Not for nought does your confession here in Lordsday 48 draw satan as the great enemy of God, as it calls us to pray: destroy the works of the devil, every power that raises itself against Thee. He is the murderer of men from the

beginning. There, in heaven, he glanced jealously at God on his throne. Envy and pride were turbulent in that shining spirit of the throne. He wanted to be like God. At that same moment the revolution began among God's liturgic spirits there in the heaven above. John says in Revelations 12 verse 8: And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. In those few words John described the terrible fight which began in heaven when the devil rebelled against God. John continues: he was hurled to the earth with his angels. The revolution was banned from heaven. This remained the undamaged Kingdom of God. Then the fight moved to the earth. The devil took man with him in the fall. God's viceroy rebelled against his Creator. The rebellion against God moved from heaven to the earth.

It did not stay with the fall of the first men.

Adam in his fall towed all of mankind along. What a powers and might satan mobilized against God. Since that time demonic powers work in this world. A stream of godlessness flows over this world. The earth has become occupied territory by the devil. John describes this to us in that same Revelations 12, in which he drew the revolt. He says there in verse 12: he is filled with fury, because he knows his time is short. What is that a profound word. The fury of the devil intensifies correlating with the time for he knows it is short. Does not history show an increase of satan's activity as the coming of our Saviour is ever coming nearer?

Perhaps you may ask yourself: Is God not King anymore? Has satan destroyed that glorious Kingdom of God? Did the Psalms of a while ago sing for nought about the God's majestic dominion over this world? Has the prince of this world, as the Scriptures call him, won the struggle?

Congregation, God would not be God, if He would have left it all. What do you think? The King of this world let his dominion over this world taken be out of his hands? That is what satan wanted. But then he did not think correctly. God is King. He does not let his royal dominion be taken from his hands. Indeed, the earth has become occupied territory through the fall of men. Immediately after the fall He began to establish a bridgehead on this world. You know: when in 1944 the allied forces had a bridgehead on continental Europe, in principal the Germans had lost the war. It took nearly another year before they were forced to surrender, but in fact they already lost the battle when the allies came ashore in Normandy.

This is also the way with the Kingdom of God. Right after the fall the Lord established a bridgehead in this world. In the mother-promise this was already proclaimed. God then already promised that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. God with this promise immediately began to bring his Christ into this world. The whole Old Testament shows how God's Kingdom then already broke through in this world.

Congregation, but now, it was not only about a Kingdom of God's power. After the fall into sin it was not only about God's dominion over the creation. Now God goes to win, hearts, sinful

hearts of men for his Kingdom. Now He seizes through the power of his grace those hearts for himself and for his cause. We saw at the beginning of the sermon that the old reformed theologians God's governing of the creation named that the Kingdom of his power. Now for the seizing by God, the winning by God of the hearts of men for his Kingdom, they also had a speaking expression. They called that the Kingdom of God's grace, a striking naming. But you have to pay attention that meanwhile God's governing of the creation continued. God did abdicate after the fall as King of this world. He put his power over against the fury of the devil. He emphasized this in his graceful winning of the hearts of men. Now it goes by the way of his grace. Through his Spirit.

If you read against the background of that struggle of God with the devil the Old Testament, this shows God's glory in his graceful dominion over men. On the one side it shows us how the devil mobilizes his henchmen. Think about the building of the tower of Babel: Come, let us build a city with a tower and that we make a name for ourselves, they said in that anti-god Babel. But God scattered them to all directions. Think about the world-kingsdoms of Egypt, Babel and Assyrie. Pharaoh used all his effort to destroy Israel. Think about that proud world kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar. What was that bridgehead that God established in Israel in this world vulnerable and weak. For ages God's Kingdom hinges on that vulnerable Israel in this world.

Congregation, but God continues. He worked towards the coming of his Messiah. He did not give the devil an opportunity to break his Kingdom. For his Son, the Messiah comes in this world. In your Saviour God's Kingdom stands alive before you. O yes, it is a different Kingdom than what Israel expected. They dreamed of an earthly kingdom, at the level of the kingdoms of this world. They thought about an earthly Messiah-empire, the restoration of the old kingdom of David. Israel expected a kingdom that would break the power of the Roman worldempire. It did not have an eye for the coming of the Empire of God's grace in Christ. The Pharisees asked Christ when the Kingdom of God would come. What has your Saviour given them a fine answer. He answered: The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say: "Here it is" or "There it is" because the Kingdom of God is within you. Luke 17: 20,21. It stood there bodily before them in the person of Jesus Christ. Even John the Baptist had difficulty recognizing the grace character of the Kingdom of Christ. When he heard of the Saviour's action in miracles and preaching but not through power, he had his disciples ask: Are You the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else? Christ then gave a royal answer to that question. Go, He said to John's disciples, and report him what you hear and see, the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. So your Saviour lets you see how the Kingdom of God itself in Him opens the way with the glad tiding of the forgiveness of sins. In his miracles He reveals the redeeming power of the God's Kingdom.

Those miracles emphasized the visibility of the restoration of life through God's grace.

Now you also see the depth of this second petition in the Lord's prayer. There they are standing before your Saviour, his disciples.

Listen He teaches them to pray: Thy kingdom come. He annexes them with this petition for the coming Kingdom. He seized their hearts through his grace. Now He employs them through this petition for his Kingdom. Later on He sends them out with the great commission: Go then, make all the nations into my disciples, include them in my Kingdom by baptizing them. And remember: To Me is given all the power in heaven and on earth.

I am standing behind you in the struggle which now comes to continue my Kingdom in this world. After this the book of Acts of the Apostles shows the persevering power of Christ's Kingdom. You could typify that whole book with the one little word "speed". With great speed the Kingdom perseveres from Jerusalem to Rome, the heart of the empire. It goes here as with the stone which Nebuchadnezzar saw rolling down from the mountain and which ground up whatever was in its way. Here also think about the horseman out of Revelations 19. It storms through history of this world, with his blazing eyes and the royal crowns on his head. No power in the world can stop Him. He kicks everything upside down what holds Him up. Congregation, He also wants to take you along in his speed, the speed of the Kingdom.

To this the beginning of answer 123 connects. Just as in the first petition of the Lord's prayer, the Catechism splits this petition in a few separate questions to the Lord. Here is the first one: Rule us by thy Word and Spirit that more and more we submit to Thee. The rider of Revelations 19 here takes your hand. He takes you with Him in his speed. He pulls you away from your uninterest. He needs you. He mobilizes you for his mighty cause in this world.

Congregation, here you pray against yourself. Take us with you, you pray here, in the speed of your Kingdom. Lord, we so easily stand aside. We are so taken by our own causes. So often we are not interested in your Kingdom. Lord, rule us by Thy Word and Spirit. Break our old nature. Renew our hearts so that it glows for the cause of your Kingdom. Here you pray against all the "I made it" and self-complacency. Here you pray against being on a side track.

Here you pray, rule us by Thy Word and Spirit. Not: the gentiles or the unbelievers. No, rule us, churchpeople, by Thy Word and Thy Spirit. Your confession here points to Psalm 119 verse 5: Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees.

Does that live in your hearts? Here we also think about Psalm 86 verse 11: Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth, give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.

2. So Christ teaches us to let us be included personally with whole our heart with the progress of his Kingdom. But answer 123 is not finished with this. There lies in that petition for the coming of the Kingdom still another question to God.

You also pray: Preserve and increase Thy church; destroy the

works of the devil and every power that raises itself against Thee.

May be you ask yourself: what has the church to do with the Kingdom of God? Quite often these are played off against each other. With the Kingdom of God many christians think about the spontaneous enthousiasm in being a christian. They than only think about the winning of people for Christ.

But the church? In the eyes of many it is a stiff institution. Actually they find it behind the times. Going to church? Listening to sermons? Going to Catechism classes? Has that something to do with the speed of the rider on the white horse with his blazing eyes? Yes, surely, congregation, this has something to do with this. It could not have been better formulated that here in answer 123. Pay attention to those two words which this answer puts side by side: Preserve and increase Thy church.

You pray for both with an eye on the coming of the Kingdom. Someone rightly said: The church is the fire of the Kingdom. How could that Kingdom come, how could Christ win hearts in this world for his cause if there was no church? Here, in the church, hearts of people are won and held unto for the cause of Christ. Here Sunday after Sunday the gospel is preached. Here the sacraments are administered. Here Christ has the offices of minister of the Word and elders and deacons gather his flock. From here He send them into the world to be fighters for his cause. Those two words preserve and increase Thy church compliment each other beautifully.

The one definitely does not go without the other. God's church cannot be increased if at first it is not gathered and preserved through the Word, the gospel. We cannot fight for the increase of God's church if the preservation is not close to our hearts. In a special manner your confession here unites the statistics in the church with the dynamics. You never should be to be too occupied with one of these aspects. They are both united in Christ's church-gathering work. He preserves his church and He increases his church. In this petition you pray for both. Here you pray: Lord preserve your church in these times of faith-apostasy and church-desertion. Lord, hold unto it with the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. Lord, let heresy not get a foot in the door in your church. Preserve it, Lord, with the pure preaching of the gospel.

When you pray like this for the preservation of the church, then as a result you will work with all your power to its upbuilding. Then you give yourself with the talents which Christ gives to each one of us. What is there much to do in God's church in the service of the offices. In the visiting of the sick and the lonely. And in among each other strengthening in society work. In the caring for the continuation of churchlife through the offering of your gifts. Here you pray against all church indifference, all carelessness in regard to churchlife.

Besides this you also pray: Lord, increase thy church. That is the dymanic in the petition for the coming of the Kingdom. You should not let that element in the church-gathering work of Christ be seized by pentacostal groups and free congregations.

It is not true that the stimulation atmosphere (charismatic?) would be nicer than a good church service with its preaching and use of the sacraments. Also pay attention, that answer 123 speaks of your church. Here we do not pray for our church or the church but for your church. Here we lay God's church to his heart. Look at that: increase thy church. If we only pray for the preservation and fight for that, then we may fall into the danger to be satisfied with our own snug little circle. Then you take the risk of petrification and withering. The preserving is the content of our petition but so is also the increase. Lord, we pray then, keep us from churchism. Keep us from the narrowing of our view. Lord, give us that we keep in mind the width and the continuation of your Kingdom. Include us in your oecumenical church-gathering work also in these times over this whole world. Make us active for mission work. Give that we get involved in evangelism projects. Let our witness also sound in the political and social life. Congregation, let us not stay with the old because it is old. Let us not seek the newness only because it is new. Lord, teach us to keep both in mind.

Also in this petition we pray for the youth of God's church. Lord, think about the lambs of your sheep in these times. Lord, there is so much coming at them. They are being drawn to unbelief and normlessness in their young lives. Lord, they are your children; children of the covenant. Thy Kingdom come, Lord also with and through the youth of the church. Give that we do not stand in their way by not listening to their questions. Teach us to answer their questions and to take them seriously. Also teach us Lord, to answer in such a way that they persevere in your Word and your church. Here your confession points to that wonderful church-psalm 122: Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: may those who love you be secure. May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels. (verses 6 and 7)

Let there not come an abyss between the generations in your church. Let old and young understand each other and hold unto each other. Let so peace bloom in Jerusalem.

