

# Insight Into

September / October 2017



## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Meditation • Deadly Smog

Free of Your Blood • Pilgrims on Snapchat

Reformation • Unrest in the Church: Past, Present, and Future

Thoughts for the New School Year

# Insight Into

## General Information

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## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

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### **Meditation**

by Rev. W. MacLean ..... pg. 1

### **Deadly Smog (5)**

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst ..... pg. 3

### **Free of Your Blood**

by Rev. P. Van Ruitenburg ..... pg. 6

### **Pilgrims on Snapchat**

Lethbridge Modern Media Committee,  
with permission from the author,  
Dr. Ir. S. M. de Bruijn ..... pg. 7

### **Reformation**

by Rev. C. Vogelaar ..... pg. 11

### **Unrest in the Church:**

### **Past, Present, and Future**

by Rev. A. A. Brugge ..... pg. 13

### **Thoughts for the New School Year**

by Rev. E. C. Adams ..... pg. 15

With quotations from Martin Luther,  
Matthew Henry, Rev. Thomas Watson,  
John Calvin, and John Newton

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# MEDITATION

## A Lively Hope

*"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3).*

Rev. W. MacLean

*I*t is true of those who have a good hope through grace that they died to the false hope they once entertained. We have either a good hope or a false hope. If we have not been begotten again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, then our hope is false. It is a hope that will perish.

The Apostle Paul tells us that there was a time in his life that he was a godly young man in his own estimation. He fully believed he was in possession of a hope that gave him a right to the heavenly inheritance. In the mercy of God he died to that hope. He came to see it to be false and unfounded. It was based on the training and privileges he had as an Orthodox Jew, which included the sacraments of the Old Testament Church, circumcision and the Passover. Besides the thorough grounding he had in the law and the prophets at the feet of Gamaliel, and the zeal with which he did God service, he bore a character which was outwardly blameless and above reproach. If any could lay claim to credentials for heaven on the ground of church privileges and good works, it was Saul of Tarsus. A day, however, came in his experience when he was brought to see that they were altogether irrelevant as a ground of salvation, that he was guilty of going about to establish his own righteousness and not submitting

to the righteousness of God.

"When the commandment came," he confesses, "sin revived and I died." The commandment which gave a deathblow to his mistaken hopes was the tenth commandment. *"I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet"* (Romans 7:7). The Holy Spirit opened up to his understanding and conscience the spirituality of God's law, that it requires perfect obedience in heart, walk, and conversation. Such perfect obedience can only come from a nature that is holy, sinless, and undefiled.

Adam, as he came forth from the hand of God in a state of innocence, had such a nature. He was therefore able to come up to the righteousness of the law, to give the law that perfect obedience which the law required. But since the Fall, man has a nature that is sinful, defiled, and depraved. On account of the sinfulness of our nature and the sinfulness of our actions, we are under the curse and condemnation of God's holy law. As it is written, *"Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them"* (Galatians 3:10).

The ruin of man's nature by the Fall, and his total inability to be saved by any obedience of his own to the law, is experimentally opened up in the understanding of all who have a good

hope through grace. They are taught to know that by the works of the law no flesh can be justified in God's sight. That is an inerasable conviction that the Holy Spirit stamps on their hearts. But not only did those who had this good hope die to all hope of obtaining salvation, or of being justified in God's sight by any works of righteousness of their own, but they also died to all ability on their part of believing in Christ. Persons may profess to believe in, and even defend and contend for, the doctrine of the total depravity of man's nature and hold to the doctrine of justification by faith, and yet only have a natural faith, or as divines term it, an historical faith. It is the faith of decisionism, the soul-deluding technique of popular evangelists who lead their converts to believe that their decision for Christ is the fruit of the faith which is the gift of God. We can believe in the fall of man, the divinity of Christ, His virgin birth, His atoning death, His physical resurrection, ascension and glorification, and as we have already mentioned, the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and yet have only an historical or intellectual faith.

