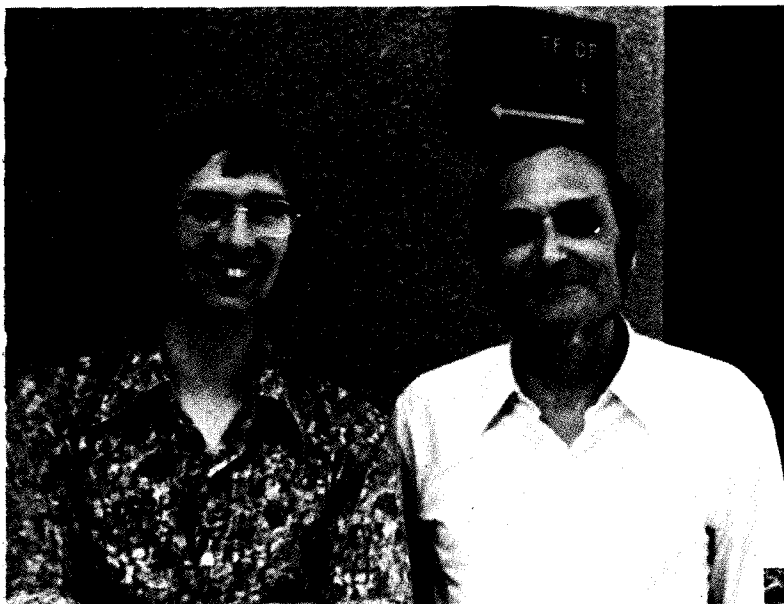


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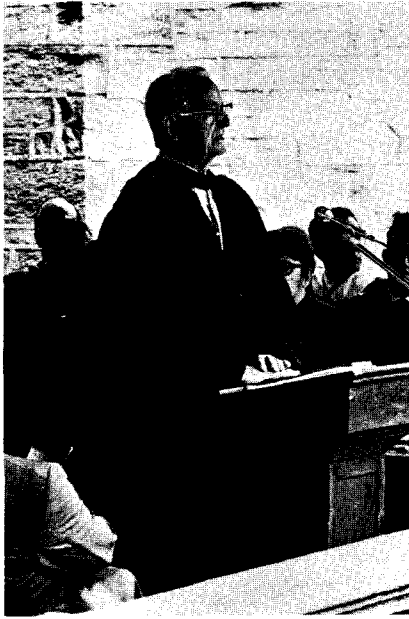


new reformed seminary in france

new presbyterian church
in the south



new degrees awarded at westminster



The Certainty of Our Faith

CORNELIUS VAN TIL

The Forty-fourth Commencement of Westminster Theological Seminary was held on May 30, 1973. Dr. Van Til, emeritus professor of apologetics, delivered the commencement address which is reproduced here in a condensed form.

When I speak to you of the certainty of our *faith*, I am thinking of the faith of our fathers — the faith of Martin Luther, John Calvin, Geerhardus Vos, and particularly the faith of J. Gresham Machen, chief founder of this seminary. I believe today, and trust that all of us here believe today, what these men believed in their day. With them we believe in Jesus Christ as the only Name given under heaven by which men must be saved.

Secondly, when I speak to you of the certainty of *our* faith, I am speaking of the faith that we possess as the redeemed by the blood of Jesus on Calvary's cross. We have found grace in the sight of God. We believe in the Christ who died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and rose again according to the Scriptures. Paul speaks to us as to fellow believers in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and of our justification through it. He says we are "sanctified in Christ Jesus." We believe this is true because we are born of God the Spirit, born from above, while other men are not. As believers, we have a common *heritage*, a common *task*, and a common *hope*. And we, who by grace have received the heritage of the Reformed Faith, must win other believers to see with us the vision of our heritage and task and hope.