So in this second petition we pray for the increase of the kingdom. With that we also pray against all the wicked powers which threaten God's church. Your confession formulates that, as being ready to fight, to destroy the works of the devil, every power that raises itself against Thee; defeat all the wicked plans which are contrived against thy holy Word. The men who drafted the Catechism, knew really well of the threatening of God's church by the devil. Rightly someone wrote: They took the devil seriously. Like: they counted on the fact that he exists and that he is frightfully active. With that they were in full agreement with Luther. Did he not throw his inkwell against the wall when he thought to see the devil? Destroy, Ursinus and Olevianus have us pray, destroy the works of the devil. Over against God's Kingdom are the works of satan. The Kingdom is a glorious oneness. The devil only has works, incidental aggression.

Answer 123 emphasizes one of the aspects of those satanic works.

It asks to destroy all the conspiracies against God's holy Word. Congregation, here you are called, to put your self against satan. Yes we know many modern christians do not want to know anything about the devil. They find that an oldfashioned belief. At the most they will speak of the satanic, the demonic. The Scriptures show something different. Behind the demonic stands the spirit of the abyss.

Lord, here we pray, Lord destroy his wicked works. Ruin all the plans he devises against thy church. Lord God, the world is full of chaos and destruction. Your great adversary makes himself strong to destroy the world through violence and terror. Lord God, you know how many young lives he ruins with enslavement and terrible diseases. Lord God, defeat his wicked plans which he contrives against thy holy Word. The men who wrote these words in that turbulent sixteenth century knew of murder-scaffolds and persecutions. Every age has its own revelation of satanic powers. Is this not enough reason also today to pray as Christ's congregation against satans plans?

3. Answer 123 ends impressively. From the centre of the by the devil threatened world the prayer of God's church reaches out to that great finish: till the perfection of your Kingdom comes, in which Thou will be all in all. In this second petition you also pray for the triumph of God's Kingdom.

Thy Kingdom come, Christ teaches us to pray. That is also now: Lord, we still are in the middle of the battle. You put us on the front of your Kingdom. But the rider of the white horse has written on his thigh: King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He rides right over the beast and the false prophet. They were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulphur. To Christ the victory.

Brothers and sisters. Do you live and fight and pray from this perspective? Does you prayer reach out to Christ's great day? The praying of this second petition also brings self-visitation (zelfbeproeving) Are you in your prayers and in your lives conform with your prayer on Christ's front? If necessary, then now is the time to revise your life and your prayers.

To convert yourself to militant citizens of the Kingdom of your King. Thy Kingdom come. Lord God, bring this world to its finish. Lord God, let the day of your Son come soon.

Lord God, we long for this. We long to see your face, your godly and glorious face. Thy Kingdom come, o Lord.

Amen.

Lordsday 49

The third petition: Without any contradiction.

Sermon by the late	Reading: Romans 12: 1-12
Dr. R.H.Bremmer,	Text: Lordsday 49,
Enschede,	Psalm 99: 1, 6.
The Netherlands.	After the law: Psalm 101: 1,5,6.
	After the creed: Psalm 103: 8.
Translated by	Psalm 86: 1,4,6.
Ralph Winkel,	Psalm 119: 13.
Edmonton, Alberta.	Hymn: no comparable.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

You all know the story of young Samuel, who as altar-boy helped the high priest Eli. One night he heard a voice which called Samuel.

On the advice of Eli he than answered: Speak, Lord for your servant is listening. Samuel then received that horrible message over the house of Eli because of the wickedness of Eli's sons. See, says the Lord, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle. God proclaimed his judgment over Eli's house. He has sworn to the house of Eli: The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering. (1 Samuel 3: 14)

Samuel hardly dared to pass this message on. So horrible it is. But Eli pressed him: What is the Word, that He spoke to you? Do not hide it from me. Then Samule told Eli everything about what the Lord had said to him, without concealing anything from him. Eli answered: He is the Lord; let Him do what is good in his eyes.

Eli resigned himself to what the Lord had said. Congregation, that was a false submission. He was not startled. He did not humble himself before the Lord on account of the conduct of his sons and on account of his own weak upbringing. No, he lets the judgment of the Lord come over him passively. He is the Lord; let Him do what is good in his eyes. There are many christians who have this conception about the third petition of the Lord's prayer. Thy will be done: let happen to me what has to happen to me. To give a non-biblical example: when the Titanic, that famous passenger liner, on its first voyage was ripped open by an iceberg and sank in the waves, a clergyman stepped forwards and cried loudly: thy will be done. This disaster, he wanted to say with this, has been destined for us.

Is that the intention of this petition? Do we pray here for a passive submission in God's holy will? Congregation, that is not Christ's intention. Pay attention to the last words of this petition, to the example which is there put before us: Thy will be done, says Christ, on earth as it is in heaven. Does Christ here mean to say that God his will on earth be as

that in heaven? No. your Saviour here points out to us the behaviour of the angels. They do God's will. They heartily fulfill this. They like doing nothing better. In that they are set to you as an example. We have to do God's will like the angels. We have to pray for this. It does not happen by itself our by nature corrupted and wicked will here collides with God's holy will. To have to do this, to may do this, we have to pray to our heavenly Father with all our power. So today we will consider this third petition of the Lord's prayer.
I speak to you about

THE PRAYER TO DO FATHER'S WILL.

In that we pray for:

1. not in submission;
2. in faith-obedience;
3. with an heavenly example.

1. Have you ever noticed that this third petition appears in the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6, but not in Luke 11, where Christ taught his disciples to pray anew? In Luke 11, in the verses 2 and 3 your Saviour jumps from the petition: Thy Kingdom come to: Give us this day our daily bread. Did the Saviour not find the third petition very important? That cannot be the reason. Those explainers would be right, who say that this petition actually is already included in the second. If you pray for the coming of God's Kingdom, then in that is included, that at the same time you ask that you may do the will of the Father. Yet Christ has taken this petition in Matthew 6 into the Lord's prayer. He teaches us with this to pray with power that God's Kingdom may come because of that we will do the will of the Father. Here it is about that doing. Not to be submissive to God's will.

Actually many people take this petition in the manner off: You have to approve what God in his will has decided. When somebody becomes ill and it looks like he will not get better, comforters sometimes say: you have to get to the stage, that you can say: thy will be done. Sometimes in funeral speeches there is talk like this. By itself it cannot be rejected to encourage each other to be in harmony with God's holy will. Here you may think about Job when he said: the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised. Paul writes in to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 12 vers 9, that the Lord has said to him: My grace is sufficient for you. He has learned to be in harmony with God who had given him a thorn in his flesh.

Congregation, only the Saviour does not aim at this in this petition. It is not about that we approve God's decree. So has the (dutch) rhymed version of the Lord's prayer understood it as it lets us sing in stanza 4: "It is majesty in all what Thou does, that all be submissive to this". But much closer to what the Saviour teaches us here to pray is in the last line of this stanza: and do your commands with joy.

Christ wants to teach us to pray to do those commands. Pay attention to the order of the petitions of the Lord's prayer. In this third petition Christ teaches us to pray after the question about the hallowing of God's name and also after the question for the coming of his Kingdom. First you pray that God's name be hallowed over the whole world. In that you have your own share: there you pray that because of us God's name is not blasphemed but praised. In the second place you ask for the coming of the God's Kingdom. With that you involve yourself: you pray, says Lordsday 48 that you may submit yourself to God's will. How can you ask for this, if you yourself do not do God's holy will? You could also say: that first and that second petition come to us in the third petition, in the concreteness of our existence. Father, it is our heartfelt desire that through us thy name be hallowed. Because of that teach us to do thy will day after day. And Father it is our heartfelt desire that thy Kingdom comes, also through our obedience to you. Father because of that teach us to do thy will in our concrete existence in this world. Even teach us to do thy will without any protest. Father, only thy will is good. Ours is depraved. Teach us to conquer our own will and only to obey thy will.

(*) Congregation, you are with this in the heart of the third petition. To understand this in its full depth, the old reformed theologians used a distinction, about which you may have learned in your Catechism class. They distinguished by God's will in the will of the resolution and the will of the command. With the will of God's resolution they mean God's counsel that goes over all things. God has in his counsel, in his program for the history of the world, taken up the whole course of the world history. He perseveres that counsel through his sovereign will. Here we do not ask for the perseverance of his counsel. The Lord does this Himself, regardless of what is attempted against that counsel by satan and God's enemies. In a manner of speaking the Lord will take care of this himself. He governs all things with his mighty and sovereign will.

However when your Saviour here teaches you to pray for the doing of God's will, He has an eye on the will of God's command. God has given us his commands. He has proclaimed to us his law. Christ now rouses in our heart through this petition the fervent desire that we carry out God's commands. To say it once more with another distinction of the old theologians: here it is not about the hidden will of God, about his counsel which He himself has made, but to what He has revealed to us in his law. This He has proclaimed to us and to our children.

With this the great gravity and depth come upon you in this third petition. Your confession formulates this very eloquently. It says, give that we and all people renounce our own will and without contradiction to obey your will, which alone is good. You are with the doing of God's will involved with heart and soul. Here you are addressed to your own responsibility. This third petition also brings you into conflict with yourself. It is about that you renounce your own will. That brings you into a heavy struggle with yourself. Here Christ does ask for

a passive obedience, as a soldier obeys his superiors. Command is command. No, He involves you with this in your own full responsibility over against God. Here God honours you in being created in his image.

Did Adam have difficulty with this petition in paradise? Absolutely not. Adam and Eve did not need to renounce their own will. They did God's will with joy. They did this spontaneously and with great happiness. It was the will of the Father which they as his children did heartily and with love. But now? After the fall? Do we now, as fallen sinners, God's will spontaneously? It does not even seem like it. With all our strength we go against it. Our will will of itself only evil. Our will is egoistic. We continually seek ourselves and our own advantage. Our own I dominates. Do you see the depth of the conflict that is created here? That Christ throws in our lives with this petition?

Your Saviour knows you and knows how that your own "I", your old nature, always tries to dominate. That is why He teaches you to pray: grant that we and all men may deny our own will. Here He teaches you to pray for the miracle of being born again, of the renewing of your own will. Here you pray in this "Grant" for God's spirit so that He breaks your own spirit and renews it and conforms it to God's holy will. Here you pray that this depraved and evil will of yours will agree with Father's holy will, so that you do what the Father wants you to do.

Lord, you pray here, work so powerful with your Spirit and with your Word in our hearts, that we accept the struggle with ourselves, with our own evil will and do your will again with joy.