The intellect of man apart from regenerating grace can attain to such a faith and to a sound and profound acquaintance with the cardinal doctrines of Christianity. Persons brought up in orthodox circles unquestionably hold to such doctrines. There are many, too, who undergo an intellectual conversion from Arminianism to Calvinism. They come to hold and to uphold the doctrines of free and sovereign grace. But alas! They unwarrantably conclude that because their creed is sound, that their hope is good. But all who have been convinced of their sinnership before God, whether they were orthodox or

unorthodox, were convinced of their inability to believe in Christ. The Holy Spirit convinces all whom He savingly teaches of the sin of unbelief, that their inability is their sin and proof of their guilt. They are brought in guilty before God, the Judge of all, in their consciences and brought to see and to believe that God would be just in their eternal condemnation. Only those who have been convinced of their total inability believe experimentally, and therefore savingly, in the doctrine of the total depravity of man's nature. For no sooner has the sinner died to his own ability and to realize that in himself he is helpless and hopeless, than his mind is enlightened in the knowledge of Christ, so that he sees Christ by faith and receives and rests upon Him alone as He is freely offered in the gospel. All who are regenerated are dead to the law. No sinner who has passed from death unto life looks to the law for life.

Dr. Owen says, "It is one thing to be in a state of grace, it is another to know that this is the case ... There are many believers who all their days never come to an abiding sense of peace with God, but are filled with troubles and exercised with fears and perplexities, so that they go sorrowing and heavy all their days." Persons with an intellectual or historical faith are not tried as to their faith or as to their hope. They are buoyed up with the delusion of an unquestioned assurance. The savour of spiritual death is in their writings, no matter how sound, and in their exercises, no matter how scriptural. They are strangers to the poverty of spirit of the living in Jerusalem (see Matthew 5). Those who have a good hope through grace are said to be an afflicted and poor people whose trust is in the Name of the Lord.

# Deadly Smog (5)

## Individualism: Me, Myself, and I

Rev. A.T. Vergunst



In this series, we are trying to analyze the polluting elements within our cultural smog. Smog is often invisible and therefore doesn't alert us so quickly to it being dangerous. Yet smog is very detrimental to our long-term health. So are the cultural elements Satan mixes into our culture. We have looked at *technopoly* (love for technology), *neophilia* (love for the new), and *egalitarianism* (we are all equal). Let's now examine individualism.<sup>1</sup>

### **Lonely man**

After God created everything, He said it was good. The only exception was after He created Adam. "And the LORD God said, *It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him*" (Genesis 2:18). Adam wasn't complete by himself. That didn't mean he couldn't function as an individual, but he was meant to function in connection to another human being. Our Creator revealed in the words He spoke that humans need each other. We are to live and function in a community. To be human means that we are connected to the community of humans.

Strangely, even though today we don't have to search as there are many humans around us, we are lonelier than Adam ever was. The main reason is not because people aren't paying attention to us but that we have broken our relationship with God. That is the fundamental difference between Adam's "lonely" condition in those hours before Eve was created

and us.

Though unlike Adam, we are surrounded with people, but for many they prove to be no more than "faces in a book." More and more we are becoming an island in the sea of humanity, because we choose to bow our knees before the idol of individualism. This idolatry is affecting every aspect of our life as humans, including church life. It deepens the separation with God and it shallows or distances our relationships with our neighbours, either those within our own family or beyond.

### **Embrace individualism**

God's adversary has been very effective in seducing mankind to embrace individualism as a way of life. He promotes the mantra to "love yourself" and disregards the needs or even the presence of others. We have all witnessed scenes where people are dining while each of them is on their cellphone. We can sit next to a person for hours who is holding himself

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<sup>1</sup> Much in this series is gleaned from *7 Toxic Ideas Polluting Your Mind* by Anthony Selvaggio.

captive between two earbuds and where meaningful communication is impossible or clearly not desired.

Within the early American history, rugged individualism was valued, but with the decline of the Judeo-Christian values as a result of the decay within the Christian church in general, the individualism changed. Dr. D. A. Carson's summary sums it up well:

In one context, individualism breeds courage, an entrepreneurial spirit, individual heroism, self-denial, deferred gratification, and thrift. It may accent values such as duty, honour, and industry. But if for whatever reasons the cultural values change, individualism can easily become a factor that reinforces narcissism, self-indulgence, instant gratification, self-promotion, and greed.

One place where this "self-culture" is apparent is how our culture views marriage. It is no longer a union of a man and woman in a life-long bond until death parts them. It is now an agreement to live together as long as it serves my individual needs. In this context of the view of marriage, individualism intersects with another toxic consumerism which reasons, "If our marriage doesn't work out, we just shop for a better deal."