Thirdly, when I speak of the *certainty* of our faith, I think of the fact that we must *speak to the world* about us of our faith in Christ. I think of this graduating class and of their task to go out to proclaim to the world and to an apostate church the gospel of Jesus and his resurrection, of Jesus the victor over sin and death, of Jesus' establishing his kingdom so the powers of hell cannot prevail against it. I think of the temptation that will come to them to accom-

modate the gospel to the taste of the natural man. To be an effective minister of the gospel of salvation, one must be *certain* that this gospel is not some cunningly devised fable, but that it is true and that all truth everywhere springs from this gospel.

Think of Martin Luther defying the emperor, refusing to retract what he had written. Think of John Rogers of London who went to the stake "as if he were walking to his wedding." Think of John Hooper who was burned to death because he believed in the finished sacrifice of Christ and had declared the Popish Mass to be an invention and ordinance of man that was keeping the people from "the merit of the blood of Jesus Christ." Or think of the words of Hugh Latimer to Nicholas Ridley as both were tied to the stake: "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day by God's grace, light such a candle in England as, I trust, shall never be put out."

As this graduating class goes forth, they will be confronted with a world that is more definitely committed to man's self-sufficiency than it has ever been in the past, and with a church far more deeply and widely apostate than was the Church of Rome in the days of the Reformers. The *Confession of 1967*, largely constructed under the leadership of faculty members at Princeton Seminary and officially adopted by the United Presbyterian Church, is calculated to erase "the merit of the blood of Jesus Christ" from men's hearts as surely as Rome ever tried to stifle the gospel of God's sovereign grace to man.

I. The Certainty of Our Faith—Today

A. *Our faith — eating his flesh, drinking his blood*

Go back with me to the time when Jesus our Savior instituted the supper for the remembrance of his Name. Jesus had told his disciples that he was the "bread of life," that "whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:54). And now, before he was to give his life a ransom

WTS grads receive M.Div. degrees

Westminster Theological Seminary awarded a newly authorized Master of Divinity degree to more than thirty graduates of the regular three-year curriculum. Since its founding in 1929, Westminster and most other seminaries had granted a Bachelor of Divinity to those who completed the basic course of preparation for the gospel ministry.

However, seminary training is on the graduate level, requiring a four-year college education. Thus the new M.Div. degree more fairly represents the actual work completed in seminary.

Those who hold the older B.D. diplomas from Westminster will be allowed to obtain new M.Div. ones. If they have one of the genuine parchment documents, however, they would do well to preserve it; the new models are a substitute—rising costs, you know.



The Rev. Bruce F. Hunt, missionary to Korea, converses with Koreans Bo Min Lee and Yung-Ho Suh who received the Master of Theology degree.

for many, he met with the twelve he had chosen to proclaim his Name to all men everywhere.

Come with me to that upper room. Some time before, Jesus had sent out the twelve to heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, and raise the dead. Go, he had said, to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and tell them the kingdom of heaven is at hand; freely ye have received, freely give. But, because you come to men to do them good and offer them salvation in my name as the promised Messiah of Israel, do *not* expect them to receive you gladly. I come as the Light of the world; but men love darkness rather than light. Men hate me, the Master, and they will hate you, my servants.

Jesus was thinking of Satan as the instigator of this hatred. From the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Satan sought to destroy the work of salvation the Lord had come to perform. He had even tried to make Jesus himself believe that he did not need to die in the place of his people in order to remove the wrath of God from them. Satan had proposed that he and Jesus cooperate in leading mankind to the establishment of a kingdom of joy and peace.

Now near the end of Jesus' ministry, Satan was redoubling his efforts to defeat the Christ because he knew more clearly now that Jesus had all along been set to defeat him and destroy his kingdom. Satan even influenced Peter in order to deflect the mind of Jesus from the necessity of suffering as the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. But Jesus had quickly detected the spirit of satanic opposition even in the words of a disciple who truly loved him: "Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offense to me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (Matthew 16:23).

At the supper Jesus forces the issue. Will you, the Master asks, all twelve of you, be my true servants and proclaim my Name as the one whose shed blood will set men free from death as the pascal lamb freed Israel from physical death at the time of exodus? Take, eat, this is my body. Take, drink, this is the new covenant in my blood.