Here your confession points to the words of Christ in Matthew 16 verse 24, where your Saviour says: If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. Here Christ puts you before the demand of self-denial and cross-bearing. Do you know what He means by this? Not, what many have made out of it: The bearing of difficulties and sorrow. No, here it is about to carry the revilement, which irrevocably will come over you, when you do God's will. If you really deny yourself and do the will of the Father, that will bring the scorn and revilement of people. This we should take upon ourselves when we deny our own will and do God's will. Someone once said: Here we pray for the hammer and the nails to nail our old nature to the cross and so to raise our new nature. We cannot avoid the conflict with our own will but dare to fight it. We cannot avoid the struggle with our own "I" but tackle it. Say it yourself: have you ever experienced anything different than that only your Father's will is good? And have you not experienced misery when you persevered in your own will? When you persevered with your marriage while your parents and the office-bearers warned you emphatically that no blessing would rest on it? Haven't you experienced misery when in business you went against God's own good will. Haven't you experienced misery when you let your children go their own way, like Eli and not warn them about the friends who enticed them from the

path of God's commandments?

Don't you pray: Thy will be done. But then it should not only be with prayer in your life, then you also have to do God's will. What do you say? That this is so difficult? That is true. It asks for struggle, but does the Lord not give you the strength to, without contradiction, do his will? Do you always suffer defeat? Does the cross of self-denial press heavily on your shoulders? Is the sin so deeply rooted in you that you cannot surmount it?

Let us then take you along to Gethsemane, to that long and heavy night of Christ's suffering. He was, just like you and me, a human being in flesh and blood. He also had difficulty with the doing of the will of his Father. He has, says Hebrews 5 verse 8: He learned obedience from what He suffered. He was a true human being and had difficulty with the will of his Father when He confronted Him in Gethsemane with his suffering. Hear Him pray on the mount of Olives: Father, if you are willing take this cup from Me; yet not my will but yours be done. (Luke 22 verse 42)

Jesus complies with the will of the Father. This He will do, if the Father keeps on giving Him the cup. So He has for us fulfilled the will of the Father in struggle and fear. He also has earned for us the strength to deny ourselves behind Him and do the will of the Father.

Very nicely your confession begins the explanation of this petition with the words: Grant that we and all men. With these words you are sheltered behind your Saviour and behind his finished work. You plead on this. That lies included in that word Grant. There is a strong pleading power in this.

Also pay attention that your confession here speaks in the plural. Grant that we and all men. Here you are united with all the believers in the community of saints before God's throne. Here your confession joins the address of the perfect prayer. You began with to say : Our Father who art in heaven.

You do not pray all by yourself, alone.

You pray in the whole great community of believers of all times and over the whole world. In that we are included when we fold our hands and pray; thy will be done. Father, you alone knows how great a difficulty each one of us has in the fulfilling of thy will. Father, you know of everyone's struggle. We lay this now collectively before your throne. What does the confession here expand the horizon of your prayer. You do not only pray with your fellow-believers about the doing of the will of your Father. You also pray this for all men. You take the whole human race before the throne of God. Here you step out of the sanctuary of the reconciliation into the world and involve all men in your prayer. God does not have a separate moral for us as christians. Once someone has said it like this: The drunk in the gutter -today we would say: the drugenslaved and the criminal- and the christian in the church are obliged to do God's will. You pray that all may deny their own will and do the will of the Father which alone is good. What lies

there a beneficial power for all men in this petition. For the whole human race which tramples on God's will and goes its own way.

2. Then suddenly your confession steps into every day life. We pray with this petition also, says answer 123, that everyone may carry out the duties to which we are called as willing and faithfully as the angels in heaven. The old text used to read office and occupation instead of duties. It is clear; we all are plain people of flesh and blood. We are standing with both feet on this earth and amid the world. Each one of us has a daily task on this earth. One in an office, the other in an factory. The one in an household, the other in a store or business. There we have to fulfil our duty. One has a profession and the other a trade. The minister has to make his sermons and the farmer has to milk his cows. The one has to take care of the household, the other is a working woman in a business or in a caring profession. We are all called in that profession or trade to do God's will. Sometimes we think, that the serving of the Lord goes on outside the business of our daily lives. Profession or trade would be out of it. That is not true. If the bicycle repair man does not do his work right and the baker does not bake good bread, he can be very pious but he does not get around to do the will of God. If a mother slaves for society-work but neglects her housekeeping, then she does not get around to do the will of the Father. This petition comesto you to sharpen you in all this, congregation. When you pray this petition, your Saviour confronts you with the reality of the day. You have to do your work willingly and loyally. At the same time here your Saviour pushes down all the sinful ambition. It is definitely not wrong when you want to climb the corperate ladder. What kind of motives drive you to this? What can jealousy be deep in our heart and drive us to always want more. The other, we think, has it better than me. What, says your Saviour here, have I not given to you that task? Be in that as faithful as the angels in heaven.

So we are as christians standing in this world. It has to be recognized that we in our daily life do the will of the Lord. Paul says in Romans 12 verse 2: Do not conform any longer to the pattern of the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will. You should not in your whole life-revelation conform to this world. You are different then all the people of this world. You have been renewed by the Holy Spirit. This also activates you. You have to, says the apostle here, test what the good, pleasant and perfect will of God is. The word that the apostle uses for testing means to say: inspect and conclude from the Word what the Lord wants from you in daily life. In these times so much comes at you. You are living in an information society. From all sides you are given information about your life in this world: in the political arena, in social problems, about your life as men and women in this world. Think about feminism and

sexuality. From all sides you are told how to arrange your life. This was also the case in the time of the first christians. So Paul encourages the Ephesians in that large world-city to strictly see to it how they lived. Not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. He then adds and today this is very opportune: Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. (Ephesians 5 : 15-17) You have, he says further, like slaves of Christ, do the will of God from your heart. (Ephesians 6:6) Let no one say, that he does not know the will of God. God has revealed that good will of Him in his Word. Here, congregation, think about Psalm 119. What a beautiful praising is this Psalm. To all perfection I see a limit; but your commands are boundless, says verse 96. The K.J.V has: exceedingly broad. To do God's will in the concrete life of every day requires the greatest care. There is enough reason to pray fo this. Scripture gives you speaking examples of this. When God instructs Moses to speak to the rock for water to appear, Moses did not speak to the rock, but he hit it with his staff. (Numbers 20: 11) A lot of water came. That is true. But you know how God took offence at him, that he did not speak to the rock. He was not allowed to enter the promised land. He did not fulfill God's will as leader of God's people. Scripture is full of such warnings. King Saul had to totally destroy the Amalekites because they had attacked Israel in the desert. You know what happened. He did not only spare the best of Amaleks sheep and cattle but also their king Agag. He wanted to show him off and with that king and his cattle as his plunder have a triumphal procession. God resented this very much. It became the beginning of the rejection of Saul's kingship. Hear what Samuel said to Saul: To obey is better than sacrafice, and to listen is better than the fat of rams. (1 Samuel 15 : 22) Saul should have served his royal office punctually. Also there are in Scripture examples of the punctual doing of God's will, which stimulate and encourage us. Here we think about Abraham in Genesis 22, an emotional example of the doing of the will of the Lord. God instructed Abraham to sacrefice Isaac as a burnt offering on one of the mountains God would tell him about. Abraham got up early, saddled his donkey, took two of his servants with him and his son Isaac. What a turmoil there had to be in Abraham. Yet he did it and also cut the enough wood for the burnt offering. If somewhere obedience to God's will is seen, that this is here. Abraham did not object. Abraham did the will of the Lord. We may think about such an example, when we pray: thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

3. So we come to the last part of what we want to discuss with you in this third petition. We saw that it is here not about a false submission, not about a passive surrender to the will of God. Here it is about faith-obedience, doing away with our own will and the doing of God's will, which alone is good, without any contradiction. Abraham's example is very eloquent. But yet we have not told you everything about the third petition. Christ himself has given us an example which exceeds that of

Abraham. He instructs us to pray to do God's will on earth as it is in heaven.

To whom else does the Saviour here refer to than to the angels in heaven? What lies there a power in that word "as". Christ does not say here: "like" in heaven, but "as" in heaven. There is strong imaginative power visible in the words: as the angels in heaven.

Of course the Saviour did not think here with the heaven only about the angels. Here you certainly may think about the saved ones above. But angels are servants of God, ambassadors of God. They give us a glorious example of the strict doing of the will of our Father without any contradiction. What beautiful examples do the Sriptures give us. Think about the angel who helped the three young men in the fiery oven in the book of Daniel. That was really something for that angel to descend in that fiery oven. But the Lord instructed him and he went. He was not afraid to do the will of the Lord. The fire did not harm him, it also did not harm those young men.

Also see the angels in the Christmas night, congregation. Luke writes, suddenly a great company of heavenly host appeared with the angel. Suddenly. When the first angel was finished speaking. At God's nod they came, those mighty angels of God. Psalm 103 verse 20 and 21 sing about them: Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. Dr Kuiper wrote with this Lordsday 49 that we do not recognize enough the importance of the angels in heaven who serve God. Also think about the angel-service at Easter when they set themselves in full rest and peace at the Saviour's grave. While sitting on a grave stone an angel proclaims the gospel of Easter to the women.

They are all wonderful examples of doing the the will of the Father perfectly. And do not forget what Revelations tells you about the glory of heaven, about the angels who are standing before God's throne and who are send to proclaim God's judgments on this earth and to execute them.

Did Christ reach to high when He made the heaven and his angels an example? No, congregation, your Saviour did not reach to high. He demands perfection from us in the service of God. But because He knows how weak we are and how often we fall short, He lays this third petition on our lips: Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Did He not by his perfect obedience obtain for us the strength to strive for that perfection? Has He not through his passive submission reconciled with God our failing in the doing of the Father's will? Does He so not have the right to charge us with this petition?

Also we we think about the parable in Luke 12 of the manager who the master has put in charge over all his servants to give them their allowance on the proper time? This manager had used his master's possessions for himself. What an horrible judgment did the master judge him with. Christ words it for us like this: the servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows.

Congregation, you know the will of the Lord, He has this clearly revealed to you in his Word. You may fold your hands and pray to do the will of your Father. Our Father, which art in heaven, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Who prays like this and also without contradiction does the will of the Father, will be called saved by Christ. But who does pray this third petition but does not live up to it, shall be beaten with many blows.

Lord, teach us to pray and to do.

Amen.

Guide my feet, O Lord, and teach me,
Be my Helper, I beseech Thee,
And unite my heart and aim
In Thy truth, to fear Thy Name.
Great Thou art, Thou shalt reward me,
In Thy mercy Thou did save
Me, Thy servant, from the grave.

Psalm 86 stanza 4.

* Both " besluit and raadsbesluit " translated as "council"
however raadsbesluit in this context could mean: predestination.
See page 417, beginning with: U bent daarmee gemeente etc.
(One third down the page)

Correction:

Last Hymn LD 45 is Hymn 47: 10
Last Hymn LD 46 is Hymn 47: 1
Last Hymn LD 47 is Hymn 47: 1,2,9,10
Last Hymn LD 48 is Hymn 47: 3
Last Hymn LD 49 is Hymn 47: 1,4,9,10

LD's 50 to 52 I caught.

Lordsday 50.

The fourth petition: Give us this day our daily bread.

Sermon by the late
Dr R.H.Bremmer
Enschede,
The Netherlands.