Another instance in how the "me, myself, and I" idol has changed our culture is in the economy of buying and selling. Individualism combined with materialism and consumerism has swept away the time-tested wisdom of delaying gratification of a desire. Buying on credit is in vogue, so that we can enjoy it "now." This

attitude is based on the underlying conviction that "I deserve this now."

### **Individualism and the church**

Smog can't be kept out of houses so the toxicity of individualism is seeping into our churches as well. The spirit of individualism undermines the authority of the church. Members frequently view themselves as the final ecclesiastical authority on matters of biblical doctrine and discipline. With a quick "Who is Calvin or Augustine?" the assertion is made that we believe only in the Bible. It sounds good, but in the final analysis, the interpretation of the Bible is now the individual who says: "This is what I believe the Bible is teaching." Without sacrificing the freedom to be like the Bereans who searched out the Word of God, radical individualism goes beyond this in rejecting the historical confessions of the church.

This individualism also manifests itself in the area of church discipline. When a member is confronted about his or her views or behaviour, many choose to simply leave and find another church. Why would my individual right to think or do as I please be subject to the authority of the leaders of our church? The thinking often is that the church is there to meet my individual needs and desires. The sermons should please us or demonstrate immediate relevance to me as a person. If our needs or desires are not honoured or met, we move on to find another church. Instead of coming to church to serve God and to be part of a church to serve others, we only use the church to serve ourselves.

## **Self-destructive**

Our society has made huge progress towards destroying itself, for that is the ultimate fruit of the idolatry of the "me, myself, and I." It is contrary to the teaching of the Lord Jesus, "*He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it*" (Matthew 10:39). True life is found in the sacrifice of ourselves and our interests. In dying to ourselves and our idolatry of all that is not God-honouring, man will find his ultimate happiness, for that's what we were created for, to glorify God and enjoy Him forever in doing so.

## **Remedy and repentance**

As there is nothing new under the sun, so the remedy against the toxicity of individualism is also not new. It is the only one and ever the same one the Bible sets forth. Pray God to inscribe upon your mind that our chief purpose is to glorify Him. So radical is the change we need worked upon our nature that we need to be born again. Beg Him for His Spirit's power to turn you away from this "me, myself, and I" idolatry. Daily submit your thoughts to biblical teaching with the fervent prayer that God would lead every thought captive to His supreme purpose of our creation. Life is about serving Him and not about us and our needs being filled. Our comforts, security, joy, pleasures, health, prosperity, and our success are secondary at best. For the Lord Jesus, to live was to do His Father's pleasure,

even when He was thirsty and tired, "*I have meat to eat that ye know not of. My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work*" (John 4:32, 34).

Seek God's power to apply this mindset to every other aspect of your life. What a different family life we will witness when we apply this self-sacrificing biblical mindset to our families, not only as parents, but also to children and siblings! How our churches will be transformed when we begin to pray that God will enable us to consider church as a place to serve God and others! This will make us teachable as well as respectful to our leaders, no matter how many shortcomings they have as they attempt to serve us. Lastly, what a difference may be experienced when we take this mindset to each neighbour God providentially places besides us. Thankfully, the Good Samaritan was not using modern media devices as he travelled. Otherwise, he might not have noticed or perhaps heard a stranger who was wounded and dying. How many of these "wounded" along the roads of our culture are we as churches (priests and Levites) ignoring or not even seeing as we are so self-absorbed? Are we like the early Christian Church which reached out in mercy to the orphans, widows, and strangers within their gates? Or are we self-absorbed in the little worlds we have created for our own comforts and pleasure?

**"My conscience is captive to the Word of God."**

~ Martin Luther (1483-1546)



# Free of Your Blood

Rev. P. Van Ruitenburg

Ezekiel, the Old Testament prophet, had to bring God's warnings to the people of Israel, and then the responsibility was theirs. If they still wanted to serve the idols and the world, he had "*delivered his own soul*" (see Ezekiel 33:9). They themselves had to make a choice. He couldn't do that for them and if they didn't want to listen, he couldn't help it.