But one of you will betray me. One will show himself to have been Satan's tool all the while. One of you will soon openly choose the side of the Pharisees who have from the beginning been seeking to destroy me. Choose ye now, *for* me or *against* me. Am I really *for you* the Lamb of God that takes away *your* sins? Do you now see that I must be wounded for *your* transgressions and bruised for *your*

iniquities?

The atmosphere in the upper room was getting much too hot for Judas. The others too were depressed, not fully understanding what Jesus had come to do for them. But in their hearts was true love for their Lord, wrought by the Spirit of God. In Judas, on the contrary, there had been smouldering a hatred for Jesus wrought by Satan. So Judas now goes out into the dark of night.

When Peter later denied that he knew Jesus, this was the result of the weakness of the flesh. After Jesus looked at him and the cock crew thrice, Peter went out and wept bitterly for his sins. But when Jesus handed the morsel of bread to Judas, Satan entered and took full possession of him. Judas never found true repentance for his betrayal of Jesus. He became the great apostle of Satan, and in following Satan lost himself and all that he had.

B. Our faith — in the merit of his blood

Our faith, like that of Dr. Machen, is the faith of the old Princeton not the new; the faith of the Hodges and Warfield; the faith of the founders of Westminster, of men like Frank H. Stevenson, first president of the Board of Trustees, of men like Samuel G. Craig, Robert Dick Wilson, Oswald T. Allis. It is the faith of all those who today are ready to stand up for the "merit of the blood of Jesus Christ" against those in modern science, philosophy, and theology, who have been and are seeking to construct the kingdom of man, the kingdom of Satan, even though they talk of the kingdom of God.

All of us must, even across many ecclesiastical lines, speak oft with one another of this our *common* faith, our *common* heritage, our *common* task, our *common* hope. It is the faith of all of us who believe in the merit of the blood of Christ, who must rejoice in the fellowship of all those who glory in the merit of that blood.

C. The certainty of our faith

When Jesus had been crucified, it seemed that Satan had been victorious. The Jews had found Jesus guilty of blasphemy. The high priest, a mere man, had said that Jesus made himself equal with God. Thus the leaders of God's covenant people, called to be a light to the Gentiles, sought to envelop that light in the darkness of the nations. And so they handed him over to Pilate, the representative of

these Gentiles.

"What is truth?" asked Pilate. You claim to be the king of a kingdom of truth; what nonsense is that? Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle have shown us that truth is *beyond* the reach of man. It is at best an ideal set by man for which he must strive. Surely then, man cannot be spoken of as guilty because he does not *know* the truth.

Thus the Jews, God's covenant people, those to whom the oracles of God had been revealed, joined with the Gentiles to say that Jesus was not, *because he could not be*, the promised Prophet, Priest, and King through whom alone salvation could be accomplished for men. All of them were the instruments of Satan. Through them the powers of hell were seeking to establish the kingdom of men instead of the kingdom of God.

But notice the *certainty*, after Christ's resurrection, with which the apostles and their followers proclaimed the name of Jesus as the only Name given by which men must be saved. It is from this same sense of fearlessness that our certainty of the truth springs and with which we must today speak forth our common faith to men.

"The kings of the earth stood up and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together for to do whatever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:26-28). May the certainty of our faith be the certainty of these early believers, a certainty that produces fearlessness before the Sanhedrin of today.

II. Christ, Victor over Satan in History

A. Our faith — in the victorious Lord

For the third time, we ask about the substance, the nature, the content, the object of our faith. "Where is your God; where is your Christ?" a scorning world and an apostate church says to us today.

Our answer is that the object of our faith is *the self-attesting Christ of Scripture, the Lord of history, the Victor over Satan* and his hosts. The whole course of history consists of an all-out war between Christ and Satan for the souls of men, with Christ the victor and Satan the vanquished. All things are *from* him and *through* him and *unto* him. This is the good news that unitedly *we* as *believers* must proclaim without fear — the message of joy to the

world that lies in darkness.

In short, when we assert that all things are from, through, and unto Christ, we give in a word our total philosophy of history. With respect to the past, we believe that all things were created by Christ. "In the beginning was the Word. . . . All things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:1, 3). As for the present, "all things were created by him, and for him, . . . and by him all things consist" (Colossians 1:16, 17). Finally, as to the future: "Because he hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

None but those who bow before the Scriptures as the Word of Christ have such a philosophy of history. Apostate men do not believe in the existence of Satan as the deceiver of mankind since the day of his fall in Adam. But we do believe in Satan's existence. And we also believe that the powers of hell have been defeated by Christ on the cross. At no time in history was Satan able to win more than a sham victory. The entire course of history is a manifestation of the victory of Christ over Satan. And that victory is anchored in the finished work he performed on the cross for his people's salvation when he cried out, "It is finished."

B. Our faith — participating in Christ's victory

Christ's victory over Satan also spells our victory over Satan and all his attempts to enlist us in his service and to take us with him to hell. History is now for *me* and all those who, in partaking of the supper that Christ instituted, really do eat his flesh and drink his blood.

We are on a staircase that leads upward to our Savior's presence. Did he not tell us, "Let not your heart be troubled"? "Ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:1, 2). At the right hand of the Father *my* Savior now intercedes for *me*, appealing to the Father on the basis of the finished redemption he wrought for *me* on Calvary's cross. The Holy Spirit also makes intercession for *me* with groanings that cannot be uttered (Romans 8:26). He too pleads for *me* on the basis of the finished work of Christ on the cross.

The Heidelberg Catechism expresses my faith marvelously well: "What is your only comfort in life and death?" The

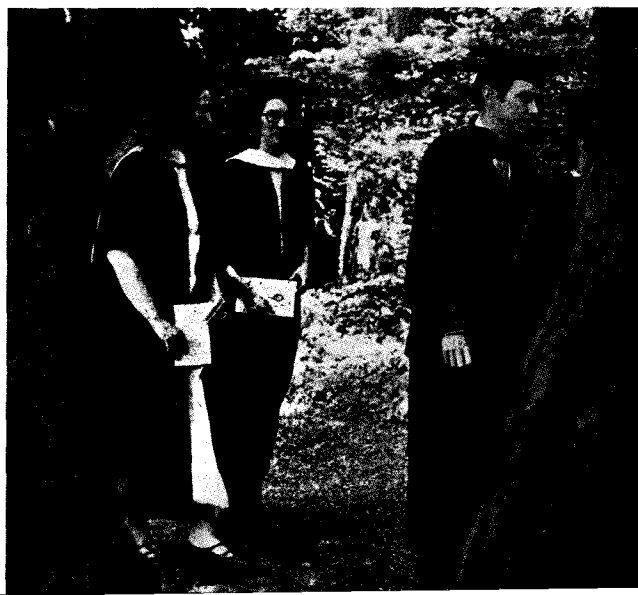
First women graduate from WTS

Miss Lynne Haas and Mrs. Susan Truitt received the degree of Master of Arts in Religion during the May 30 commencement exercises. The degree is given upon completion of a two-year course, similar to that required for the M.Div. degree, but not including work in the area of preaching.

Though women have attended classes at Westminster in the past, the seminary only recently was given authority to award the M.A.R. degree. The new degree is designed for those who want a sound theological education but who do not plan to enter the ministry.

Miss Haas expects to use her training in church work or teaching. Mrs. Truitt took the course in parallel with her husband who expects to graduate with the M.Div. degree next year.

Susan Truitt and Lynne Haas in academic procession to receive the first degrees awarded to women at Westminster Theological Seminary.



answer is "that I, with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ; who with his precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things work together for my salvation, wherefore, by his Holy Spirit he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me heartily willing and ready henceforth to live unto him" (Question and Answer 1).

This is *my* faith. It is *our* faith as believers in the merit of the blood of Jesus. More than ever before we must hold to this faith against the opposition of the combined forces of an inherently hostile world and apostate church.

C. *The certainty of our faith — in the self-attesting Christ*

When I think upon my faith in the self-attesting Christ of Scripture as the Lord of history to whom all power in heaven and earth is given, who will soon return on the clouds to judge all mankind, then I ask myself once more of the *certainty* of this my faith.

Do I, do we, dare fearlessly to set our philosophy of history over against that of the unbeliever and challenge him to forsake the "wisdom of the world"? Does not today's philosophy assure us that no one knows the truth? Are we not told that science cannot operate except in an open universe? Does not the prevailing thought tell me that my body, and all life, has come into the world by a process of evolution from a world of chance? When we cry out, "O death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory?" do not the leading theologians of our day — Roman Catholic and Protestant — inform us that we are deluding ourselves, setting our hope on fairy tales that no mature person can take as representing the facts in our world?

I think again of this graduating class. A number of them will soon be called upon to preach Christ and him crucified and risen from the dead. They will be called not to set forth cunningly devised fables, but to speak the truth as it is in Jesus — to say, to those for whom all things are relative and no truth is known by anyone, that the Christ of the Scriptures *is* the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and that without him life is worse than vain.

Will they dare to say with full assurance of its truth that Christ is risen from the dead and become "the firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Corinthians 15:20)? As servants of Christ who will be called upon to give account of what they have said to men about their Lord, they will continually hear the solemn words of Paul: "Be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye *know* that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58). Will they dare to say, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Timothy 1:12)?

After Easter and Pentecost, how can any servant of Christ be anything but *certain* of his faith in Christ as Lord of lords and King of kings? How can any true servant of Christ speak hesitantly or apologetically of Christ as victor over all of history? Listen to Peter tell the high priest, who was "grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead," that "if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus

Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole" (Acts 4:2, 9-10).

In this way our graduates, this Seminary, and we all each in his own way, must speak today to those who are "grieved" when they hear of Christ and him crucified for the sins of his people and raised for their justification. It is the responsibility of all of us who, by God's providence, have inherited the Reformed Faith to lead other believers into the service of the sovereign God of the Scriptures.

III. The Cloud of Witnesses to Our Faith

If fear should ever threaten to prevent our being steadfast, immovable, abounding in the Lord's work, then let us look to those witnesses, some of whom were "stoned, and sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword, who wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, tormented, afflicted, . . . [but] received not the promise; God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Hebrews 11:37-40).

A. *Noah, the man of God*

Noah differed from the men of his time because he had received grace in the sight of God. With grace in his heart he lived as a covenant-keeper among covenant-breakers. He preached righteousness to those who preached lawlessness. Obeying the vision of God he built an ark to save his house and as a warning to all who had forsaken their Creator-Redeemer.

Noah's faith involved a philosophy of history, for he believed that God had originally created man perfect but that man had disobeyed the command of God. For their disobedience they were to be destroyed by a universal flood. When he told them this, Noah's contemporaries ridiculed him: How do you know this vision of yours means anything for the world of sunshine and showers? There are no records of all-destructive floods. Do you think you are God's favorite? Do you think that if we all should drown that you will not drown with us?

But the Spirit of Christ was speaking to men through Noah. Christ was calling all men to himself as the one from whom, through whom, and unto whom are all things. As covenant-breakers, all men are under God's wrath and will be destroyed. Only covenant-keepers will be saved, and they are covenant-keepers because, by God's grace, they have been lifted out of the mass of covenant-breakers. Noah *knew* that his labor was not in vain in the Lord.

Jesus said, "As were the days of Noah, so shall the days of the Son of man be. For, . . . until the day that Noah entered the ark, [they] knew not until the flood came and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:37-39).

The men of Noah's day paid no attention. They simply assumed that Noah's claims of the coming judgment were but the product of an overheated imagination. Men today simply assume that Jesus' word about his coming as the Judge of all men was based on a delusion at best.

In Noah's day the line of separation between the children of Cain and the children of Seth had, for all practical purposes, been wiped out. Today an apostate church has become enamoured of the principles of an apostate world. As Jews and Gentiles united to destroy Jesus and his claim



Dr. Cornelius Van Til speaks with friends following the Forty-fourth Commencement of Westminster Seminary.

to be the Son of Man and Son of God, the coming Judge of all, so a false church and apostate world today sing in chorus that nobody knows anything about anything, but that all *know* that the faith of men like Luther, Calvin and Machen *cannot* be true. It is the task of this graduating class in days to come to dare to stand alone as Noah did against those who believed his words were folly.

Those who hold to the faith in the Christ of Scripture must do so in the face of well-nigh universal doubt, indifference and unbelief. They must listen to the words of God: "Fear not little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

B. Abraham, father of the faithful

When we are afraid or doubt, let us also look at the faith of Abraham, father of believers. "In *obedience* to the heavenly vision he left his home and went out not knowing whither he went" (Hebrews 11:8). "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange land, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (verses 9, 10).

Our Lord says that Abraham longed to see his day, and that he saw it. And "to Abraham and to his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Galatians 3:16).

Through Christ, the promised seed of Abraham, will all the nations be blessed. But who believes this today? The world says that nobody can predict the future. Those who believe that "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, . . . that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Galatians 3:13-14), must believe this in the face of the opposition of the god of this age.

Kierkegaard centers all that he says about God in man as self-sufficient. Karl Barth says that "the historical Abraham does not really concern us," that it is a "non-historical truth that to Abraham his faith was reckoned as righteousness." Arnold Toynbee says there is no special merit in Christ's

blood since all suffering of any man anywhere sanctifies him. Bonhoeffer teaches that all men, as men, are what they are because they are in Christ who *is* the *act* of saving all mankind. Jacques Maritain, the Roman Catholic theologian, teaches an "integral humanism" in which the "merit of the blood of Jesus" has no place. Herman Wiersinga, of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, denies openly that Christ was made a curse for us.

Thus modern theologians do what the Pharisees did — deny the need and efficacy of "the merit of the blood of Jesus Christ." The task facing this seminary and facing us all is to be obedient with Noah and Abraham to the heavenly vision of the Christ, to his atoning death and resurrection for men under the wrath of God for their disobedience to him. To be obedient is for us to proclaim Jesus and him crucified, Jesus as risen, Jesus as ascended into heaven, Jesus as soon to return on the clouds to judge all men according to whether they have believed or have not believed in him.

Modern man is paralyzed by doubt and fear. His wisdom has been made foolishness with God. Taking for granted that he must start his effort to know himself and his world from within himself, he cannot even find himself. He is a whitecap on the wave of a bottomless and shoreless ocean of chance. He differs from the sea only because there chanced to be a wind from the infinite blue above that stirred the surface of the bottomless deep. After a moment he sinks back into identity with that from which he came.

Such is the vaunted freedom of modern science and philosophy. The message of modern theology is one of death and despair. It is to this world lying in darkness, and to an apostate church with a gospel of darkness, that we, who by grace have seen the vision of the sovereign grace of God, may and must bring the message of light, of hope and of gladness.

We receive this message by grace, not because we are any wiser or better than others. We believe what we believe on the absolute authority of him who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." We believe that all things are his because *he has told us* this. We believe that truth is what Jesus Christ says it is and that what he has spoken in the Scriptures is true because he has spoken it. We are certain in our faith on the authority of him who knows all things because he made all things, directs all things, and will judge all.

Let us then run with patience and perseverance the race that is set before us, "looking to Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1, 2).

Lift up your hearts then, my friends, to that one who sits on the throne with the twenty-four elders and four living creatures as all the church of God sings the song of Moses and the Lamb, saying, "Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power; for thou didst create all things, and because of thy will they are, and were created" (Revelation 4:11; R.V.).

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

Amen.