Reading: Deuteronomy 8: 1-20
Text Lordsday 50
Psalm 145 : 1,4
After the law: Psalm 65 : 2
After the creed: Psalm 146 : 3
Hymn : ~~no-comparable~~ 47: 1, 5, 9, 10
Psalm 36 : 2
Psalm 23 : 3.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton, Alta.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

When a priest entered the holy of the temple, he immediately was confronted with the daily bread of the Presence. Literally in the original it is: shewbread. They lay there in the holy before the face of the Lord. Exodus 25 verse 30 writes: Put the bread of the Presence before Me at all times. They lay there in two stacks of six. You understand why; for each tribe one round baked bread. Every sabbath they were renewed. The old bread was eaten by the priests. They were baked of the finest flour and sprinkled with incense. These breads of the Presence had a symbolic meaning in Israel's worship service. They attested that Israel gave back to the Lord, the bread that had received it from the Lord. They were a representation of the offering to the Lord of the daily bread. That bread of the Presence was not the only thing in the holy that had to do with the daily bread. There before the ark in the holy of holies stood a golden jar with manna. In that exactly one gomer of the miracle bread was preserved, which the Lord had "rained" over Israel in the desert. It was a lasting remembrance of God's goodness over his people in the giving of the manna bread. Is this not remarkable, congregation? Beside the things which had to do with the service of atonement and of the prayers, like the the mercy-seat above the ark and the golden altar of incense, there stood that table with the bread of the Presence and that golden jar with manna. They reminded Israel continually that it received its daily bread from the Lord. It could ask for it and thank for it. Now this is also so with the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer, which we will consider today. Between petitions as: thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven and: forgive us our debts, is the petition for bread: give us this day our daily bread. No, this it not only a petition in times of poverty and shortage. It is a question to the Lord also in these times of prosperity and in an highly industrialized society like ours. It is not only a petition for countries where there is hunger and misery, but also for us in a time of abundance. Your Saviour teaches you with this petition to live out of God's fatherhand. It is such a short petition. In our language it only has seven words. But they are rich in contents. Here you learn to pray to God the Father, as your Creator, but also to God the Son

for you receive your bread for Christ's sake. Here you also learn to pray to God the Holy Spirit. He teaches you to put your trust for your daily bread in the Lord alone and not on any creation.

So today we will speak to you about:

THE FOURTH PETITION OF THE LORD'S PRAYER.

We pay attention to this petition in relation to

1. God the Father our Creator;
2. God the Son our Redeemer;
3. God the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies us.

1. Rightly it has been pointed out, that Christ has laid a fine sequence in the petitions of the Lord's prayer. As such your Saviour is a great Architect, who has erected the building of the prayer with great care. Christ did not place these six petitions in a random manner. No, He brought a holy order in this. To this we will pay our attention. Than the meaning of this fourth petition will be emphasized.

You can arrange the six separate petitions in the Lord's prayer in what we call two prayer tables. The first table encompass the first three petitions and lays God's cause close to your heart. The second with the last three petitions concentrates you on the cause of us as being God's children.

Well, in the Lord' prayer Christ first brings the cause of God before our attention. We pray: hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. In this Christ makes God's cause ours. First of all his cause asks for our prayer-attention. And then, in the last three petitions of the Lord's prayer we at our turn make God's cause our cause. We lay our daily bread, the forgiveness of our debts and the deliverance of our temptations at the heart of the Father. Everything is about us and about ours. Now Christ makes our human causes of bread and forgiveness of debts and deliverance of temptations a cause of the Lord.

With this not everything has been said about the order of the petitions in this second prayer-table. Christ also has arranged the last three petitions carefully. First the cause of our daily bread. That is the very first we lay in this second prayer-table on God's heart. Later after this come our debt and as last the question to be delivered from the distress of temptation.

Actually is this not strange? Does our daily bread have to be first to our hearts? Is the forgiveness of our debts not more important? Should this not take the first place? And than the deliverance from the power of the evil one? Is that not more intrusive? We can imagine that you think in that direction and yet this is not right. Here you may think about what the apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15 verse 46: The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. What does the apostle mean with this? Well, very sober and clear, that when you speak about spiritual things with God, first you have to be there as a human being, have to exist. How can a person pray for forgiveness of sins if he is worn out by poverty?

How can you ask for strenght in the struggle against evil if you cannot keep up in this life? The natural is first, first you have to be a human being, you have to exist, otherwise you cannot get around to the spiritual things. Perhaps you could say it with an expression of today: Christ sets what we need all in a row for us. That is why He begins with our naked existence. Without my daily sandwich and without clothes on the body and a roof over my head, I will simply die. I have to be there. Someone formulated it very concrete: without my milk and buttermilk I never get around to the Lord supper wine. That is putting it very strong but it makes it very clear what it is all about. That is why the Lord Jesus put this fourth petition first in this second prayer-table. At the very first I come near with my plain human needs the throne of the Father. Yes, and than it is in this fourth petition about real, about plain bread. For a long time no-one had an eye for this in the church.

The roman catholic church of the middle ages understood this petition spiritual. Here it was not about real bread, about bread that comes from the bakery and is baked out of real flour, but about spiritual bread. With that one thought about Christ himself. Does He not call himself the bread of life? Here He would teach us to pray to be satiated with Him who is the bread from heaven. Others say: no, here it is about the eucharistic bread, the bread at the mass. Here we should pray to be able to celebrate the mass daily. You can ask yourself: how has it been possible that people got so far away from this fourth petition. The reason for this lay in the unbiblical spiritualization of christian life. Imagine, said people of those times, that here it would be about bread with butter and cheese. That they simply found to be unspiritual. As if, congregation, the Lord God would not be involved with our plain daily bread.

As if it would be unspiritual to ask for bread and potatoes. Here your confession radically breaks with this spiritualization in its explanation of this fourth petition. It emphasizises: provide us with all our bodily needs so that we may acknowledge that Thou are the fountain of all good. With this it takes a strong position againt that spiritualization.

Once more, God does get involved with our daily bread. The bible is plainly full of this. Your Saviour who really knew the Old Testament, knew very well how his heavenly Father is involved with our eating and drinking. Congregation, take the story of the manna in the desert of which we spoke before. What a beautiful example of God's involvement with our daily bread. It is worth the effort to remind you of this? Israel moved out of Egypt. Regardless of what you could say about Egypt, not that Israel had not enough to eat there. The land of Goshen was a very fertile land. There they had plenty of pastures and grainfields. And now they already trudged for days after the exodus out of Egypt in the desertlike steppes. You know what they did. Grumble. Did Moses guide them out of Goshen to bring them here to this barren desert? You know how the Lord then

said to Moses: I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. Exodus 16 : 4. God then let bread rain from heaven to feed the people. He also defined how much each could gather: one omer per person. Moses had a first class distribution system: a godly measure. And who greedily gathered too much discovered that it was full of maggots the following morning. God held his people to the godly measure. And who had gathered not enough still had enough the following morning. So the Lord cared for his people for 40 long years. Every morning the white manna was laying on the earth. We were reminded at the beginning of the fact, that God commanded Moses to save such an omer in a jar and lay it before God's face. Israel had to keep in mind God's good care for its daily bread.

Congregation, that manna, was not a spiritual bread. You could bake real bread with it and you can be sure that it was tasty. Ah, the whole Old Testament is full of God's good care about the daily bread for his people. Think about the story of the prophet Elijah. The ravens looked after him with food at the Kerith Ravine, when he had to flee from king Ahab. That was in the days of the great famine which God brought over Israel. Who send the ravens? The Lord. And when he came to the widow at Zarephath, the Lord again revealed with how much care He looks after his servants. Elijah could proclaim as the glad gospel to the widow: The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land. And surely the Lord kept his word.

The Lord Jesus himself shows you how God looks after the daily bread for his children. He did this some time later after He had taught his disciples this fourth petition. You still know the story of the miraculous feeding? It is not for naught in the gospel. When He had spoken to the crowd at the sea of Galilee: He asked Philip: where shall we buy bread for these people to eat? Philip finds this to be a silly question. Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread to feed this crowd, he said. And then suddenly there is Andrew with a little boy who has five small barley loaves and two small fish. You know what happened then. Under the hands of your Saviour those five loaves of bread and the two fish multiplied into more than enough to feed thousands of people. And twelve baskets were gathered so that nothing was wasted.

You may think, now yes, that were miracles by God. Israel received wonderbread and the feeding of the crowds was a miracle by Jesus. Indeed: those were great miracles. And here, in the fourth petition, it not about wonderbread but about plain simple real bread. And yet, congregation, there are enough reasons to point out to you those wonders with this fourth petition. You have to think about what Moses said in Deuteronomy 8 in regard to the manna-wonder. The Lord led them for forty years through the desert, says Moses in verse 2, to test you to know what is in your heart. He humbled Israel, Moses continues, causing them to hunger and then gave the manna, to let you know, that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.(verse 3) Your Saviour cites that

word when He hungered for forty days and forty nights in the desert. As satan hisses at Him to make bread from stones, the Saviour answers: Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. What did Moses mean and what did the Lord Jesus want to say with this word?

This: That is what not only for God to give them food. Of course that too. But not only that. He gave Israel that bread as a gift from Him. He also laid a nutritional value in it. There is an immediate connection between God's creation-power and the bread that He gives to us. That is what your Saviour had in mind when He taught us this fourth petition. It is not self evident that we receive our daily bread. As God gave Israel in his omnipotence that wonder-bread, so He also gives us our plain daily bread. It comes from Him. We may ask Him for it. You could also say it like this: if God gives Israel bread in an extraordinary way, will God then not give us bread in a normal way? Through our care and labour to speak like answer 125. What has your Saviour taken great care in choosing the words of this petition. He teaches us to pray the Father for our bread. What kind of food is more common than bread? It is being eaten all over the world. Daily we eat it in our prosperous society, but the Chinese in Asia and the Bantuus in South Africa too. And what lies there in that one word "bread" much meaning. What a lot has to happen before it lies on our plate. The grain has to be sown and harvested, treshed, milled and baked. Your heavenly Father looks after all that. As He gave manna through his allmighty power as a wonder, so He cares with that same allmighty power that daily there is bread for you on the table. Along all those various ways in which it comes to being. Congregation, you must understand, that Christ with that word bread not only had in mind your bread. It encompasses everything what we as a human being need in this world. Luther said: Christ does not only teach us to ask for bread, but also for a dear wife or man, for good medicine and for children. When we are sick we sometimes race to the doctor and forget the Lord. Is medical science a thing that is outside God's care for his children? Did He not lay that wonderful medicine penicillin in the creation? And the radiation treatments?

Indeed: every word in this fourth petition has its own meaning. Take the word "daily". We pray: give us this day our "daily" bread. The word that Christ uses in the Greek text only appears once in the New Testament. And that is especially here. It has been translated to "daily", but newer translations say: it means what you daily need. We found in the new edition on the Luther-Bible the translation: our needed bread (Unser notig Brot). That is a beautiful translation. It is about the bread that I need "today". If you want to put it in military terms: the daily ration. What Christ here means can be very nicely explained (elucidated) in what is written in Proverbs 30.