With your parents, it's the same. They have to let you go. Naturally, they never really let you go, because they hope and pray for your welfare, but they must give their children over to God. Consider the fact that if your parents are really God's children, they will agree with God on the Judgment Day. Yes, even if God must condemn you for your sins. Then your beloved mother won't have that friendly sparkle in her eye, but she will decidedly turn from you in respect for God, while you will have to bear your own punishment. You won't be able to blame the mistakes on your church or on your parents anymore. You will be held personally responsible for all you have done with your life. I think of Christ, who made Himself loose from Jerusalem at the end of His life. He looked once more over the city with

tears in His eyes. He had wanted to bring the inhabitants of Israel's capital city together like a hen gathers her chicks, but they hadn't wanted to. It pained Him.

You know that in Paradise, we have already chosen for the world and against God! So, there must be a *different* choice. My grandfather was stopped by God with the words, "*Choose you this day whom ye will serve*" (Joshua 24:15). I hope those words won't let you go. It's a choice nobody ever regrets. I would say, don't let the Lord go. I hope you get to know yourself as a godless sinner. Seek God in His Word. Seek to trust in Christ. The Lord willing, may we meet each other before the throne of God!

*"Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul"* (Ezekiel 33:9).

*"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate"* (Matthew 23:37-38).

# Pilgrims on Snapchat

Lethbridge Modern Media Committee,  
with permission from the author, Dr. Ir. S. M. de Bruijn



*Living as a stranger here below,  
journeying to a city that has  
foundations--and then at the same  
time, on Youtube and Snapchat.  
Can the two go together?*

The greatest walking event in the Netherlands will commence in one-and-a-half months, when 50,000 people will walk in and around Nijmegen for four days to receive the Four-Day March Cross. The exertion and perseverance of these walkers can be used as an example for us when we contemplate the baggage of Christian pilgrims and their media usage. These walkers don't only make sure they have the right shoes and light clothing, but they also very carefully pack their backpacks. As they add every bottle of drink and every roll of energy candy, they ask themselves if they really need it. They will avoid all excess baggage, because they feel that every 100 grams they don't need acts only as ballast. Similarly, the runners in Hebrews 12:1 are urged to lay aside every weight that can hinder them. During their journey, these walkers or pilgrims also manage their time carefully and avoid everything that can divert them from their destinations. A Greek myth

relates that Princess Atlanta lost a race because her competitor rolled three golden apples over the racetrack. She couldn't resist the temptation and picked up the apples, thereby losing the competition.

## Habituation or addiction

What is the practical meaning of this for a Christian in the 21st century? How can a father apply this image of the pilgrim to the upbringing of his teens? "Come on, Dad. You can't walk with your head in the clouds the entire day, can you?" One of the malicious sides of today's media is that they continuously demand our attention. This was already the case back in the days of the old-fashioned telephone, which penetrated into our conversations, disturbed the peace, or interrupted our meals. Modern media devices don't ring anymore, but the vibrating signal is quite sufficient to interrupt our concentration.

Why is this? In the past few years, we've come to know more about

what takes place in the brain during the use of social media. Checking e-mails, messages, or WhatsApp becomes a habit or even an addiction, because of the regular interesting “rewards” perceived by getting these messages. These rewards cause the brain to produce dopamine, a “stimulating hormone,” which gives it a kick and stimulates the recipient to go on to another film, another reply, or reading another couple of messages. Another vibrating signal again; perhaps there is another interesting tidbit? It is precisely the unexpectedness and the pull of the unknown (just think of Snapchat) that make this effect so strong.

Dopamine is a material in the brain that performs all sorts of functions, but one of its involvements is in addiction and the associated experience of pleasure. The brain can become so used to dopamine stimulants that we need more and more of them in order to feel “normal.”

In his book *Ontketen je brein* (*Unleash Your Brain*), Compernolle, a Flemish neuro-psychiatrist, describes how we become so accustomed to all these small, unpredictable rewards from our smartphones that we are no longer able to go offline. The deceitfulness of this is that we find it pleasurable. A second result is that these media continually disrupt us when we want to concentrate or rest or sleep. This disturbs important mental processes, such as reflection and archiving. Therefore, Compernolle advises us to go offline for an hour a couple of times per day, only do one task at a time, and take regular breaks. This will improve our concentration,

our willpower, our self-control, and our creativity.