There Solomon says: give me neither poverty or riches, but give me only my daily bread. The African Bible has: let me enjoy the bread that is intended for me. The proverb poet says; Or I may become poor and steal and so dishonour the name of

my God. But also for riches Solomon prays, so that we not disown you and say: Who is the Lord? For then you do not need Him anymore. Has the modern prosperity state not contributed that many have been alienated from God?

Give us this day our daily bread, Christ teaches us to pray. It is about what I exactly need every day to fulfill my task in this world and in God's church. It sees on the ration, that we as soldiers of Christ need for being at the front of his Kingdom. No more and no less.

Of course, that is here in the Netherlands again different than that of a hundred years ago. We live in another social system. We work in a society with collective provisions, with computers and with the most refined salary calculations. There is a study about what people earned through the ages in the country-side of Overijssel. (An eastern province of the Netherlands)

From that we learned that the wages in this province remained about the same from 1500 till 1800. That was in fact a static society. Our social system is much more dynamic. But our need to live as God's children before his face in his service is the same as then. The great Economist cared then and cares now for his children. Whatever the social system may be, Christ teaches us to pray: Our Father who art in heaven, give us this day out daily bread. Father, give us, the wages and prices by which we with our families or as singles can live and serve Thee with our possessions. Give us today our needed bread.

Give that we by praying like this and keep on praying, recognize Thou as the origin of all good. Give that we acknowledge Thee as our Creator-Father as the One who looks after us from day to day. What do you think, congregation? Is there in our prosperity system no needs for some? Is there no poverty in the Netherlands? As it is a different kind of poverty than in times gone by. Are there not unemployed among us? And if it goes well with us, does our prayer for our daily bread not imply that we ask and receive from the Lord so much, that we can fulfill our tasks in the great Kingdom of God properly?

2. In this fourth petition we pray God the Father as our Creator for what we need daily for His service. For our daily ration. We also pray this petition in our relation to God the Son as our Redeemer. There is in answer 125 a clear pointing to our Saviour and his work for us in relation with this fourth petition. Here we also acknowledge, says this answer, that without God's blessing our care and labour and God gifts cannot do us any good. God's blessing is needed over our care and labour. And that, while our daily bread also has to do with God's curse. What did God say to Adam, when he because of his rebellion against God was driven out of paradise? Then God proclaimed the ground cursed because of the sin of men. God spoke: through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food. (Genesis 3: 17-19) In the place of abundance of paradise now came God's curse over the world with thorns and thistles and heavy labour. The ground was cursed

because of men. And listen, now suddenly the confession speaks about God's blessing.

Is this not powerful, congregation? And how come that the curse over our labour and over the earth could change into a blessing? Only through Him who teaches us this petition. You may frankly pray: Give us this day our daily bread. Father, we pray with this, let because of the work of your dear Son, our care and labour prosper and be a blessing. You are for Christ's sake our Father. We are for Christ's sake your children. He has born for us the curse over this earth. We taste your blessing in your gifts which Thou gives us in the way of our care and labour. Your goodwill is tangible in our livelihood.

What falls here a clear light upon on that word "today". Our yesterday is perished in the stream of time. Our morning has not yet begun. Today we stand with our need before God's face. We lay in this "today" our hand on the finished work of our Saviour. My "today" is lit by the light of his redeeming work. And than should I in this today of grace, today, now, not say my need before Father's ears? Does there not lay in that for Christ's sake the security of the hearing of today? Yes in that "today" we say to the Father: Give us this day our daily bread. Give it to us Father, out of grace. Give it for Christ's sake. In that "give" lies your plea on Father's promises. It is not the give of the leech of which Solomon spoke, a demanding "give". It is not a "give" with the fist on the table. It is not the "give" of actions and of banners and roadblocks.

Yes, but, sometimes it is said against this "give, yes but: why do you have to pray for that? Is it not already before you? You set yourself to the table, you pray: give us this day our daily bread. But the bread is already on the table and you smell the roasted meat. Why than still pray? Because the Father plainly likes to be prayed to. Because in that it is visible and tangible that we are his children. Like a child knows for sure that it will get a birthday present and still makes its list of presents, so we may while praying live out of God's Father hand.

For Christ's sake.

Just because The Lord like to be prayed to by his children, everyday we say our grace at the table. There are plenty of reasons that this good custom of saying grace does not erode with us. The hurry and haste of today also interferences with our saying grace at the table. Just pray briefly, hardly taking the time for our daily divine service. If at all possible, pray this petition every day, that Christ himself has taught us. It works in your heart the astonishment about the hearing which has become visible in the food before you on the table. Is it not a great miracle, that God daily sets the world-table? That millioncities like London and Paris and whatever daily receive their food and drink? Is there than not a reason for you, now that God hears this petition for you in our country so abundantly, also to give abundantly for those areas in the world where there is suffering because of hunger?

3. And so we come to the last part. Christ trains us in this fourth petition also in our faith in God the Holy Spirit, who

sanctifies us. We especially think about the last sentence of answer 125: Grant us therefore, that we may withdraw our trust from all creatures and place it only in Thee.

And who, who, congregation teaches us that faithful trust no other than the Holy Spirit? He works through the praying of this fourth petition that steadfast trust in our hearts, that God cares for us and that we only on Him put our trust for our daily bread. Now there is yet one more word in this petition that we have not discussed with you. That is that little word "our". You pray this petition not only for yourself, or for your family. You pray this petition in the fellowship with all of Christ's church. We together may know of being cared for by the heavenly Father as congregation of Christ. In these times there is so much needed in that church. We think about the care for the continuation of the service of the Word and church-life. Than there is mission and the care for them who are in material need in the congregation. From all sides there are the calls on us for all kinds of labour in reformed and broader christian life. Sometimes it rains requests for funds. All that need is also included in the bread for which we here pray for.

You may even enlarge that "our" further. Here you pray, as in the other petitions; substituting for them in this world who do not lament their need before God's ears. In a manner of speaking you take them along in this petition to the Father. This fourth petition is embracing the whole world. Also for them the Holy Spirit teaches you to pray that they do not put their trust on any creature but only on our Father.

Congregation, who does not trust that God will set his table, can also not trust God for forgiving his sins and delivering him from the evil one. Father, we pray in this fourth petition: there we are standing before thy throne. Poor sinners who do not deserve that Thou have set our table. But Thou are in your covenant our Father and Creator. Thou will take care of us in all that we need for our existence in this world. Father, Thou does this for the sake of thy dear Son. He bore your curse away over this earth on the cross at Golgotha. We pray Thee that Thou will bless all your children for His sake with our daily bread. And Father, we also pray Thee, that Thou through your Holy Spirit will work the steadfast trust in Thee as Giver of all good in our hearts. Thank Thou, Father, for the meal which later will be ready for us.

Amen.

Lordsday 51.

Forgive us our debts, Lord.

Sermon by the late
Dr. R.H. Bremmer
Enschede,
The Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton,
Allberta.

Reading: Leviticus 6: 1-7
Matthew 18: 23-25
Text: Lordsday 51,
Psalm 86: 1,2
After the law Psalm 143: 3
After the creed: Hymn: no comparable
Psalm 103: 1, 4, 5
Psalm 79: 3
Hymn: ~~no comparable.~~ 47: 1, 6, 9, 10

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

About Spurgeon, the wellknown English gospel-preacher goes the following story. Once a drunk addressed him and asked of Spurgeon to help him beat his drunkenness.

Spurgeon answered: than you have to pray. Lord, the drunk prayed, last night I went out with the wrong friends. You do not pray right, said Spurgeon, you have to do it over again. Lord, prayed the drunk, last night I went to a bad place. No, said Spurgeon, still not right. You have to do it again. The man was at the end of his wits and asked the preacher if he would pray for him. Spurgeon than folded his hands and prayed for the man: Lord, last night I became drunk, but I really regret it. Will you help me to beat this?

Congregation, such a simple story shows you, how concrete prayer has to be and has to go together with repentance. Spurgeon wanted to teach this man, that in prayer to God not to wriggle out of it but to confess your sins concretely.

There, congregation, this fifth petition of the Lord's prayer will help us. And forgive us, teaches the Saviour us here, our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. Christ here puts their sins before his apostles concretely and shows them and us the way to heaven. You may not for a moment separate of the address of the Lord's prayer: our Father who art in heaven. It is a very direct and clear prayer. It is about "our" debt and about "our" forgiveness. The Catechism clearly shows us in this explanation what depths there are included in this. It does not only touch on the sins we do but also on the wickedness which is in us. But not only that. Your Saviour also wants to prod you to forgivingness over against your neighbour. Do not underestimate the power of that word "as" in this petition.

The forgiving by the Father of your debt in unseparately bound to your willingness to forgive the sins of your neighbour. It is not inconsiderable what Christ demands of you in this petition. We speak to you about

THE FIFTH PETITION OF THE LORD'S PRAYER.

1. It discovers us to ourselves;
2. Makes us seek the plea-basis for forgiveness in Christ;
3. It forces us to forgive our neighbour out of thankfulness.

1. This fifth petition begins with the little word "and". And forgive us our debts. Your Saviour not for nought placed this word as the begin-word of this petition. He with this ties this fifth petition emphatically to the previous one. There is a strong coherence in the Lord's prayer between the different petitions. We pointed this already out to you in the previous Lordsdays. Christ did not put the different petitions mixed up beside each other. It is worth the effort to pay attention to this again. Then unfolds for us the architecture of the Lord's prayer.

In the previous Lordsdays you have already been told that in the first three petitions it is about God's cause. In them we lay those before the Lord. In the second trio we pray for our daily bread. As a human being you have to exist first before you can speak about the bond with your Father in heaven. Our spiritual life cannot bloom if we go under in the natural life. Someone who dies of hunger, does not get around to the service of God. That is why your Saviour places the fourth petition, for our daily bread, first in this trio. But to that He with this word "and" immediately ties the fifth petition to it. The one about the forgiveness of your sins. In a manner of speaking; your heavenly Father first puts the bread on the table to feed you. Then after that you are going to pray for a redeeming relationship with Him. The one is just as necessary as the other. I as a human in God's covenant cannot be without my daily sandwich, my potatoes and vegetables. I also cannot be without the forgiveness of my sins.

Do we have to pray our whole life long for the forgiveness of our trespasses? Perhaps you find this a strange question. You may think: but that teaches the Lord Jesus us in this fifth petition? Yet there are christians who have difficulty with this. And really not because they do not take their sins seriously. Just the opposite is the case.

Only: they believe that our sins are already forgiven. They say: Did the Lord Jesus not die for our sins on Golgotha? Did He then not already pour out his blood for our debt?

It is said, so they say, in 2 Corinthians 5 verse 9 that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ? Does not Paul write in Romans 5 verse 1: therefore since we have been justified through faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ? Does David not sing in Psalm 32 verse 1: Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. There even have been christians, who said: this fifth petition is timely up to Golgotha, but after that it is not needed anymore. Then once and for all the sins have been forgiven. Abraham Kuiper, one of the most important explainers of the Catechism in the previous age, was actually in agreement with these christians. He powerfully brought to the fore, that we in one time, in God's eternal council, have been acquitted of

our debt. God has once and for all in eternity already justified us. Yet he did not want to go so far as to state as those christians of a while ago, that this petition only is valid before Golgotha. He stood his ground that we continually have to keep on praying this petition. Only: we have to pray this petition, so he writes, not to attain forgiveness, but to become conscious of that eternal forgiveness in God's council. Christ wants to bring us time and again to the realization that through this petition our sins already have been forgiven from eternity. It could be possible that we could get used to it. You understand that this view of the fifth petition consequences has for the hearing of this petition. If you stand on this point of view, then really there is nothing of the hearing. Are our sins not already forgiven? The hearing than only exists in this, that God renews in us the consciousness that us the sins have been forgiven. He gives us internal, in our conscience, the conviction, the consciousness, that God through all eternity already has acquitted us from our sins.

Congregation, do not think, that it is here about a view on this fifth petition that would not be of significance for us anymore. Here it is about the depth of this petition. Is there actually not something self evident for many christians of today in this petition? Did Christ not die for us? Did God not through the offer at the cross of your Saviour reconcile our debt? They had difficulty to pray this petition time and again as a "new", a "fresh" petition. To those who wrestle with this we point to the part of Scripture from Leviticus 6 that we have read together. It is only a part out of the many regulations out of the law of Moses. But it is for us, newtestament christians, an instructive part. It puts us in the middle of the daily life of the people of Israel. Here it is about an Israelite who found something of value that one of his brothers had lost. When asked if he had found it, first he said: no. May be it was a precious gold ring and he had kept it for himself. Later on he was sorry. He should have said that he had found it. That he does and he gives the found item back to his brother. But with this the business was not concluded.

By saying first that he had not found it, he had sinned against the Lord. For that he took a sound ram from his flock, with this he walked to the priest and confessed his sin before him. Relieved that Israelite then walked to his house. For, Leviticus 6 verse 7 says: the priest will make atonement for him before the Lord; and he will be forgiven for any of these things he did that made him guilty.

Is that not an especially fine moment in the law of the Lord? That Israelite concretely sinned against his brother and against the Lord. The covenant-relationship between him and the Lord was totally interfered with. Now he confessed his sin, the Lord forgives him his trespass in the way of reconciliation.

Now put over against this moment in the law of the Lord what you read in Exodus 23 verse 20 and what follows. There Moses calls on Israel not to be rebellious over against the Angel of the Lord who God had send out before Israel during the desert journey. Then the Lord threatens his people, do not rebel against

him, he will not forgive your rebellion, since My Name is in him. Who rebellious is against the Angel of the Lord, is rebellious over against God. Then He does not forgive the sins. Here you see how the Lord in his covenant deals with his people. It is definitely not: once forgiven, for always forgiven. In the covenant in which we live with the Lord, we can load debt on us, which interfere with the covenant-relationship. That can only be restored through repentance and prayer for forgiveness.

That is how it was in Israel, in the old covenant. Is it really different in the new covenant? For sure: God was in Christ reconciling the world with himself, not counting their trespasses against them. Scripture is full of rich promises of forgiveness and reconciliation. How wonderful the Psalms speak about this. WE already spoke about Psalm 32 and now think about Psalm 103 verse 10: He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. As a Father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. And then very significantly follows: for He knows how we are formed, He remembers that we are dust. Or that moving Psalm 130: But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared. Think what Psalm 103 says in regard the praising after the Lord's Supper. In that you hear of such mighty promises over God's congregation.

All those promises root, congregation, in the finished work of your Saviour. He has through his outpoured blood laid the foundation for that. But they are promises. God imparts them to us through the Holy Spirit in the way of faith. The form of baptism says it so fine that the holy Spirit imparts - what is that a beautiful word - what we have in Christ, namely, the cleansing from our sins and the daily renewal of our lives. But then we have to impart those promises to us also in the way of prayer.

To use an example: what do you do when you in the high mountains have made a long hike. Then you tired and thirsty. And look: there is a clear mountain creek before your feet. You kneel and scoop water and you drink it. You quench your thirst and get new strenght. Delicious, that cool cristalclear water. Now, like this your Saviour lets in this fifth petition the cristalclear water of the forgiveness of sins stream past you. He grants us, by teaching us this petition, a great boldness to go to God with our debt. You may not for a moment separate this petition from the beginning of the Lord's prayer.

Here you cry to your heavenly Father for forgiveness. Indeed, the blood of Christ, writes the apostle John, purifies us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1 verse 9). That is an unshakable firm promise. Only: we have to kneel at this creek of the forgiveness. You have to scoop and drink. That is why the explanation of this fifth petition here also begins with humiliation over our sins. Answer 126 lets us pray the described petition: For the sake of Christ's blood do not impute to us, wretched sinners, any of our transgressions. Time and again we make our heavenly Father angry. We are no angels but humans of flesh and blood.

Again, congregation, think back about the fourth petition. This can make clear to you, why we time and again we have to pray this fifth petition. With the prayer for our daily bread often our food is already on the table. And yet we pray: give us this day our daily bread. In a manner of speaking we smell the aroma of food. But our heavenly Father wants to be prayed too. So it is also with this fifth petition.

Isaiah says in chapter 55 verse 7 of his prophesy: God will abundantly pardon. But he let it be preceded with: Seek the Lord while He may be found; call on Him while He is near. Now, He lets himself be found by every sinner in his promises. He is near to us in his glorious promises. When does man pray hard for his daily bread? When he is in need. So it is also with the petition for forgiveness. Especially when we have sinned, Christ gives the boldness to call on God for forgiveness. Is this not great? God forgives you the sins. He crushes them. He hurles them in the depths of the sea. (Micah 7: 19)

Also think about the parable on the Pharisee and the taxcollector. The pharisee did not have any need to pray for forgiveness.

He fasted twice a week and he gave a tenth of all he owned. But the taxcollector had got to know himself as a great sinner before God's holy altar in the temple. He cried out: O, God, be merciful to me a sinner.

Yes, here the Lord Jesus discovers you in this petition in yourself. The rhyming of this petition brings this finely into words. It lets us sing: Forgive us our debts, Lord we often violated your honour. Yes but, someone may ask himself is that really so bad? I live decent, I am free of crude sins. I do my utmost to serve the Lord. I am a righteous christian and than still always pray for forgiveness? Congregation, let us take a closer look at this petition. For that we have to pay attention to the different words your Saviour uses in this petition. In Matthew 6 He teaches us to pray: forgive us our debts. But in Luke 11 verse 4 this prayer is: forgive us our sins. Your Saviour has, as we saw before, taught the Lord's prayer twice to his diciples. With that He one time used the word " debts " and the other time the word " sins".

That He surely did on purpose for us to know clearly the depth of this petition. For the word sin has another meaning than the word debt. The word for sin in the original actually means: the failing of reaching the target. It was used with the shooting of an arrow. That can miss its target. So it also goes when we commit sins. We shoot past the aim of our life to live to the honour of God the Lord. We go wrong in our life over against the Lord. Your confession underlines that here by using the word " transgressions ". Do not impute to us our transgressions answer 126 teaches us. How often don't we sin in the association with the Lord by transgressing his commandments? O yes, that we are sinners, we will consent too. But o woe if someone confronts us with our sins. For example on a home visit, when our lax churchgoing is pointed out or our neglect for the offering for the service of the Lord.

Then we become very upset. How often do we miss the aim of our life in the association with our neighbour, in our jealousy, in our egotisme, in our greediness. That are our sins. But now Christ also uses in Matthew 6 the word debts. So we also pray the Lord's prayer: forgive us our debts.

Now you understand the difference between these words. With sin it is about what you do wrong, but with debt it is about what did not do " and what you should have done". Your Saviour lets you with that word debts contrast to the depth of your sinning. To what you should have done but what you did not do. There in it is about your shortcoming over against your heavenly Father. He asks from you perfect love for Him. When is this done rightly? Where is that perfect love to the Father in your life? He asks from you perfect love to your neighbour. When is this done rightly? How great are not your shortcomings in what the Father demands from you?

Answer 126 surely also thinks about this as it speaks of "wretched" sinners and of " our transgressions ".

We are "wretched" sinners because of the shortcoming, the debt of our lives over against our heavenly Father. That word "transgressions" does not only imply what you did wrong, but also what your shortcoming is over against God.

Congregation, who here is scott-free? Who can deny, that he especially on this point, increases his debt daily over against God? Christ confronts you in that word "debts" with the living God himself. Who shall not say with Psalm 130:

If you, O Lord, kept a record of my sins, O Lord who could stand? (verse 3) Is the shortcoming of your life over against God not awfully great?

And yet congregation we are not there yet. Answer 126 bares deeper our being in debt over against God. Praying this fifth petition and baring it in its depth, still adds something to it. It also asks not to impute to us, the evil- in the old text: wickedness- which is always in us. You must concede: here this answer pulls of the mask of our life. Here it penetrates into the depth of our sin and debt. Behind your missing of the aim of your life and behind the shortcoming, the debt of your life, lies your inborn evil. This smoulders under the surface of your life. It is like a vulcano. It can slumber for years so that the fire which glows in the deep is not noticed. But suddenly it can erupt and spit fire. Is it different in our life? Can sometimes not suddenly original sin and evil that slumbers in us erupt to the outside? Think about David, in the fifty-first Psalm which he composed after his gross sins with Bathseba and Uriah? Suddenly he discovered where the root of these gross sins lie. See, he cries out, I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. David knew how that evil that still always is in us, suddenly can explode to the outside. So gauges the explanation of the fifth petition in answer 126 the depth of our sinful existence. Here you are not only discovered to what you daily do wrong over against God and your neighbour, but also what your shortcoming is over against God. About what you had to do and did not do. And also what lays behind this: you having been conceived and born in sin.

2. God be praised, answer 126 does not stop with this. What sound the words "forgive us" here liberating in our ears. The word forgive, that your Saviour here uses, actually means in the original: send away, do away with it. In the time of the Lord it was used in the courts. The judge had examined the accusation, he had weighed the charge and after that he acquitted. He send the now acquitted innocent on his way. Congregation, hear, on what ground this heavenly Father acquits you. He does not acquit you for shortage of proof or something like that. No, He acquits you, says answer 126, for the sake of Christ's blood. Someone once said: those words for the sake of Christ's blood, the Catechism has inserted there. Did the Lord Jesus himself not use them? The thought about the reconciliation through the atonement would have been carried in this fifth petition through the Catechism. As if, congregation also this petition does not hark back to the address of the perfect prayer. On the Our Father, who art in heaven. As if in that address the adoption to be his children on the ground of the blood of the Saviour is not included. In this petition you may stand with both feet on that firm rock of our salvation: the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Once again, what is that word forgiveness a comforting word. The bible uses all kinds of different words for it, like: make extinct, cover, throw into the depth of the sea. All those words show how intensively the Lord is concerned about our sins, and gets involved. He does away with them. He crushes them, in one word: He forgives them. And that is on the ground of Christ's blood.