Christians must take this advice seriously. Young people--but also older ones--regularly complain that they have a hard time concentrating. Do we realize that the devices that constantly demand our attention are like heavy concrete bricks in the backpacks of pilgrims? That those hundreds of stimulations per day are the golden apples that roll over our racetracks? They look attractive and promising, but they exact a high price when they distract our attention during the sermon, during Bible reading, or during our prayers. Here, only a radical choice is fitting, and parents have the important task of being the example: Go offline an hour before going to sleep, reserve time to “reflect” and time to think about and meditate on God’s Word. Do not read your Bible on an electronic device. Make sure that digital stimulants cannot disturb your Sabbath



rest, by silencing your smartphone from Saturday evening to Monday morning. Avoid social networks that exist precisely because of surprise and stimulation (i.e., Snapchat) as much as possible. If your (home) work allows, turn off the sounds and signals of other networks (i.e., WhatsApp, Facebook, e-mail, etc.) to the extent possible and limit yourself to only answering these types of messages at fixed times. If someone really needs you, they'll phone you.

### Vlogs

Among the many forms of media distraction lies a second danger that the pilgrim should greatly fear. In Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, we see how Christian continually met with diversions. When he, together with Faithful, passed the town of Vanity and could not bypass the fair, they put their fingers in their ears and looked upwards. Further on, when Christian and Hopeful passed the Enchanted Ground, where sleep would be deadly, they kept each other awake by means of spiritual discourse and singing. In a previous article in this series, we have seen the excellent possibilities that these new media can offer. The other side of the coin is the secular influence of the "image culture" on our families. Games, videos, and vlogs on YouTube and series via NOP and Netflix slay their thousands. It is very important for parents to watch what their children are doing online and to familiarize themselves with sites like Facebook, Instagram, After School, ASKfm, Kik, and Live.ly, to name only a few.

It often appears that parents

themselves aren't really that convinced of the associated dangers and, for the most part, are only concerned about the use of obscene language. The American preacher John Piper has an entirely different opinion about this. The article he wrote in 1995 about TV is still completely applicable to the image entertainment of the current era. "Turn off the TV. It is unimportant. And it is a lethal spot for your relaxation. The penetrating banalities, the sexual suggestions, and the God-denying values do not uplift your soul. It is mind numbing. It drives God away. It quenches prayer. It darkens the Bible. It reduces the value of your soul. It corrupts virtually everything. It is unnecessary for most of you and is spiritually lethal for all of you." Later, he wrote that, although we can be more selective on the Internet, "yet you can also search worse things on it, while only the Judge of heaven and earth beholds you."

Whoever takes these words to heart will say, together with the poet of Psalm 119, "*I have refrained my feet from every evil way*" (verse 101). Then we will be happy with filters and other aids that keep this form of "recreation" at a distance for ourselves, as well as for our children.

### Filters

But filters—they don't work at all, do they? Indeed, if someone wants to circumvent digital protection, they will most likely find a loophole. But those who know the deceitfulness of their own hearts and are afraid of it actually feel the need for protection. These fathers and mothers will tell

their children that, in the first place, they need the filter for themselves. Then, like Christian and Christiana, they will urge all their children to depart from the City of Destruction and join them on their pilgrimage.

In relation to this, we can also draw a valuable lesson from the Four-Day Race; not everyone is automatically included just like that. Someone can join up with the procession of walkers, go through the same difficulties, walk the same distance, and come into the same city along the same Via Gladiola. However, only those who have officially registered and can show their identity card will receive the Four-Day Cross.

The same holds true for the Christian pilgrim. Media education begins with conversion. The English evangelist Arthur Pink points out that we may not be satisfied with raising children to be "rich young rulers," as "it will not profit us when we each try to form a good character and do that which will gain God's approval, if our sins stand between Him and our souls. What good are shoes to us if we are lame? Or what good are pairs of glasses if we are blind? The matter of the forgiveness of our sins is fundamental, and of vital importance. ... At the hour of death, it comes down to this: Have our sins been blotted out by the blood of Christ?"

Solomon states, "*There is a time to be born, and a time to die*" (see Ecclesiastes 3:2). It is not said, there is a time to live--as if the moment between those two events were too insignificant to be even mentioned. I wonder if God were to call you away tonight, are you all marked with the precious blood of Christ? Nothing but the blood is found to liberate the captive's soul, and give joy and peace in believing. From Genesis to Revelation, wherever the blood is mentioned, there is a solitary greatness assigned to it. Daily remember that beautiful text, "*When I see the blood, I will pass over you*" (Exodus 12:13).