Congregation, here think about what Scripture tells us about the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. Aaron had to lay his hands on the ram which was send away. With that he in a sense laid the sins of the people on that ram, which after that was send into the desert. When an Israelite was cleansed of his leprosy, the priest had to dip a bird in a barrel with blood and water, and then let it fly away. So the uncleanness was done away with. So the Lord also does away our uncleanness and debt once and for all. He has laid those sins and debts of ours on his dear Son. He does away with them for His sake. That He does in the way of your faith and your prayer. Time and again you may think about the cross that was erected on Golgotha and on which you now plead in prayer. Also do not not oversee that little word "us" congregation. Here you are standing in prayer in the communion with all of God's people. You are standing here as a praying and pleading congregation before God's throne. In my prayer I also cannot separate myself from the whole situation of God's church, of its slowness, of its slackness in prayer, of its unbelief. I live in its midst, I share in its guilt. You bear all that before the throne of God. You not only pray particularly for yourself.

You pray with whole the community of God's church: forgive "us"our debts Lord.

3. So we come to the last that this fifth petition brings before your prayer-attention. It discovers you to yourself, he made

us seek our plea-ground in Christ. He also pushes us to thankfulness. For your Saviour adds: as we also forgive our debtors. Who does not think right away about Christ's parable from Matthew 18? There Peter asked the Saviour how many times he would have to forgive his neighbour. He already used a high number: up to seven times? What, answered your Saviour, up to seven times? Up to seventy times seven times. Unimaginable many. After that the Saviour tells the parable of the man whose debt of ten thousand talents was cancelled. Approximately forty million dollars. In those days an astronomical figure. But when his brother asked him to cancel a hundred denari, forty or fifty dollars, he had him thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. Then his king got angry and in his turn let this ungrateful servant be turned over to the jailers to be tortured until he paid back all that he owed. Christ himself gives you the application of this parable. He says, this is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart. (verse 35)

Congregation, how important is this word "as". As we also forgive our debtors. Most of the explainers are always fast to say, that the word "as" not has to say, that our forgiveness ground is for God's forgiveness. That indeed is not so. Answer 126 wants to cut off this misunderstanding by proclaiming that it is a testimony of God's grace, when we have the sure intention to forgive our neighbour from the heart. No, our forgiveness is not the ground for God's forgiveness. Your confession lets with this explanation perceive how difficult it is to forgive the other person. It is by the grace of God that we are able to do it.

But that word "as" does pinch here. Look at the text of the fifth petition in Luke 11. There your Saviour does not use the word "as" but the word "for" we also forgive anyone, who sins against us. Who lives out of grace, wrote an old exegete, has to live in grace and because of that forgive. What do you say? Is it so difficult? That is true. Especially if the other person does not want to acknowledge his debt over against us. And still forgive? Yes sure, congregation, than still forgive.

Seventy times seven times says your Saviour. That is to say: innumerable often. We can through all kinds of issues and quarrels sicken a congregation. What can it go hard against hard in God's congregation. But in the other way around, what can a congregation which wants to live out of God's grace and can forgive, bloom as a rose in the desert.

No, our forgiveness is not ground for God's forgiveness.

But can the Lord forgive us if we are not willing to forgive our neighbour? Does here not lay that word "for" from Luke 11 a great claim on our heart to forgive the other his debt?

Listen congregation, what Christ adds to this petition in Matthew 6. These words: For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. Has your Saviour himself not given the example when He prayed on the cross: Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing?

Amen.

Lordsday 52.

The sixth petition: Lead us not into temptation.

Sermon by the late
Dr. R.H. Bremmer,
Enschede,
The Netherlands.

Translated by
Ralph Winkel,
Edmonton, Alta.

Reading: James 1: 1-16,
Text Lordsday 52,
Psalm 141: 1,3,8.
After the law: Psalm 139: 13,
After the creed: Psalm 106: 24,
Psalm 138: 1,2,4.
Psalm 66: 8.
Hymn: 47: 1,8,9 and 10.

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

With this Lordsday 52 you have come to the end of the Catechism. In 52 Lordsdays it has unfolded to you the only comfort in life and death. It began with you in the first Lordsday to put that only comfort before your eyes. It testified that you are Christ's. You are his possession. He has bought you with his precious blood. You are His in life and in death. Then He took you by the hand and led you around in that firm building of the only comfort. He showed you all the aspects of it. How that comfort comforts you in the midst of misery, in which you have thrown yourself. He proclaimed it to you with power in that part of your redemption. He also showed you how this comfort obliges you and stimulates to a thankful life before God's face. You, with this Lordsday 52, not only have come to the end of the explanation of the only comfort. Now you are also at the end of the explanation of the Lord's prayer. Your confession has explained to you petition after petition of this perfect prayer. It did not only ask for your attention for the sixth petition, but also for the praise with which the Lord's prayer ends: For Thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, for ever. Also in that praise, which at the same time is your plea-ground, confronts your confession you with the only comfort in life and death. That does the last Lordsday even with the last word of your prayer, the word "amen".

Congregation, there lies something triumphant in the explanation of this last petition and of this praise. And also in the closingword. In there lies something eschatologic, an outlook to the coming of the great Kingdom of God. You could compare it with a great concert. As the end nears, more tension enters the hall. All the eyes are focussed on the conductor. With his baton he guides the last chords. Often there is a fiery contrast. Suddenly, then there is the closing chord and the end. Often this is listened too in silence.

So it is also with the Catechism and with the Lord's prayer. High chords were struck: of God is the Kingdom, of God is the power and the glory. There is outlook on eternity. And it shall be true and sure. Once again: there lies something triumphant, something of the great victory of God over all the devilish powers. You may also read this last Lordsday against the background of the book Revelations of John. But at the same

time you may read this conclusion of the Catechism against the background of Lordsday 1. This is intertwined up to the very end. That is why we speak to you today about:

YOUR ONLY COMFORT IN THE CONCLUSION OF THE LORD'S PRAYER.

We pay attention too:

1. The last petition;
2. The last plea-ground;
3. the last word.

1. Already before we asked for your attention to the fine manner in which your Saviour composed the Lord's prayer. We will not go into this anymore but we want you to pay attention to the following. You see that in the Lord's prayer God himself is central in the first three petitions. It is about his name, his Kingdom, his holy will. We also pray in those first three ~~x~~ petitions that God's cause also may become ours. Then we lay in the last three petitions our cause, our need and misery, our guilt and struggle before the Lord. We ask in those last ~~a~~ three petitions if He will make our cause His.

However with that not everything has been said. The Lord Jesus tied those last three petitions closely together. Look at it. In the very first of those three last petitions He confronts us with the "this day" of our need, namely "today". Give us this day, today, our daily bread. We can, Lord, not do a step in your service if Thou does not give us our sustenance today. After this we look at yesterday and the day before yesterday. Forgive us our trespasses against Thee and our shortcomings in your service. Will Thou please draw a line through this. But if you may think, that now you are finished with bringing your needs before God, then you are mistaken. Your Saviour continues with one more petition. You stand as christians, also after the forgiveness, still in the center of temptation. This goes on, till the end of your life. That is why your Saviour lets you see to the future. The devil and the old nature do not stop to tempt you, sometimes up to the deathbed. That is why the Saviour gives you now this sixth petition: and do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one. Little words, congregation, sometimes have a deep meaning in the Lord's prayer. So it is with this first word of the sixth petition: "and" lead us not into temptation. With this your Saviour ties this sixth petition very closely to the fifth. We haven't prayed yet for our forgiveness and testified that we will forgive our debtors or this petition comes along: "and" lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.

Are that two separate petitions, congregation? Do you pray here for two apart causes? Does your Saviour teach you here first to pray not to be led into temptation and than as second: to be delivered from the evil one? That would be the case if Christ had not tied these two parts of sixth petition so close together with the word "but". "But" deliver us from evil. That word "but" shows clearly: it is one cause which you here

ask from your Father. But it has two sides. In the first place you pray not to be led into temptation but immediately after that your Saviour teaches you also to pray, if you end up in that temptation, to be delivered from the evil one.

What has this answer 127 tied these two parts closely together. Exactly like with the previous petitions it explains the prayer-words of Christ in prayer-form. Your confession does this by etching your life in the center of temptation. From ourselves we are so weak, it outlines our our life-situation, that we ourselves cannot stand up for a moment. Our sworn enemies do not stop for a moment to tempt us. It calls them those sworn enemies, it does not lie about it. They are the devil, the world and our own flesh: formidable enemies. In the midst of this temptation we pray: o, God keep us standing and strenghten us through the power of your Holy Spirit. Give us that we in that spiritual struggle not get the worst of it. Have us give powerful resistance till we at the end will win the victory.

It is clear, congregation, that answer 127 wants to bind on our souls: Watch out, every day you are confronted with your mortal enemies. It does hide anything. But four-square over against those mortal enemies stands your God. You pray to Him with all your power that He will keep you standing through his Holy Spirit. Lord, we pray here, You are powerful not to bring us into temptation. But if it comes that far, keep us than standing and make us victorious. So your confession unites the both sides of this sixth petition into one prayer.

There is one point in this last petition, that in the explanation of the Catechism does not come clearly to the fore. That is the fact, that Christ here teaches us to pray to our Father. that He will not lead us into temptation. Answer 127, goes from the premise, that we already are in the midst of temptation. But in this petition we clearly pray, that we not come into temptation, not led into it.

Here rise some difficult questions for us. Can God do that, leading his children into temptation? Is that Godly work? Temptation: is that not being pushed by the devil to commit sins? Temptation: is that not that your sworn enemies are trying to get you into their power? That the devil has a hand in this is clear. But God? Does James, the servant of Jesus Christ, not write in his letter: When tempted. no one should say, "God is tempting me". For, he continues, God cannot be tempted by evil nor does He tempt anyone. (James 1 verse 3)

But why do we pray then: lead us not into temptation? Once again here we touch on difficult questions. It is about the relation of God to evil and to the devil. Surely, there may not be a single doubt about this with you: God is far from the evil.

He is the holy and majestic God. God is light, says John (John 1 verse 5), in Him there is no darkness at all.

But than does the evil, does the devil than do this outside of God? Is God than passive over against evil? Is God a God, which let the devil do his thing passively? Surely not.

He gives the devil some play-room but not any further than He, God, permits. Once Luther has used an example of a yard-dog, which barking loudly comes to you as you near the farmyard.

Such an animal can scare you to death, but suddenly you notice that he cannot get any further than that his chain extends. To say it real clearly: The Lord has the devil on his chain. That is not to say that he within that reach cannot do us horrible harm.

Congregation, in this connection read: Revelations 12. There in detail is spoken about the power of the devil. It shows us the war which ignited between the dragon, the ancient serpent, the devil on the one side and God assisted by Michael and his angels on the other side. It was satan's great revolution against God. Then suddenly John hears a voice from the heaven: the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before God day and night, has been hurled down. (Revelations 12 verse 10)

At the same time this voice cries out the woe over all the inhabitants of the earth: for the devil is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short. (verse 12) Especially because satan knows that his time is short and his kingdom on earth will be finished, because of that his fury is great.