"Conscience is that candle of the Lord which was not quite put out."

~ Matthew Henry (1662-1714)

"If there were no Bible to tell us there is a God, yet conscience might."

~ Rev. Thomas Watson (1620-1686)

# Reformation



Rev. C. Vogelaar

*I*t will be 500 years ago this year that the Lord gave a reformation in the church, which had come into a very sad condition. On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses on the chapel door and this started a renewing movement which led the people back to the scriptural truth. We still call this Reformation Day.

However, did the Reformation really begin on October 31, 1517, as often is believed? No, it began earlier, when a young monk named Martin Luther was living in much unrest and fear. He feared the righteousness of God. That was to him an avenging righteousness, which punishes the sinner for his many transgressions against the Lord. Luther could not find rest for his soul, not even in his works of penitence, in chastising himself, or in trying to be the strictest monk of his monastery. Even a journey to Rome, and climbing the "Pilate's Stairs" there, did not give him peace, but left him very disappointed when he saw how far the clergy lived from the holiness he had expected.

Whenever Luther read the word "righteousness" or "justice" as an attribute of God, he trembled, because he could not exist before this holy, righteous God. All his efforts to obtain peace failed. However, at God's

time, the Lord opened the gospel to him. In his studies of the letter to the Romans, he came to Chapter 1, verse 17, as it is written, "*The just shall live by faith.*" How could that be, he wondered? How could a man, a sinner, be just before God and live by faith?

There the Lord showed him that here in Romans 1, there is not spoken of an avenging justice, but of a righteousness which is given to a guilty sinner, the righteousness of Christ, which is received by faith. Then Luther saw and experienced in that little tower room where he had his study that a holy and righteous God can receive a sinner like himself into His favour again, only for the sake of what the Lord Jesus has merited for them, by His atoning work. Nothing of man has, nor can be added to this. It is only for the sake of His obedience, as willing Servant to His Father, who had fully satisfied His justice and paid the price for this. Then you will understand that the fruits of this experience also became evident in his teaching.

There the Reformation began, where the Holy Spirit worked in the heart of this restless monk and young scholar. There the "Solas" so well known to us were born by the Spirit's teaching. My young friends, ask the

Lord to receive a place as a student at the same school where Luther was taught, the school of grace. Yes, there we learn those *solas* which exclude all merits of men.

*Sola Gratia:* It is by grace alone. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8, “*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.*”

*Sola Fide:* It is by faith alone, and not by works. Faith as empty hands stretched forth, beggar’s hands to receive what the Lord will graciously give.

*Sola Scriptura:* It is by the Scriptures, God’s Word alone, that the Lord shows the way in which we should walk. These testify of Christ and His perfect work, His righteousness freely given by which a condemnable sinner may be able to stand before God.

Grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone, and we could add Christ alone, and to God alone the glory. In all these expressions we read the word “alone.” That is a hard word for a proud man. It is no wonder that in most teachings today, this word “alone” is missing. It is a humiliating word in which there is no place for any human contribution to the work of salvation.

Perhaps you feel the resistance to it in your own heart. Why does everything from man have to be taken away? Why can I not be part, even perhaps a very small part, of what has to be done in order to be righteous before God? Friends, do you know why? It is because this is the only hope for a bankrupt sinner, for one who has nothing to pay anymore, because all his money is worthless. His best works are imperfect and defiled. It would be hopeless for him if it would not be by grace alone.

You may have heard the expression: “Nothing in us, but all in Him; so goes the church to Jerusalem.” It means that if a sinner may arrive in the heavenly Jerusalem, in glory, with the Lord, it will not be because of anything we have contributed, but only for the sake of all what He has done as the blessed Saviour of sinners. May that by grace be also not just something you learned about the Reformation, but a living truth and a real experience in your heart, my young friends. How blessed and happy you would be. It is the happiness that I wish for all of us, to the honour of the glorious Name of the Lord, who is so worthy to be praised, also by you.

# Unrest in the Church: Past, Present, and Future

Rev. A. A. Brugge

## Introduction

Nothing seems to be wrong, yet everything is unfriendly, unwelcoming, and cold. There is no love and everything is only for outward appearances. The Bible remains closed and ignorance reigns supreme. Important people in the church think of their own gain rather than the interest of their hearers. There is also no call to repentance. We are talking about the church!

## The 95 theses posted

What did the German monk Martin Luther do on October 31, 1517, almost 500 years ago? He posted a copy of his 95 theses, wherein much is said, to the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church. There was protest about what he posted. After all, the word "Protestant" comes from the word "protest." There was protest against the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church and the mutilation of God's Word by this church.

Actually, we can summarize this briefly in two ways: It has said what it is not, but also what it is.

## Three principles of the Reformation

The following are three principles of the Reformation:

1. *Sola Scriptura*: It is not the

tradition of the church, defined by events and statements of scholars in the church, but by Scripture alone.

2. *Sola Gratia*: It is not earning salvation, but I am saved by grace alone.

3. *Sola Fide*: It is not doing good works to achieve this myself, which delivers me, by which I would be righteous before God, but only by faith alone.

This had an unprecedented effect, as the Lord blessed Luther's work. The Roman Catholic Church was accused of wrongdoing and reacted with annoyance and anger. It is not what people do and think, but the Bible is authoritative. Scripture alone is the touchstone and standard. Luther received strength amid the struggle and conflict to remain standing, and he did not add water to the wine to make concessions. There were extensive discussions about the doctrine and several religious conversations took place without any results. However, the breach remained between Rome and the Reformation. There was also persecution of the supporters of Luther and other Reformers like John Calvin.

## The blood of martyrs

Tertullian, an early church father,

had previously remarked: "The blood of martyrs is the seed of the church." As a prisoner awaiting his death sentence, he wrote touching letters to the churches, to his wife, and to his mother. To his fellow prisoners, he wrote: "My brothers, I am at the present time condemned to death because of the teachings of the Son of God. Blessed is He! I never would have thought that God would give me that honour. I rejoice, therefore, and my heart leaps for joy within me. ... What is death? Death is not the end! Do we hear, brothers, what the Lord says in His Word, "*Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them*" (Revelation 14:13)!"

### Continuous reformation

The Reformation through Luther

was a single unrepeated event, yet it must again and again be directly connected with Scripture, as grace and faith continue. "*Ecclesia semper reformanda reformata*" means that the Reformation church must be continually reformed.

It is your duty and responsibility to pray for the church, that the Lord contrary to everything will continue His work. It is also your duty and responsibility to look in the mirror. You may grumble about what that has to do with the church, while at the same time you neglect to examine yourself. Is God's Word your guide?

When will this reformation finally be achieved? With the Church in the new heaven and the new earth? Does your heart lie there? Then, "I am, O Lord, a stranger here below."

"If there were no God, consciences were useless."

~ John Calvin (1509-1564)



# Thoughts for the New School Year

*"That ye may know the way by which ye must go: for ye have not passed this way heretofore" (Joshua 3:4).*

Rev. E. C. Adams

Dear young friends, the Lord willing, by the time that you are holding this new copy of *Insight Into*, many of you will in the Lord's providence and mercy have commenced a new school year. Many of you may be privileged to be in the sheltered environment of our Christian schools, and others will be going to colleges and universities. Some will be studying at home, and others have left school and entered the work place. It shall also be true for this new school year what was said unto the children of Israel before they entered into the land of Canaan, "*For ye have not passed this way heretofore.*" Every school year is a new year. Let us in short draw some lines of similarity between the children of Israel going into the Promised Land and you commencing another school year.

For the children of Israel, life was short and uncertain, but death was sure. So it is also for you as young people; for old people must die, but young people can die. The children of Israel must have had many thoughts of death (see Psalm 90) when they were ready to enter the land. Was not everyone older than twenty years at Kadesh Barnea buried in the wilderness? During the last school year, a ten-year-old student in one of our schools was suddenly ushered into eternity. May the Lord graciously watch over you.

When Israel was ready to enter the Promised Land, particular mention is made of the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord. It is mentioned ten times in Joshua 3. The ark was sprinkled with the blood of the offerings on the great Day of Atonement. The ark pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ

who is proclaimed to us in the Holy Word of God. Let God's Word have a central and authoritative place in our Christian schools. It can be said that our schools are called Christian, and yet are becoming more secular and humanistic, departing from the old truth and old paths (see Jeremiah 6:16). To that end the Lord said unto Joshua in Chapter 1:8, "*This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.*"

The children of Israel had a God-given and God-appointed leader. We read in the explanation of the fifth commandment of our Heidelberg Catechism, "*And submit myself to their good instruction and correction, with*

*due obedience; and also patiently bear with their weaknesses and infirmities, since it pleases God to govern us by their hand.*" Joshua and the children of Israel had the same desire and purpose. Teachers and students must not have opposite intentions, but parallel goals--to receive a blessing out of God's Holy Word by the work of the Holy Spirit, and to receive an education profitable for this time. I hope, young people, that you may show much love, respect, appreciation, and obedience to all in authority.

There were many difficulties for Joshua and the Israelites to overcome. In the land of Canaan there were cities, towering walls, and seasoned soldiers. Five times there is made mention of giants. Have the spies not told them in Numbers 13:33, "*And we were in our own sight as grasshoppers*"? How towering, manifold, and diverse your fears can be concerning your studies--uncertainties about friendships, qualms about loneliness, even deep scars from the past. Sometimes they can be so overpowering. Other times they may make you downcast. The psalmist has exclaimed in Psalm 124:2-3a, "*If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, when men rose up against us; then they had swallowed us up quick.*"

Israel was ordered to fight the Lord's battles with His help. So you are called to prayerfully, in a heartfelt dependence upon the Lord with the talents entrusted unto you, battle all the enemies and temptations which are seeking to destroy you. They are within and without us, also in our schools, and come in many different

: shapes and forms. Let us mention the triple-headed enemy: the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh. Remember what Achan has done; he has looked, and coveted, and taken, thereby bringing a curse on all the people.

In Joshua 13:1 we read, "*There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed.*" The Israelites must have been overwhelmed when they thought of the spacious land of Canaan which they were called to conquer. So it can also be for you at the beginning of another school year when you contemplate all that is required of you, even to the point that it affects your constitution. What have the children of Israel done? They have conquered one city at a time. May you be given to do the same (see Matthew 6:34). Tomorrow's cares and burdens on top of today's task are too much to carry. Young friends, as I write these words to you, then a voice speaks to me, "*Physician, heal thyself*" (Luke 4:23).

Young friends, what have I not yet pointed to in this article? Have you thought of it? Fifteen times in the book of Joshua I read of an altar. An altar in the Old Testament was a place to worship the Lord with sacrifices, prayer, and thanksgiving. May that be your portion in this school year. May it be a year of much earnest, unceasing, and, may it be given, prayer (see Romans 8:26) for soul and body, for yourselves, your family, your teachers, and your classmates (see 1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Before I take leave of you, allow me to make mention of one more beautiful point of great importance!

It is a fact that can make such a profound difference in a school. When the children of Israel went into the Promised Land, they were to march together in an orderly way, standing shoulder to shoulder while combating the enemies and not each other (see Psalm 133). Remember and take notice of those that stand alone and seem to be burdened with anxious cares. A friendly smile, a few kind words, a helping hand, an invitation to join in, a question—it can make such a difference. Remember, we are not all Calebs or Othniels or Achsahs (see Joshua 15).

*"For ye have not passed this way heretofore."* These words shall have special meaning at your death, for die we all must (see Genesis 2:17). No one has ever returned and told

us what it was to cross the Jordan of death. What is now so indispensable, my young friends? That we are born again (see John 3:3), that we experience the godly sorrow over our sins that leadeth to repentance (see 2 Corinthians 7:10), that we learn to "*hunger and thirst after righteousness*" (Matthew 5:6), and that we are washed in the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ (see 1 John 1:7) by a true saving faith (see Romans 5:1). May it please the Lord through almighty grace by the loving and irresistible work of the Holy Spirit to bless the instruction given out of God's Holy Word to that end. Young friends, then it would be an unforgettable and special school year to God's honour and glory.

"Distinction between virtuous and vicious actions has been engraven by the Lord in the heart of every man."

~ John Calvin (1509-1564)

Now, Lord, inspire the preacher's heart,  
And teach his tongue to speak;  
Food to the hungry soul impart,  
And cordials to the weak.

Furnish us all with light and powers  
To walk in Wisdom's ways;  
So shall the benefit be ours,  
And Thou shalt have the praise.

~ John Newton (1725-1807)