We should not underestimate the power of the devil.

In that war against God the devil puts up those both other mortal enemies, which answer 127 names here. You could speak about two enemies outside the fortress, the devil and the world and "one" enemy inside the fortress: our own flesh. Enemies inside the besieged fortress are very dangerous. They are no more than traitors. In our own lives, in our own flesh, sometimes demonic powers work. And says, answer 127, they do not cease to attack us. Each one of us knows his own sins and the power of his own flesh best. In the middle ages the roman catholic church had lists of sins, to which people were tested when they did confession. Luckily the Reformation did not copy this. Everyone has to test himself according to God's holy law. Someone who is open to love of money knows how this can get you in its grasp. What can sensuality drag along a person on the way of sin. Luther once said, that sensuality was the sin of youth, ambition the sin of the middle-aged and love of money the sin of old age. Whatever may be the case: the tempting power of the devil is great. Answer 127 says, he does not cease to attack us. And yet, congregation, the devil is submissive to the power of God. God does use him to test his won. To light up the gold of the faith that really is present with his children. Think about the story of Abraham, who had to sacrifice his son Isaac. After these things, says Genesis 22 verse 1, God tested Abraham. When you read this, you hold your breath. Abraham had experienced a lot in his life, but now comes the deciding test. You better believe that the devil dripped poisonous thoughts in Abrahams spirit. He had to take his son, his only, and go to Moria and to sacrifice him on one of the mountains which God would show him. How can God do this the devil threw into Abraham's spirit. God went very far with Abraham. Then Abraham rose early in the morning, and saddled his donkey. It is written so simply, but it must have been hard on Abraham. You better believe that during the three days of Abraham's travel the devil was in action. And still, Paul writes later Abraham believed that God gives life to the dead. Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed

and so has endured the test. (Romans 4: 17,18)

But sometimes, congregation, it also happens differently. Think about David and the census. In that the Lord shows you, that temptation can come from two sides, from God's side and from the side of the devil. In 2 Samuel 24 verse 1 it says that God incited David and said: Go count Israel; and Judah. But in 1 Chronicles 21 verse one, where the same story is told to us, it says that the devil incited David to count Israel. In a manner of speaking God came from one side and the devil from the other. They both threw David's faith in the melting-pot. Then David succumbed to the temptation and it was God's mercy which later on saved him.

Now, congregation, does your confession go to far when it says, that the devil and both those other sworn enemies not cease to attack us? Aren't we dead-beat sometimes? Think about Job and his struggle to hold on to God when satan had brought him on the garbage pile behind his house. Did God not let his three friends go to the very end to contend with Job? Can misery and sorrow sometimes not make us doubt God?

And yet. What does answer 127 give us a powerful hold. How fine the Catechism here combines those both parts of this petition of the Lord's prayer in this one strong petition: that is why we pray You: Wilt Thou, therefore, uphold and strenghten us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that in this spiritual war, we may not go down to defeat. There is a power that keeps you standing, through all kinds of temptations. Without that power you would be nowhere. It is the power of your Saviour, which keeps you standing through the Holy Spirit.

Here think about the beginning of this sermon when we spoke about the only comfort which has been given to us in Christ. How Christ himself has been in the fire of temptation. He has taught his diciples this petition shortly after satan had tempted Him in the desert. The tempter is satan's name in Matthew 4 verse 3. He said to your Saviour: If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread. Then the Saviour appealed on: It is written. And with the second and third temptation again: It is written. He held unto this with all his power. So He has believed himself through all those three temptations. Unto Him and his finished work also in his temptations, you may hold unto, congregation, in temptations and struggle. He later said to Peter that satan desires to sift him like wheat, but He, your Saviour, has prayed for him, so that your faith may not fail. (Luke 22: 32) That intercession is there also for you today. He also prays for you that your faith in the most bitter temptations will not fail. He is amidst all struggles and temptations your only comfort. That is why the confession here in answer 127 can speak of victory. You find in this petition and in Christ's finished work, that stands behind it, the power to remain standing and not to get the worst of it. Yes, here the view to the total victory has been opened for you. Father, you may pray here, sometimes it is so difficult. Sometimes the power of the evil one is so strong in our lives. Father, we are ashaming us away from before you. But Father,

we see up to our Intercessor with you in heaven. You have promised that You soon will crush satan under your feet. (Romans 16: 20) Father do this on account of our only Comforter. Here, congregation, also think about the eschatologic view that John shows us in Revelations 15. There he sees the singers standing at the sea of glass and they sing the hymn of Moses and the Lamb. They had, says John, been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They have prayed their whole life long: lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. Now they see how the evil one is thrown in the lake of burning sulfur. Our Father, who art in heaven, we may pray along with them: it becomes so difficult in the world. Powers of unbelief, of secularization and of church-desertion are pressing. Father, we are so weak. Father, do not bring us in the snare of the evil one. But if You lead us into temptation and give satan permission to tempt us, keep us than standing. Father, close to your Son, our only comfort.

2. So we have been allowed to explain to you the last petition. But still the perfect prayer has not come to the end. It also points you triumphantly, at the end, to the last plea-ground that Christ has inserted in it for us. For, it continues, Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory. for ever. When you read the Lord's prayer in your bible in the New Translation, you see that these words are between brackets (In Dutch bibles, but in our N.I.V. they are not mentioned.) That means that there are manuscripts in which these words do not appear. Because of this the roman catholics leave them out. They end the Lord's prayer with the sixth petition and than say only: Amen.

You may leave the question which manuscripts here turned the scale, unanswered. It has to be sure to you, that these words are thoroughly scriptural. Time and again they come back in the praise-hymns of angels and the blessed ones in heaven. In these words you may read your whole faith. Also congregation pay attention to the word "For". With that this hymn of praise joins immediately to the sixth petition. Christ lays in this hymn of praise a plea-ground under your feet, as strong as concrete.

If there is still one moment that fear rises in your heart that the devil yet would get the upper hand in your life, here this is swept away. Here you pray: for of You, Lord, is the Kingdom. Your prayer is addressed straight to God, the God of the covenant. What interpretes the book of Revelations by John God's mighty kingship. Read it against the background of the fiery temptations, of which it speaks. Read in its drawing of the horrible power of the devil and of the beast out of the sea and out of the earth. What will be the result? What is the last thing it shows us? It will end in the new Jerusalem, a city without a temple, which comes down from God out of heaven. What will be the result? To the forever locking up of the dragon and of the kingdom of death in the eternal perdition.

"For Thine is the kingdom" we confess here in prayer. Here is

the faith of God's church in the power of God and of his Christ. Of that the angels also sing when the dragon has been beaten. What a plea-ground.

Congregation, here turns the ending of the Lord's prayer back to the beginning. Our Father, who art in heaven, so you began your prayer. You began with Him, our Father, above in his royal palace. After that you stood with your prayers in the center of the struggle here on earth between God's church and the satanic powers. You prayed if the Father would destroy all the works of satan and every power that raises against itself against Him. Now at the end you say: "For Thine is the Kingdom. The victory is assured. God is king and Jesus Christ has accepted the kingship. Even if we do not see any of this in this world, it may be as firm to you as a rock: The Kingdom is God's and Christ has the victory.

And than: and Thine is the power. Here we think about the third petition: Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven.

With that you prayed that you without objections may obey God's will, which alone is good. What is the holy will of God trampled on by this earth. Today's man kicks against it. He wants to decide what is allowed and what is not. And still God perseveres with his will in this world. Straight against the chaos of this world. From Him is the power. Who can oppose Him?

Than the last: Thine is the glory forever. Here our thoughts go to the first petition: Thy name be hallowed. There it was about the honouring and praising of God's holy name. What is right about this in this world? How is the holy name of God besmeared and defiled today by the media, by journalists and broadcasters. And yet God's church cries straight against this; Of Thine is the glory forever. Who is able to lay one stain on God? Does the glory of his holy name not shine over this world? Don't the saints above with the angels together sing of the glory of God's name? Did John not hear them sing:

To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever? (Rev. 5: 13)

Yes, in those last words of this hymn of praise, which at the same time is a plea-ground, our prayer climbs up from time to eternity. With the prayer for your daily bread, for the forgiveness of your debt and the deliverance of the evil one, you stood in the center of these times, between Christ's first coming and his second coming, later on the clouds of heaven.

Now in these last words, your prayer raises itself from time to eternity. It lifts you above the struggle and the chaos of life in these times to the glory of eternal life. The last word is to God and his eternal Kingdom, his eternal glory. Once God's glorious name shall be written in all the corners of the new earth.

Congregation, what is our praying of the Lord's prayer often weak. How often it becomes a rut. What is there enough reason time and again to let it penetrate into us what we really pray for in this prayer. When the martyr Perpetua was thrown before the wild animals, she prayed aloud the Lord's prayer. She understood how also in this last plea-ground the only comfort comes to us anew. Your praying is being carried by God's

kingship, it receives from God the power and it looks forward to God's glory. Father, we pray, let that continue to comfort us and encourage us in the middle of the struggle to remain standing in this godless world.

3. The last question of this Lordsday is: What does the word Amen mean? The Catechism used to say "little word amen". It wanted to say with this: it is only a small word, that last word of the Lord's prayer, but what a deep meaning does it have. It is an Aramaic word that the Greek writers of the gospel have not translated. It apparently was already copied untranslated in the first christian congregation from the synagogue. It means: it is sure, it cannot be moved, you can depend on it. Christ himself is called in the bible the Amen. Your confession implicates it in answer 127 to the hearing of our prayers. It says this so nicely: For God has much more certainly heard my prayer than I feel in my heart that I desire this of Him. What does Christ assure you that hearing powerfully in the words in Matthew 7, shortly after He had taught his disciples the Lord's prayer, and He spoke to them: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who prays, receives and who seeks, find, and who knocks, it shall be opened. Also this belongs to the eternal comfort. Now Christ has bought me with his precious blood, God will also hear my prayer. I am His and He does not let his children's prayers go unheard. O yes, I have not deserved this. But the firm ground on which I base the hearing of my prayer does not lie in me, but in God's trust. So with this Lordsday 52 the discussion of the perfect prayer is closed. Also that of the Catechism. Amen we say to the part of the misery. Amen also too that of the redemption and also: amen to the part of the thankfulness. For no matter how many promises God has made, they are Yes in Christ. And so through Him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. (2 Corinthians 1 verse 20) For Christ himself is the "Amen" the faithful and true witness(Revelations 3 verse 14) He himself in his own person is our only comfort. That comfort we were allowed to proclaim to you for 52 Sundays. Soon you begin again on a new series. Someone has once said: a church that does not live with the Catechism, can be written off as dead. There is much to this. Not because that this booklet is perfect, but because it is a glorious and simple summary of all the promises and commandments of God. When the old devout preacher Hermann Kohlbrugge laid on his deathbed, he cried out just before he died: the simple Heidelberg, the simple Heidelberg, hold on to that my children. That this also has been given to us in this chaotic and often godless age. And: Praise to the Lord God, the God of Israel, who does alone does marvelous deeds. Praise be to his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory.