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MEDITATION

That Ever Wonderful Story

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria. And all went to be taxed, everyone into his own city. etc.

—Lu. 2:1-7

How wondrous are the ways of God!

Thus, indeed, one exclaims ever again, as often as he may read the utterly simple, yet amazingly marvellous story of the coming of Immanuel!

Wonderful is that narrative from its very beginning.

Or is it not amazing that the story that tells of the incarnation of the Son of God, of the birth of Christ, the Anointed of God, should be introduced by the name of Caesar Augustus, the head of the mighty world-power? A decree went forth from Caesar Augustus! . . .

It testifies, indeed, that the glory had departed from Israel. How otherwise could a decree of the mighty Caesar have any bearing upon the realization of so distinctly an Israelitish hope as the birth of their Messiah? Yet, so it was. After the captivity in Babylon, there had, indeed, been a brief period of hope and joy. The temple was rebuilt. Jerusalem had been raised from its ruins. The law had been restored. But never had Israel been restored to its former glory and freedom. A mere handful of people had returned to the land of their fathers. Though the temple had been rebuilt, the Holy of Holies remained empty: the ark of the covenant was lost for ever! Israel had been the plaything of cruel nations, that

plowed upon its back and left long and deep furrows. A hated tyrant, descendant and worthy representative of the Reprobate, occupied the throne in Jerusalem; and even so, the sceptre in his hand was controlled by a mightier hand than his: that of the glorious Caesar of Rome! And a decree went forth from Caesar Augustus. . . .

The outward form of the kingdom of God had been swallowed up by the mighty world-power!

Even so, the fulness of time had come!

True, it did not appear so to those that had expectations of an earthly Messiah and world glory. But God's purpose was different. The earthly form of the kingdom was a mere shadow. It might disappear. And it must needs depart, that the essence of that Kingdom might become manifest. God's King will, indeed, also cause the kingdoms of the world-power to crumble into the dust, but He would not appear in a halo of glory, with world-crowns on His head, royal purple about His shoulders, and glittering sword in His hand, but as the lowly Servant of Jehovah, the Man after God's heart, Who will establish His kingdom in righteousness!

Hence, not in Jerusalem, but in Bethlehem, are His proper connections.

There He must be born!

And the world-power must cooperate to this end: a decree went forth from Caesar Augustus!

Wonderful ways of God!

And Joseph also went up!

For, "all went to be taxed, every one to his own city."

Critics have denied the fact that such a general taxing ever took place at the time when the Saviour was born. They argue that secular historians know nothing of such a taxation; that, even if it had taken place, Herod's dominion would not have been subject to the direct decree of Caesar; and that, even if it had taken place and affected Judaea, all could have registered in the city of their habitation.

Interesting, indeed!

For the gospel narrative itself informs us that this taxing was actually first made, "when Cyrenius was governor of Syria," and this was ten years after the death of Herod the Great. At that time Judaea became a Roman province. The truth, then, appears to be, that the decree itself went forth at this time, that Herod hastened to please the emperor, so that all were registered, and that the actual taxation did not take place till years afterward.

And so: Joseph also went up.

He, indeed, would have to proceed to Bethlehem, for in Israel the census would be taken according to tribes, houses, families. And since also Joseph was of the house and lineage of David, to Bethlehem the decree of Caesar would occasion him to go.

Hardly, however, does it account for the fact that he went "with Mary his espoused wife," for neither according to Roman nor to Jewish law was it required that she should accompany him. It appears probable, however, and for evident reasons, that they intended to move from Nazareth, that city of ill repute, and to take up their abode in Bethlehem permanently.

And thus it came about that Joseph went up "into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem. . . with Mary, his espoused wife, being great with child."

We can imagine that, perhaps, it was toward evening of the third or fourth day after they had left Nazareth, that they approached the city of David. The country surrounding Bethlehem, the terraced gardens, the vine-clad hills, and the rich fields, even at this late season,—for it was winter in Palestine,—presented a beautiful view, as it was bathed in the golden glory of the setting sun; but, perhaps, the two weary travelers paid scant attention to the beauty of the landscape. Then, too, the country through which they passed, as well as the ancient city of their fathers which they approached, might have reminded them of the past and Israel's ancient glory; but even these reminiscences may hardly have registered in their consciousness. Other matters occupied their minds and hearts, things of the present and of the immediate future, and that, too, in connection with events of the recent past. Their state of mind would be one of expectation and wonder. . . .

Did not Mary have many things to "keep, and to ponder them in her heart?"

Could it be possible that at this moment, as they are approaching the end of their journey, and, at the same time, the fulfillment of a most marvellous expectation, she was not revolving in her mind the mysterious message of the angel that had visited her humble dwelling in Nazareth, and had pronounced her the favored one of the Lord, the most blessed among women. Had he not informed her that she

would conceive in her womb One that would be called the Son of the Most High, Who would sit on the throne of His father David for ever? And did she, at this moment, not ponder her own timid question concerning this mysterious matter, and the much more mysterious answer of the angel, that the Holy Ghost would come upon her, and the power of the Most High would overshadow her? And was not this Wonder of wonders about to be realized? . . .

And Joseph? . . .

Had he not been minded to leave his betrothed secretly, not knowing anything of the Wonder that had been revealed to Mary?

And had not he, too, received a revelation, which he had believed though he understood it not, warning him not to carry out his intentions, seeing that Mary was pregnant of the Holy Ghost, and that the Son she was about to bring forth would be Immanuel, and must be called Jesus, because He would save His people from their sins?

These things had begun to come to pass!

And now, as they were near the end of their journey, they had but little eye for the beauty of the landscape, for their hearts were filled with the thoughts of those things that were on the eve of their realization.

A strange wonder occupied their minds.

What would the immediate future bring? How would it all be?

Many questions crowded their hearts!

And so they went on, these two, till they entered Bethlehem.

In silence!

And "the days were accomplished!"

While they were there, that is, not long afterward, if not the very day after their arrival; or even in that same night, for in the night it was, when shepherds keep watch over their flock.

Not long after their arrival it could have been, for it all took place in a very hastily prepared shelter they had found for the night. For as they arrived in the little town, they found it crowded to capacity with visitors, so that there was no room for them even in the inn. Refuge they had found in a stable; according to some the inn-stable in the adjoining court; but more likely one of the caves or grotto's in the outskirts of the city, where passing caravans would stable their animals for the night.

While they were there, her days were accomplished!

The days of Mary: that she should be delivered!

Yes, but also the days that must pass, the hours that must glide into the past, the seconds that must be ticked off, in order to reach that exact moment that is called "the fulness of time." For, "when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made

of a woman, made under the law." The days were accomplished! The most significant moment in all history had come! The Wonder of wonders had been performed: God is come into the flesh!

Must not human language be exhausted to publish this glorious event, and to describe this amazing Wonder?

But no!

Utmost simplicity characterizes the form of the narrative!

"While they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

These simple words convey the report of the most astounding Wonder, of the most profound mystery, of the most blessed event of salvation, of the most central fact of all history. . . .

Disappointing? . . .

Yet, consider for a moment. Could anything but the barest simplicity be proper here? Or can the most glowing terms human speech can produce ever do justice to the report of the "mystery of godliness," and ever do anything more than add to the mystery and incomprehensibility of it all? O, to be sure, there in that night of all nights, in that humble stable, the Most High has accomplished the Wonder of all wonders, the realization of His promise. And you may exhaust human speech, you may pile phrase upon phrase to express its meaning. God is come into the flesh! Eternity is come into time! The Infinite is for ever united with the finite! The Lord has become Servant! The Almighty is revealed in the weakness of human flesh! But after you have thus exerted your utmost to explain the mystery of Bethlehem, have not your efforts been in vain, and have you not merely declared the incomprehensibility of it all? . . .

Besides, true though it all may be, that is not Bethlehem!

"And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger."

That is Bethlehem!

Yes, in the manger of Bethlehem lies the mystery of godliness, but it is hid, completely hid. There you may behold by faith God in the flesh, but emphatically you behold Him *in the flesh*. And because He is come into the flesh, the Wonder is completely lost to sight. All other wonders are amazing and astounding, because the divine power of grace in them flashes through the darkness and misery and death of the sin-cursed world: in Bethlehem God revealed is God hidden in the likeness of sinful flesh!

What else then would you say, to describe the event, than what is recorded here?

Her days were accomplished that she should be delivered: like every other child He had developed in Mary's womb.

And she brought forth her firstborn son: he was flesh of Mary's flesh, bone of her bone, blood of her blood.

And wrapped him in swaddling clothes: helpless and dependent as all other children he came into the world.

And laid him in a manger: the glory of the wonder is here enshrouded in deeper darkness.

O, ever wonderful story!

The manger!

O, the shame of it all!

She laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn!

When God comes into the world, when He sends His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, when Christ the Lord is born, the only place for Him in all the world is a miserable stable, the only cradle that can receive him is a manger! O, it is true, it could not be helped. No one knew of His coming. Jerusalem was sound asleep. Bethlehem was crowded. The poor people of Bethlehem could not possibly have provided more room for the two travelers that arrived so late that there was even no room in the inn. . . .

But, o, the shame of it!

Yet, what would you?

Would you come to Bethlehem, only to be indignant in your heart with a self-righteous indignation at the sight of the Babe in the manger? Would you judge that the royal palace in Jerusalem had been a better place for this Son of God in the flesh, and that royal purple should have taken the place of those swaddling clothes? Are you, perhaps, in your self-righteous and religious fervor and zeal, on the verge of calling in some social welfare agent to take this mother and this Child out of this stable, and to provide comfortable lodging for them? . . .

But wait! . . .

Do not destroy what God has wrought!

For this stable and this manger are the divinely appointed place for this Child! True, circumstances determined it so: because there was no room for them in the inn! But God determined the circumstances. Here in this poor stable, in that humble manger, among the beasts of the field, on the very edge of the world, He sent His Son, made of a woman, made under the law. . . .

Do not destroy the sign, for it speaks!

It proclaims that in your heart and my heart, in human society, in all the world, there is no room for the Son of God!

Until He makes room for Himself!

Glory to His grace!

H H

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EDITORIALS

The Christian Reformed Synod on Labor Unions

(Cont. from p. 73).

The question is: does corporate responsibility imply that a church member is liable to ecclesiastical discipline, if the union or association to which he belongs is or was engaged in sinful practices? The Christian Reformed Synod replied: not necessarily; it all depends on the degree of guilt. The correct answer to this question, however, is and must be: *most assuredly!*

Let us first of all dispose of the question of "degree of guilt." Whether or not a sin is censurable cannot be made dependent upon the degree of guilt, or the degree of sinfulness of a given deed. That would make Christian discipline quite relative, so that it would ultimately be impossible to apply it at all. *No sin is censurable that is repented of*, for he that repents is forgiven, and therefore in the kingdom of heaven: he cannot be excommunicated from that kingdom. Even if a man should be convicted of murder, and condemned to be hanged, the Church would not discipline and excommunicate him *if he repents*. On the basis of the same principle, *every sin is censurable that is not repented of*, for he that does not repent is not forgiven, and is therefore outside of the kingdom of heaven. If a man does not repent of one sin, however small it may appear to us, he cannot repent of any sin. Hence, he is subject to discipline even unto excommunication.

That leaves the question: does corporate responsibility imply that a church member is guilty of the sinful practices of any union or association of which he is a member, even though he does not personally commit them? And our answer is: certainly:

a. If such sinful practices are *quite in accord* with the principles of such union or association, as announced in its constitution.

b. If such sinful practices are *not in conflict* with the principles of such union or association, as announced in its constitution. This, too, is possible. The constitution of a union or association may be "neutral." It declares neither positively Christian, nor directly antichristian principles. In such a case, sinful practices are not directly in harmony with the constitution, but they may be committed *under it*, because they are not *in conflict with it*. If such sinful practices are committed, and one *remains a*

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member nevertheless, he is responsible for them.

c. Even though such sinful practices should be quite in conflict with the principles of such union or association, as declared in its constitution, but are committed under the approval of such union or association, condoned by it, protest has proved to be vain, and one still remains a member.

Let me add a few words of explanation.

1. First of all, we must, I think, proceed from the standpoint that, in order to discipline a member even to excommunication from the kingdom of heaven, the Church must be able to point out to such a member, and to admonish him with respect to *some concrete and definite act of sin* which he commits, and of which he refuses to repent and convert himself. In the case under discussion, the Church must be able to point out that one of its members commits an act of sin by being a member of some organization, be it labor union or employers' association, and the nature of his sin must be clearly pointed out to him. Hence, it must be concretely proved that the organization of which he is a member is sinful and commits sinful practices. For this reason, for no other, I cannot agree with the stand that a Church can and may exercise discipline and excommunicate members simply because they are members of some union or association, even though you cannot point to anything positively antichristian either in their constitution or practices. I readily agree with Rev. Petter that basically and principally, there is no "neutrality." And this holds also for any organization. In deepest principle it is always for or against Christ. And I believe, too, that the preaching of the Word should emphasize this, and warn all believers against membership even in "neutral" organizations, that declare nothing directly antichristian in their constitutions, nor openly are known to be engaged in sinful practices. But I do not agree that on this abstract and general basis the Church can excommunicate her members. And all ecclesiastical discipline is principally excommunication. To be able to apply such discipline, the Consistory, but also the members of the Church, must be able to point the guilty party to some definite sin, so that it is quite clear that he is outside of the kingdom of heaven. No Consistory can or may consider it sufficient to announce to the congregation that N. is to be excommunicated merely on the ground that he belongs to a certain association, union, or any other organization. *His sin must be announced definitely.* This is clearly implied in all the Church Order has to say on Christian Discipline, Art. 71ff. It must be explained to the congregation how one errs in doctrine, or offends in conduct. And this is also very clear from the language of the *Form of Excommunication*, which presupposes that the congregation is acquainted with "*the great sin*" and "*the*

heinous offence" of this "*rotten and as yet incurable member,*" who is in "*the bonds of the devil,*" and who "*daily aggravates his sin, which in itself is not small.*" It is plain, then, that before the Consistory can discipline a member, which is the beginning of excommunication unless in the course of the admonitions given to him the member repents, they must be able to *name his sin.* And if his sin stands in connection with his being a member of some organization, lodge, union, or association, not merely that membership, but the sin involved in such membership must be announced to the congregation.

2. Now, if we apply this, we may state the following:

a. A church member is censurable when he joins any organization that is based on antichristian principles declared in the constitution of such an organization. Anyone joining an organization thereby assumes responsibility for the constitution of that organization and declares that he agrees with its principles. If, then, that constitution contains a declaration of principles that are contrary to the Christian faith, that rule out Christ from the sphere of labor, that demand of him that joins a repudiation of his faith, or a pledge to acts of violence, or the like, and a church member joins under such a constitution, he adopts the principles of that constitution, and is, on that basis, censurable. In such a case he can be admonished for his sin of having denied Christ and the Christian faith, and having broken the vow he made when he made confession of faith before the Church. And if it must come to excommunication *that sin* can be announced to the congregation.

b. From this it already follows that any church member is also liable to censure, if by the organization to which he belongs sinful acts are committed, or sinful practices are engaged in, that *are quite in accord* with the constitution of such an organization. By joining the organization he assumed responsibility for the principles declared in the constitution, and promised to abide by them. One dare not offer the excuse that he never saw a constitution, that he was not asked to agree with any principles and that, therefore, he is not responsible for anything. For he knows very well that every organization has its declaration of principles, and that by joining he assumes responsibility for them. To join any organization blindly is itself a sin. Hence, if sinful acts are committed that follow from the declaration of principles, all the members *commit them jointly*, and have expressed their agreement with them by expressing agreement with the principles of the constitution. And if such a church member is to be excommunicated *these sinful acts* to which he is a party and of which he is guilty can be announced to the Church as the ground of his censure.

c. But suppose that an organization to which a church member belongs commits, approves or condones sinful practices that are not directly implied in the principles declared in the constitution, but are neither in conflict with it. The constitution is "neutral." It does not declare itself on any moral or religious principles. Is such a member even then responsible for such acts, and, therefore, censurable? He is. For he knowingly joined an organization that did not declare itself on matters religious and moral, and that left plenty of room for evil acts and sinful practices. By these sinful acts it becomes evident to him and to every one else, that the organization to which he belongs is not at all "neutral," and, therefore, he should break with it. If he does not, he certainly becomes liable to ecclesiastical discipline. And again, if it must come to excommunication, his being guilty of the sinful practices of his organization must be announced as the ground of his censure.

d. And this is even true if sinful acts are committed or approved by any organization *contrary* to the declared principles of its constitution. Suppose the C.L.A. would become guilty of this. In that case, the members have, of course, the right to protest under the constitution, and they must. But suppose protest would be vain. Then it simply becomes the duty of the members to resign. For they certainly are responsible for the acts of the organization, and liable to censure if they remain member in spite of its corrupt practices.

These, it seems to me, are the general principles implied in the one principle of corporate responsibility.

And they hold, not only for labor unions, but for all organizations, lodges, employers' associations, business associations and the like.

H. H.

IN MEMORIAM

As we are again drawing to the close of another year, it has pleased the Lord to take out of our midst two of our members,

MRS. P. MINNEMA — SEPT. 14, 1943

MRS. S. G. SCHAAFSMA — DEC. 4, 1943

The Ladies Aid of the First Protestant Reformed Church wish to express our heartfelt sympathy to Mr. P. Minnema and family, and Mr. S. G. Schaafsma and family, in each the loss of a devoted wife and mother.

May the Lord of all comfort and sustain the bereaved families with His divine Presence and grace in their sorrow.

Mrs. J. Vander Wall, Pres.

Mrs. A. Pruis, Sec'y.

The Christian Labor Herald Differs

(Cont. from p. 73.)

The Christian Labor Herald reflects on my criticism of the decisions of the Christian Reformed Synod regarding labor unions, as follows:

The foregoing decisions were taken as a result of a report rendered by a committee appointed in 1940. In answer to an overture of one of the Classes of the Church the Synod decided the following: (Art. 175, p. 105)

"1. To appoint a Committee whose task it will be to make a study of "Corporate responsibility" in industrial, professional, and business organizations.

2. Synod urge the leaders of the church to warn and instruct our people regarding the dangers of their participation in the unchristian practices found in C.I.O. and A.F. of L."

The editor of the Standard Bearer severely criticizes point A of the decisions. We suspect that he quoted from a press report instead of from the official Acts of Synod because the designation in parenthesis of CIO and AFL after the words "so-called neutral labor union" is not found in the Acts. However, it may be that the editor felt justified in injecting those initials in parenthesis because membership in those two organizations was the real question before Synod. And no-one will deny that the decision does intend to justify membership in the affiliates of those movements if such affiliates do not give constitutional warrant to sin, nor show in their regular activities that they champion sin.

But, the editor is hardly justified in concluding that the Synod by that expression also declared that the existing so-called neutral labor organizations (CIO and AFL) do not necessarily give constitutional warrant to sin, nor show in their regular activities that they champion sin. In fact it can be argued on good grounds that the Synod actually declared that membership in the CIO or AFL is not compatible with membership in the Church when attention is fixed upon the last of the decisions, in which a warning is given, very specifically, against the "unchristian practices found in the C.I.O. and A.F. of L." That decision in effect eliminates those organizations from the "so-called neutral unions" membership in which is declared to be compatible with membership in the church on the condition that they do

not give "constitutional warrant to sins," nor show in their regular activities that they champion sin. Surely the warning against the "unchristian practices" found in those organizations by implication declares that they do champion sin in their regular activities. We have therefore a perfect right to contend that the Synod of the Christian Reformed Churches, held in 1943, taking its decisions as a whole, declared that membership in the C.I.O. and A.F. of L. is not compatible with membership in the Church because of the unchristian practices found in them. With that we are in complete agreement.

Now, I have already stated (cf. S. B. p. 73), that it was not I that "felt justified in injecting those initials (CIO and AFL) in parentheses," but that they were inserted in the Press report from which I quoted. And I readily admit that if there is no reference to the CIO and AFL in B,1 of the decisions of the Christian Reformed Synod (cf. S. B. p. 73.), that part of the decisions assumes a somewhat different aspect, and my criticism was not quite to the point. Nevertheless, I must remark the following:

1. That I do not agree with the *Christian Labor Herald* when it states that: "it can be argued on good grounds that the synod actually declared that membership in the CIO and AFL is not compatible with membership in the Church, when attention is fixed upon the last of the decisions, in which a warning is given, very specifically, against the 'unchristian practices found in the CIO and AFL.' That decision in effect eliminates those organizations from the 'so-called neutral unions' membership in which is declared to be compatible with membership in the church on condition that they do not give 'constitutional warrant to sin,' nor show in their regular activities that they champion sin." If it were true that such a warning were given by the Christian Reformed Synod of 1943, I could agree with the above statement. But this is not the case. The warning is of 1940. The present decisions do not mention the CIO and AFL at all.

2. That, as the decisions stand, the "so-called neutral labor unions," mentioned under B, 1, *may*, at least, include the CIO and AFL, and B, 1 may be thus interpreted. There is nothing in the decisions to prevent such an interpretation. And this is all the more plausible, because it was membership in those unions that was the definite issue before synod.

3. I do not know whether reports prepared for the Press are approved by synod, or by a committee for publication, before they are released, but it is evident to all events that the Press reporter, who must have been present during the discussion on this matter on the floor of the synod, labored under the

impression that by "neutral labor unions" the synod referred to the CIO and AFL.

4. However, whether or not under B, 1 the synod referred to the CIO and AFL, my criticism of the ambiguity of the language of the decisions, as well as of their opposition of corporate responsibility vs. ecclesiastical censure, may stand unaltered.

H. H.

The Triple Knowledge

An Exposition Of The Heidelberg Catechism

PART TWO

OF MAN'S REDEMPTION

Lord's Day X.

Chapter 1. (cont.)

The Idea Of God's Providence.

The word *providence* is not a very accurate term to express what it is meant to denote. From the term itself the idea cannot be deduced. In the sense in which it is used in this connection it does not occur in Scripture at all. Literally, according to its derivation, the word means *foresight*. And it has acquired the added meaning, which it now commonly has, of fulfilling a need, of making provision beforehand. We see that winter is coming, and we provide for it by filling our coal bin. So one provides for the needs of his family, a traveler provides himself with money for the journey, a ship is provided with supplies for the voyage, etc. It is, perhaps, because the word is usually employed in this sense that even in modern circles, that have long forgotten the Scriptural teaching about God Who is really GOD, He is preferably spoken of as Providence, as if God were nothing but some good and beneficent Power, Who really exists to help us in our need, and more especially to be called in when we perceive that we can no longer help ourselves, or when we are in trouble. And on thanksgiving day we remember this Providence for the abundance of worldly prosperity in which we may rejoice. But this is certainly not the teaching of the Word of God concerning the "providence" of God, nor is it this sense that the Church

employs the term. And it may, therefore, be well to remember that Scripture never uses the word at all. It is a theological, not a biblical term.

The Heidelberg Catechism defines the providence of God as "the almighty and omnipresent power of God; whereby, as it were by his hand, he upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures." The basic idea, therefore, of God's providence is His omnipresence. And we will do well to give ourselves account of what is really meant by the omnipresence of the Almighty. For even of this marvellous virtue of God we are apt to form a wrong conception.

By the confession of God's omnipresence the Church really expresses two ideas, that may never be separated from each other, those of God's immanence, and His transcendence; by which she opposes two very serious errors, that of Deism on the one hand, and that of Pantheism on the other. These two heretical views are usually so distinguished that Deism denies God's immanence, His presence in the world, and only believes in His transcendence; while Pantheism teaches that God is only immanent, and denies His transcendence. For practical purposes this distinction may be adopted, although, strictly speaking, it does not accurately describe these heresies. For, although Deism certainly will have nothing of an immanent God, it neither has a correct conception of His transcendence; and although Pantheism knows nothing of a transcendent God, it can neither speak of an immanent God, for it identifies God with the world. According to Deism God is not in the world, neither is He really transcendent in relation to the world, but He exists outside of the world, and has nothing to do with it. Just as man builds a house, but when the house is finished has really nothing to do with its continued existence except to keep it in repair whenever necessary; or just as the mechanic constructs an automobile that can function and run without him when it is ready; so God formed the world, gave it its laws and inherent powers, and now the universe runs by its own power and by virtue of its own laws. God is not transcendent, still less immanent in the world, but He is outside of the universe He created. And according to Pantheism, God is not transcendent in relation to the world, neither can it be said that He is immanent in all things, but He *is* the world. The essence of God and the essence of the world are identified. Everything is God, and God is everything. All things are a part of God's being, and especially in man God reaches His supreme self-expression, and self-consciousness.

We may remark here in passing, that while Pantheism is the ultimate expression of man's sinful pride instilled into his heart through his acceptance of the word of the devil: "Ye shall be as God"; every day thinking and life are rather Deistic, so that men

either rule out God from their own and the world's affairs altogether, or are reminded of Him only on special and striking occasions. Even our language is usually Deistic. Are we not accustomed to replace the name of God by the impersonal pronoun "it?" We say that *it* rains, *it* snows, *it* thunders, *it* freezes, etc. How different is the language of Scripture in this respect! It is God, who "sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills. . . . He watereth the hills from his chambers; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works. He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, the herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth. . . . He appointed the moon for seasons: the sun knoweth his going down. Thou makest darkness, and it is night: wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth." Ps. 104:10, 13, 14, 19, 20. Or again: "He sendeth forth his commandments upon the earth: his word runneth very swiftly. He giveth snow like wool: he scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes. He casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before his cold? He sendeth out his word and melteth them: he causeth his wind to blow, and the waters flow." Ps. 147:13-18. According to Scripture God is very near. He is in all things, and they all reveal His wonders.

However, over against the Deistic and Pantheistic philosophies the Church confesses that God is omnipresent, that He is both immanent in, and transcendent above the world. By the latter is meant that God is essentially different from, and infinitely greater than all creation; by the former is expressed that with His infinite and transcendent being He is in all creation, and in every creature. We must beware, lest we conceive of this transcendence of God in terms of space, or in terms of time. We are very apt to do this. Not only is our thinking necessarily bound to the laws of space and time, but Scripture itself often speaks of God anthropomorphistically in the same language. "Behold the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have builded." 1 Ki. 8:27. And then we conceive of God as being endlessly extended in space, or as being infinitely extended in time. God's omnipresence, according to this conception, simply means, that He fills all space (His immanence), but that He also infinitely is extended beyond the limits of our space (His transcendence). But this is not correct. God is infinitely exalted above all creation essentially. He is the simple, infinite, absolute, eternal, independent, and immutable essence. There is an infinite chasm between the being of God, and the essence of the creature. He is infinite in His being and nature, in all His virtues and wonders. The creature exists in time, and time is change, succession of moments, constant flux. On that indivisible moment that constantly moves from the future into the past, the creature is

carried on, and in that moment he exists only in part. He never is what he was, nor will he be what he is. But God is the eternal One: He is transcendent above all time. To be sure, this also signifies that He is without beginning and without end. But eternity is not time, not even time conceived as endlessly extended into the past and into the future. There is no time in and for God. Paradoxically the Bible expresses this by saying "that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousands years as one day," II Pet. 3:8. He is the I AM, Jehovah is His name. There is no change or becoming, no flux or succession of moments in God. Constant, infinite fulness is He. God is transcendent above all time, and above all that exists in time. And the same is true of His relation to space. The creature exists in space, and he occupies space. And space is distance from one point to another, extent, limitation, form. But God is immense, immeasurable. There is no space for God, nor does He exist in space essentially although no point of space excludes Him. You cannot measure the distance from God to the world, nor is there distance or extent in Him. And to conceive of Him under any form is to create an idol instead of the living God. He is God, the Lord of heaven and earth, essentially and infinitely exalted above all that is called creature! The transcendent One is He.

But this transcendent God is also immanent in the world, in every creature, and in every point of all that exists, and that, too, as the transcendent One. Let us make no mistake. God's transcendence and His immanence may not be divorced from each other in our conception of Him. As the immanent One He is transcendent, and as the transcendent One He is in all creation. We are apt to conceive of God's immanence as consisting in this, that His divine essence is distributed through space, so that He is everywhere in extent. Just as the ether fills all space, so God is everywhere present. But this is an erroneous conception. Nor may we conceive of God's immanence as referring merely to His *power*. It is true, the Heidelberg Catechism speaks of God's providence as being "the almighty and omnipresent power of God; whereby, as with his hand, he upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures." But this may not be understood as implying a denial of the omnipresence of God's essence. God's power cannot be separated from His essence. For He is a simple Being. His essence *is* His attributes, and His attributes *are* His essence. Wherever God's power is, there He is Himself, the almighty and ever living God. But God's immanence does mean that with His essence, and that, too, with His whole infinite, transcendent essence, He is in all creation, in every creature according to the nature of that creature, and in every atom of the universe. Nothing can contain God, yet

He is in all things. Eternally He is transcendent, yet, as the transcendent One He is immanent. For "the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Him," I Ki. 8:27; and he, the "Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands," Acts 17:24; yet, He is "not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being." Acts 17:27, 28. "Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. . . . Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there." Ps. 139:5, 6-8.

This, then, that God is essentially present in the universe, and in all things, in every creature, in every part of every creature, in the material and spiritual world, in all the sense and meaning, in all the movement and relations of the universe, must be strictly maintained in order to understand the idea of the providence of God. The existence of the creature is in contiguity, in constant touch with the essence of God. Nowhere is there separation between God and the world. As the Catechism expresses it: he upholds, *as it were by his hand*, all things in heaven and earth. This essential immanence of God must not be confused with the covenant idea of God's dwelling with us. For this means that God is near to His people in His blessed favor, grace, friendship, so that He takes them to His heart, reveals to them His secrets, has most intimate communion with them and they with Him, so that they taste that the Lord is good. In this sense, He is near unto His people in Christ Jesus only, while He is far from the ungodly, is present to them in His fierce wrath, as a consuming fire. Not His covenant nearness and fellowship, but His essential contiguity in all created things is meant when we speak of God's immanence in the world. He is in everything visible and invisible. He is in space and time, and in all that exists and moves in them. He is in the light and in the darkness, in the flower of the field and in the trees of the forest, in the lightning and in the thunder, in sea and land, in storm and earthquake, in man and beast, in color and form, in every relationship and movement in matter and force. And He is in every creature, and all its component parts according to the nature of that creature, and according to its meaning and relation to all the rest of creation.

In the second place, we must remember that God is present in all creation and in every creature as the living, almighty, ever active, sovereign Lord. God's providence is not mere contiguity of God and the creature, it is such a presence that there is a continuous action of God upon the creature, whereby the creature continues to exist. God is the living God. He is almighty power. And this almighty power is

constantly active. With this almighty power God is present in, and reacts upon the whole world in all its parts and relations. He is and remains the sovereign Lord of the universe. Not for one moment does anything exist without this act of God's almighty power. God alone exists in and of Himself. The creature has no independent existence, it receives its being from God constantly. This does not mean that God's providence is the same as a continuous act of creation, as Ursinus asserts (I, 196). For creation is the act of God whereby He called the things that are not as if they were. And the heavens and the earth were finished on the sixth day. Nothing is added to them by God's providence. But it does mean that ever since the end of the sixth day there is a constant influx of the activity of God's almighty power into the world He created and into all things, and that it is only by this continued activity of God that all things exist and continue to be what they are. When you turn the electric switch in your living room there is light in the bulb of your lamp that illuminates the entire room. Does that light now exist independently in the electric bulb, so that you can cut the electric current and still have light? Of course not. There must be a constant current of electricity into that bulb in order to keep it lit. The same is true of God's relation to all creation. He is the almighty God, the living Lord. And as such He created all things in the beginning, calling the things that are not as if they were. And through this act of creation the world received existence in distinction from God. Does that mean that henceforth that world can exist by itself, and that God can cease to act upon the world He created? Not for one moment. If God does not uphold all things constantly they sink back into *nihil*.

This, then, is the meaning of the Catechism when it states that God, as it were by his hand, upholds heaven, earth, and all things. Let us not be misled by the anthropomorphism of the expression "he upholds, as it were by his hand." For then we might still entertain the idea that the thing that is upheld has existence in itself. When I carry a book in my hand, I may be said to uphold it. But the book that I thus carry and uphold does not receive its continuous existence through my act of upholding it. It exists apart from my power. I may put it on the table, or drop it to the floor, but it still exists. But if God would not uphold the creature it would not simply drop somewhere, it would be nowhere, it could not possibly exist even for one moment. By omnipotent, infinitely intelligent will all things were called into being, and by that same omnipotent will they are kept where and what they are. By the Word of God they were called into being, and by that same Word they are caused to continue in existence. He is "upholding all things by the word of his power." Heb.

1:3. Of Him, but for that very reason also *through* Him, are all things. Rom.11:36. Providence is not an act of continuous creation, but it is the continuation of the Word God spoke in the beginning. He does not continue to speak new words, but He does continue to speak the Word he spoke in the beginning. When God says: "Let there be light," light springs into existence. And only when He continues to speak that same word, can light continue to exist. If God would recall that word "light," or cease to speak it, that moment the light would exist no more. It is thus that God upholds all things, "as it were by his hand." And thus we can also understand that all things in heaven and earth are a revelation of the living Word of God concerning Himself, so that "the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge." Ps. 19:1, 2.

H. H.

Debate:

INTRODUCTION

The question: Resolved that a local consistory has the right to act contrary to our Church Order.

Rev. B. Kok argues on the side of the affirmative. It is thus his task to prove the affirmative proposition, thus to prove that a local consistory has the right to act contrary to the Church Order. The undersigned argues on the side of the negative. It is thus his task to prove the negative proposition, thus to prove that a local consistory *has not* the right to act contrary to the Church Order.

My introduction, I admit, is rather long. This is due to the fact that the matter on which we dispute is rather complicated and that, if this disputation is actually to advance the cause of truth, we must take great pains in making straight paths for our thinking before we begin to debate.

The object of argumentation, as was said, is to arrive at definite conclusions regarding definite matters in order to advance the cause of truth. If this purpose is to be achieved the disputants must state (1) the immediate cause for discussion; (2) the origin and history of the question; (3) define terms; (4) restate the question as defined; (5) exclude all irrelevant matter; (6) state admitted matter; (7) set forth the main contentions on the affirmative contrasted with those of the negative; (8) declare the main issues.

The origin and immediate cause of this discussion is an action of the consistory of the Protestant Reformed church in Hudsonville that consisted in its admitting to the Lord's supper persons who came to it from another sister church but who were not reputed to be of a godly walk. This action of the consistory of Hudsonville militated against more than one of the articles of the Church Order, in particular against art. 61 which reads: None shall be admitted to the Lord's Supper except those who according to the usage of the church with which they unite themselves have made a confession of the Reformed religion, besides being reputed to be of a godly walk, *without which those who come from other churches shall not be admitted.* The question also has a history. It is briefly this: The consistory of the sister church (Byron Center, Mich) from whose fellowship and jurisdiction the aforesaid persons had withdrawn themselves, addressed to the consistory of Hudsonville a writing in which it directed the attention of the brethren to their having negated our Church Order and in which it besought them to return to the Church Order by undoing their action. This they refused to do. Thereupon the consistory of Byron brought the case to Classis, and its protest was sustained. Still the brethren refused to yield and are now resolved to appeal the case to synod.

Definition of terms. The sense and meaning of the predicate of the proposition (which my opponent affirms and which I deny) is clear. But I want to observe that *to act contrary* to the church Order is at once *to depart from and to take exception to*, the Church Order, and further that the *right* to act contrary to it necessarily implies the right to change, modify, or amplify as one—a local consistory—sees fit: it includes the right to do with the Church Order what one pleases and to place upon it whatever private construction one finds convenient and suitable for the hour.

Thus the predicate must mean, certainly, the right to act contrary to the Church Order independently with respect to the classis (synod). My opponent must realize that this is indeed the meaning of the affirmative proposition. Its meaning is not that a consistory has the right to act contrary to the Church Order only in its capacity of member of the federation (classis) so that in this capacity alone it may exercise this right—thus exercise it only in collaboration with all the churches met in classis and as always recognizing it to be entirely right, and proper that it subordinate its private judgment to the judgment of the classis and that it submit to, adopt, and execute the will of the classis as expressed in its resolutions. The affirmative proposition, so construed, sets forth my view exactly but not that of my opponent. If it does, we have nothing to argue about. If it does, my

opponent must refrain from appealing the case of Hudsonville versus classis to the synod and speedily urge his consistory to undo its action.

However in all fairness to my opponent, I want to state that it is not his view that a local consistory has the right to act contrary to the Church Order in *opposition* to the resolution of the classis that it be observed. But his stand is that a resolution of this character is strictly out of order, that it should not be made, that in making it the classis oversteps its bounds by interfering with what he considers to be the private and inalienable right of a local consistory. If I am mistaken, I can't explain his past conduct. If I am mistaken, I can't see why he appeals his case to synod except it be on the ground of the contention of the classis that the Church Order may not be contradicted at all, either by a local consistory or by synod. But my opponent ought to know that this, certainly, is not the contention of the classis.

Finally, the predicate "has the right to act contrary to" is in the indicative mood. My opponent will not object, I trust, if I enlarge the predicate by the addition "should have the right." This addition enlarges the range of our dispute.

Having defined terms and set forth the main contentions of the disputants, let me now restate the question as defined. Resolved that a local consistory has and should have the right to act contrary to the Church Order independently with respect to classis. This may also be expressed as follows: Resolved that a local consistory has and should have the right to place its own private construction upon the Church Order without any interference from Classis (Synod).

There is certain irrelevant matter that must be excluded from our disputation. In case of a clash between the profit of the local church and the church order, must the consistory first act (contrary to the Church Order) or the classis first advise (on the basis of the principle that its advice must be adopted and in the assurance that its advice will be adopted). This is an issue upon the settlement of which the truth or falsity of either the affirmative or negative proposition does not hinge. It must therefore be excluded from our discussion, from the argument as well as from the issues. For after all was said that could be said on either side of this question, the issue would still be there waiting to be debated, whether a local consistory has the right to act contrary to the Church Order.

Let me now state the admitted matter. The Church Order, being the work of man, is fallible. (If it were not, our proposition would be strictly undebatable). On this account, it *may* be in error, inadequate in some of its articles, antiquated and unusable. In as far as it is found to be so, it must be contradicted and corrected, altered, amplified, in a word, revised. And

this for the true profit of the churches. Several of its articles have been revised through the centuries. Some have even been eliminated altogether and other articles placed in their room. This matter, being admitted by both disputants (my opponent and I), forms the basis of the argument and, according to the principles of the art of disputation, must be excluded from the issues *although not from the argument*. Hence my opponent and I are not allowed to make an issue of the question whether the Church Order may be contradicted. Doing so, we sidestep the proposition appearing above this article. The sole question in this dispute is whether, in the sense just defined, the Church Order may be contradicted *by a local consistory*. Thus, my opponent may not come with some such reasoning: A local consistory has the right to act contrary to the Church Order, for the Church Order is fallible. This issue is not debatable in this disputation, as it is admitted that such is the case.

And so I admit that the Church Order is not a collection of iron clad i.e. *unbreakable* rules. Being fallible, it *may be* in error (but not necessarily so); may and must be broken, if found to be in error. But here again the sole question in our dispute is whether this right belongs to a *local consistory*. This matter, too, must be excluded from the issue although not from the argument.

To say that the Church Order is breakable is certainly not equivalent to saying that it is not *binding*. I admit the former but not the latter. And it seems to me that my opponent should also be ready to admit this. Because the question is not whether the Church Order is binding, but whether, in the event it is found to be in error as to one or more of its articles, its chords may be broken by a *local consistory*. In our present disputation, therefore, we must not make an issue of this matter. Doing so, we sidestep the main question, which is, whether a local consistory has the right to act contrary to Church Order. Let us, by all means, strictly keep ourselves to the real issues.

Further, the affirmative (my opponent) I feel certain, holds the view that the classis as well as the consistory and thus not the consistory to the exclusion of the classis has the right at issue. I can admit that the classis has this right but certainly not that the consistory has it. It is my view that the classis (synod) *alone* has the right. But the point is here that we both admit that the classis has the right in question.

(Rightly considered, the classis has this right only if it be the broadest assembly in the organization of denomination of churches, otherwise not).

Let us now see what may and may not be expected from the disputants in this argument. It may not be expected from the affirmative that he prove that the classis *has not* the right at issue; for it is not implied

in the affirmative proposition that it *has not* this right. The affirmative therefore, need have no fear that he will have proved more than he desires, should he win this debate. Even his *failure* to prove the affirmative proposition, would not warrant the conclusion that it is false, and that therefore the consistory *has not* the right to act contrary to the Church Order. The affirmative proposition must *be proved* to be false before any such conclusion may be drawn. And this is the task of the negative, namely to *prove* the affirmative proposition false, no more and no less. Hence, it is not to be expected of him that he prove that the classis *has* the right at issue; for it is not implied in the negative proposition. Should he nevertheless make the attempt, he would be sidestepping the real question and likewise the affirmative with respect to what is expected of him. My opponent and I do not strive to *prove* but we *admit* that the classis has this right.

Let us now state the issues in this disputation.

I. *Is one of the central ideas of our Church government rule by the majority or rule by the minority?*

In order to prove the positive proposition, my opponent must prove that the central idea of our church government is rule by the minority. Further, he must disprove that it is rule by the majority.

II. *Does a local consistory promise and is it thus in duty bound before God and the churches to deny its private judgment and will in the interest of the judgment and will of the majority?*

My opponent must prove that a local consistory *promises* to always assert and maintain its own private judgment and will in opposition to the common judgment and will. Further, he must *disprove* that a local consistory promises and is thus in duty bound to deny its private will and judgment in the interest of the common judgment and will.

III. *Does article 86 declare that a local consistory has not the right of private revision of the Church Order?* My opponent must prove that article 86 declares that a local consistory *does have this right*. He must disprove my contention that the article declares that a local consistory *does not have this right*.

IV. *Is the Church Order the private property of a local consistory or the common property of all the churches?*

My opponent must *prove* that the Church Order is the private property of a local consistory. He must disprove that it is the common property of all the churches.

V. *Has the Church Order an authority similar to that of our Forms of Unity?*

My opponent must *prove* that the Church Order has no authority at all. He must disprove that it has an authority similar to that of our Forms of Unity.

VI. *Would the right of a local consistory to act*

contrary to the Church Order result in Chaos and in the final dissolution of our entire Church Formation?

My opponent must *prove* that the right of a local consistory to act contrary to the Church Order would work for order, harmony and stability. He must *disprove* that it would result in chaos and in the final dissolution of our Church Formation.

VII. *Would the right of private revision of our Church Order be promotive of grossest injustices?*

My opponent must prove that the right of private revision of the Church Order would be promotive of justice in our organization of churches. He must *disprove* that it would be promotive of grossest injustices.

VIII. *Can it be otherwise but that for a local consistory to insist that it has the right in question must necessarily proceed from a wrong, sinful motive?*

My opponent must *prove* that it cannot be otherwise but that for a local consistory to insist that it has the right in question proceeds from a good motive. He must *disprove* that it necessarily proceeds from a wrong motive. In a word, besides proving the positive proposition, my opponent must overturn my entire argumentation. If he accomplishes all this, he wins this debate.

Now I believe that I have discovered all the issues in this disputation. If my opponent knows of others, let him advance them and I will be only too glad to consider them. If he knows of no others, he and I must keep ourselves strictly to these issues. Not doing so, we sidestep the main question which is whether or no a *local consistory* has the right to act contrary to the Church Order, i.e., the private right to revise its articles.

G.M.O.

AFFIRMATIVE

Resolved that a Local Consistory Has the Right To Act Contrary To the Church Order.

By Church Order, in the subject of our debate, we understand a body of ecclesiastical rules, mutually adopted, for the purpose of maintaining good order in the Churches. They are rules and regulations, which have been prescribed by mutual consent, and which all must obey for the furtherance and welfare of the Church of Christ. They must not, however, be regarded as divinely prescribed ordinances, or as a set of legal laws which must be applied and obeyed, no matter what the result might be. They are moral in character, not judicial. They are regulatory and mean to guide and direct, but are not to be regarded as a legalistic set of laws which *must* be obeyed.

A Church Order is very essential to the welfare of a Church or denomination. As soon as a body of believers are organized into a Church institute, one immediately feels that there must be rules and regulations to regulate the ecclesiastical life and welfare of the congregation, and when various churches, having the same confession of faith, unite into a denomination, there is need for an accepted body of rules to maintain unity and good order. God is in all things a God of order, and also demands that in His Church all things be done decently and in order. I Cor. 14:40. In fact congregational and denominational church life would be impossible without such rules and regulations. Even as in a congested area, where there is much traffic, there must be rules and regulations to guide and direct the flow of traffic, so also in our congregational and denominational church life there must be ecclesiastically prescribed rules to regulate this church life. These rules must be mutually adopted, and mutually observed. To deny this would create disorder and chaos. No church or denomination could long exist without them, neither if having them, they were disregarded. They are not necessary for the *being* of the Church, but are absolutely essential for her *well-being*.

Hence the question in this debate is not at all whether or not a local consistory, may arbitrarily and without good reason, act contrary to the mutually accepted Church Order. If this were the question in our discussion it would be nonsense. Such a question were not even debatable. It would be sheer folly to accept certain rules and regulations and then utterly disregard them. Such folly would lead to chaos. Imagine what would happen, if in a congested city as Chicago, a driver of an automobile would arbitrarily and without any good reason whatever, disregard the traffic rules of stop signs, traffic signals, and one way drives? That would be fatal, and if every driver would act thus, it would lead to chaos and confusion. Thus it would also be in our ecclesiastical life if a consistory wantonly and arbitrarily disregarded the accepted Church Order. Such action would be fatal to a local consistory, and if such an attitude became general among the local consistories of a denomination, then all denominational church life would be an impossibility. If our congregational and denominational church life is to function smoothly, it must be well regulated according to certain ecclesiastical rules which all have adopted and which all must obey. They are necessary for the maintenance of good order, as it is expressed in the first article of our accepted Church Order, namely of the General Synod of Dordt.

But the question in this debate is whether or not a local consistory is so bound by the Church Order, *that it may never, under any circumstances, make any decisions, or take any actions which are contrary to*

the Church Order. We of the affirmative maintain that it is very well possible that in a particular situation the observance of the Church Order would be a physical impossibility, or would clearly create harm and disorder in the congregation, and that in such circumstances the consistory would be perfectly free to suspend the rule for that instant, if at least the article in question does not concern a definite prescribed principle of Holy Writ. The opposition must prove that under any and all circumstances it is always per se wrong for a local consistory to act contrary to the Church Order. This is a question of fundamental importance. It is a question that involves our Christian liberty, the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. We maintain the affirmative with all our heart, and by the grace of God we will always defend it with all of our God given strength and talents. To deny this would be the most dangerous kind of Roman Catholic hierarchy, which places its ecclesiastical rules and decrees on a par with Holy Writ. No Church Order or ecclesiastical set of rules may ever bind the conscience, for this is alone the prerogative of the Word of God, who alone is Lord, also of the conscience. But never may we ascribe such powers to ecclesiastical rules or rulers.

Indeed a Church Order must be based upon the Word of God, and contains many prescribed ordinances which do bind the conscience, not however, because they are found in the Church Order, but because they are provisions taken directly from the Word of God. Even then it may never be said, "Thus saith the Church Order," but "Thus saith the Lord." Then it is not the Church Order, but the Word of God that binds the conscience. In order to understand this we must clearly distinguish between divine law (*jus divinus*) and human laws (*jus humana*). God's laws are immutable, unchangeable, and must therefore always be obeyed. Not so, however, are human laws and regulations. These can and may be changed and also leave room for discretion and considerations. They only serve to guide, direct, and regulate for the maintenance of good order. They are utilitarian. Therefore if circumstances demand it they may be suspended, altered or changed. Now our Church Order contains both divine laws and human regulations. This is evident from the fact that Article 86 prescribes that (if the profit of the churches demands it) the Church order may be altered, augmented or diminished. This can never be said of divine ordinances, but it is only applicable to human laws and regulations. And it is in respect to these that it is our conviction that a local consistory is at liberty to act contrary to, if the welfare of the congregation demands it.

To this most all the authorities on Reformed Church polity agree. Jansen in his 'De Kerkenordening' writes as follows: "Eindelijk is de vraag *hoever*

zich het gezag der kerkenordening uitstrekt, n.l. of het de conscientie bindt of vrijlaat; of het door onder-teekening moet worden, of eene zekere vrijheid van beweging laat."

"Allereerst ontkennen wij dan, dat de kerkenordening eene conscientie bindende kracht zou hebben, zooals de Roomschen beweren. Zij toch zeggen, dat alle menschelijke wetten, zoowel kerkelijke als politieke, met Goddelijke wetten op een lijn staan, en daarom de conscientie binden. De Gerformeerden ondercheiden echter met Voetius tusschen Goddelijke en menschelijke wetten. De Goddelijke wetten zijn direct en per se van conscientie-bindende kracht, omdat God de Heere der conscientie is, de Eenige Wetgever, die het geweten des menschen binden kan. Jakobus 4:12. Maar de menschelijke wetten binden niet per se en direct, zelfs de apostelen traden by de regeling van het kerkelijk leven niet met dwingend gezag op. I Cor. 7:35; 2 Cor. 1:24; Hand. 15:20; en de geloovigen mogen geen dienstknechten van menschen worden. Zelfs die artikelen eener kerkenordening, welke rechtstreeks aan de Schrift ontleend zijn, hebben alleen conscientie-bindende kracht, omdat God zelf ze voorgescreven heeft, en niet omdat ze in de kerkenordening staan; dus niet in qualiteit van kerkelijke, maar Goddelijke bepalingen." p. 53. (See also Voetius, Pol. Eccl. 1:263-64.

Even Prof. Heyns in his *Kybernetiek* quotes Dr. Rutgers on page 127 as follows; "Vandaar dat er in de Nederlandsche Kerken altijd zekere ruimte was met betrekking tot het naleven der Kerkenorde, en dat men met betrekking tot haar lang zoo stipt niet was als met betrekking tot de Belijdenis. In gewone omstandigheden, zoo oordeelden zij, was men aan de Kerkenorde gebonden, maar als soms gehoorzaamheid aan een of andere bijzonderheid van de Kerkenorde in moeilijkheid dreigde te brengen, b.v. met de overheid of anderszins, dan moest wat het zwaarste was het zwaarste wegen. In overeenstemming daarmee is de eisch van het slotartikel, dat de Kerken en Classes "naarstigheid zullen doen om de Kerkenorde in alles te onderhouden," een uitdrukking die eenige speelruimte last."

Thus also Dr. Hodge in his *Church Polity* writes as follows: "There are certain things prescribed, to which every Church ought to conform, and many things as to which she is at liberty to act as she deems best for God's glory and the advancement of his kingdom. All we contend for is that everything is not prescribed; that every mode of organization and action is not either commanded or forbidden; that we must produce a "Thus saith the Lord" for everything the Church does. We must indeed be able to produce a "Thus saith the Lord for everything, whether a truth, or a duty, or a mode of ecclesiastical organization or action, which we make obligatory on

the conscience of other men. But our liberty of faith and action beyond the prescription of the Word of God, is the liberty with which Christ has made us free, and which no man shall take from us." p. 122. And on page 130 he continues; "The third point of difference between two systems is the extent to which liberty of the Church extends in matters of government and modes of operation. According to the old, and especially the genuine American form of Presbyterianism, while it is admitted that there is a form of government prescribed or instituted in the New Testament, so far as its general principles or features are concerned, there is a wide discretion allowed us by God, in matters of detail, which no man or set of men which neither civil magistrates nor ecclesiastical rulers, can take from us. This is part of that liberty with which Christ has made us free, and in which we are commanded to stand fast."

Whereas the space of five typewritten pages, which was allotted us for this debate is almost filled we will conclude with the following from Joh. Jansen in his "De Kerkenordening" page 56; "Hieruit blijkt voldoende, dat de onderhouding der kerkenordening niet zoo streng werd voorgeschreven, dat er geene vrijheid van beweging overbleef. Wel ging die vrijheid niet zoover, dat ze in ongeregeldheid en bandeloosheid oversloeg. Want de afwijking zelve was aan een drietal regelen gebonden: a— er moest reden voor afwijking zijn, de goede orde en stichting der gemeente moest er beter door worden bevorderd. b— er mocht ondertusschen niets in de kerkenordening zelf veranderd worden, want dat mocht alleen door een generale synods geschieden; en c— als er verschil over de afwijking rees, dan was de dienaar een de kerkerand, de kerkeraad aan de Classe, de Classe aan de provinciale en deze weer aan de generale synods gehoorzaamheid schuldig. Zoo bleef er ruimte, maar binnen zekere grenzen; en regelmaat zonder formalisme."

B.K.

NEGATIVE

A local consistory has not the right to act contrary to the Church Order i.e., place its private judgment upon any of its articles and to act according to it, for

1. *The idea of our Church government is rule by majority and not by minority.*

Allow me to explain. Our system of Church government is presbyterian in distinction from that of the Roman Catholic system and the system known as Collegianism which are hierarchical, and that of the Independents or congregationalists which is indivi-

dualistic. In the Presbyterian system the consistory under Christ is the sole judicial power over the local congregation. The consistory consists of a pastor and a number of elders elected by the people. It thus exhibits with its flock the unity of the body of Christ in a visible tangible form. It emphasizes the equality of the ministers by concentrating the authority in all its ministerial members, sets forth the rights of the people by the presence of their elders as their representatives ruling jointly with the ministers, and exalts the headship of Christ by magnifying the Scriptures as the sole infallible rule of procedure. But to emphasize in a yet more marked degree the unity of the body of Christ all the local consistories (with their congregations) organize, league together, and thus form an organized denomination of churches. This organization has broader representative bodies than the consistory, known as classis and synod. The authority which these assemblies exercise over the local consistory is not juridical but ethical, which means that this organization by its representative bodies (classis, synod) may not depose consistory members and excommunicate them out of the Christian Church. The local congregation only, acting through its consistory, has this right. This organization, league, thus emphasizes the strict judicial equality of all its members—the local consistories—but also, to be sure, that the judgment and will of the majority of its members, as embodied in the resolutions of its representative bodies (classis, synod), shall prevail over and against the private judgment and will of any of its members, a local consistory, if it cannot be proved that this common judgment and will militates against the Scriptures. If this cannot be proved, the lone member of the organization, of the league, is in duty bound, before God, to deny its private judgment and will and act according to the judgment and will of the majority of the members of the organization to which it belongs. If a local consistory cannot do so, for conscience sake, it must break off its connections with the organization after having protested to the end. This is its right, as it is autonomous. But it has not the right, as a member of the league, to persistently negate the will and judgment of the majority of members of the league to act according to its own private judgment and expect to be tolerated as a member in the league.

Thus one of the central ideas of the Presbyterian system of church government is majority rule. From this it follows:

a) That a local consistory has not the right to act contrary to the Church Order i.e., place upon any of its articles its own private construction to act accordingly, for

1) just because the construction that is followed is private, a local consistory, in following the con-

struction, acting upon it, sets at nought the judgment and will of the majority.

b) That the organization (classis, synod) cannot allow a local consistory the right to act contrary to the Church Order i.e., place upon any of its articles its own private construction and to act accordingly, for

1) doing so, the organization repudiates in principle the entire Presbyterian system in the interest of the individualism of Independentism.

II. *A local consistory promised and is thus in duty bound before God and the churches to deny its private judgment and will in the interest of the judgment and will of the majority, for*

a) this promise is implicit 1) in its voluntarily joining itself to the organization; 2) in its voluntarily continuing as a member of the organization; 3) in its attaching its signature over and over to the classical credential and thus instructing and authorizing its delegates to take part in all the deliberations and transactions of classis regarding all matters legally coming before the meeting and transacted in agreement with the word of God according to the conception of it embodied in the doctrinal Standards of the Protestant Reformed Churches, *as well as in harmony with our Church Order.*

Here, too, therefore the conclusion is entirely warranted that a local consistory has *not* the right to act contrary to the Church Order, not the right to insist that, particularly with respect to our Church Order and its revision the private judgment and will of a local consistory be held legitimate and practicable.

III Art. 86 of the Church Order declares that a particular congregation shall not be at liberty to alter, augment or diminish the article of the Church Order. This article (86) reads, "These articles, relating to the lawful order of the Church, have been so drafted and adopted by common consent, that they (if the profit of the church demand otherwise) may and ought to be altered, augmented and diminished. However, no *particular congregation*—mark you, *no particular congregation*—classis or synod, shall be at liberty to do so, but they shall show all diligence in observing them, until it be otherwise ordained by the general synod."

Therefore a local consistory *has not* the right of private revision of the Church Order, for

a) it, a local consistory, is organized on the basis of the Church Order;

b) It voluntarily remains on this basis as a member of the organized denomination of churches;

c) it signs over and over the classical credential. Through these acts and doings, it adopts also the above-cited article, certainly, and solemnly promises to show all diligence in observing it, thus promises to refrain from privately revising the articles of the

Church Order and to always be willing to subject its private judgment and will to the common judgment and will of the churches, for the above-cited article explicitly declares, "*no local congregation but the general synod.*"

IV. *The Church Order is not the private property of a local consistory but the common property of the churches, for*

a) The churches organized on its basis and thus conjointly adopted it. Therefore a local consistory, being, as it is, a member of the league of churches, has not the right to act contrary to it i.e., place its own private construction upon its article, for

1) in doing so, it proceeds on the false assumption that the Church Order is its own private property.

V *The Church Order has an authority similar to that of our Forms of Unity: the Thirty seven articles, the Canons of Dort, and the Heidelberg Catechism, for*

a) According to the firm conviction of the churches it sets forth the only system of Church government contained in and thus legitimized by the Scriptures for the New Testament Churches.

b) The churches subscribe to it as truly as they subscribe to the three Forms of unity, for

1) They are organized on its basis;

2) through attaching their signatures to the classical credential they, over and over, instruct and authorize their delegates to take part in all deliberations and transactions of classis in harmony with it as well as in harmony with the Word of God according to the conception of it embodied in the doctrinal Standards. This being true, the right of private revision of the Church Order is akin to the right of private interpretation of the creeds. It is difficult to see why, if a local consistory has the right to do the former, it should not have the right to do the latter. It is difficult to see why, if the classical credential, in which office-bearers promise to transact all matters legally coming before the meeting in harmony with the Church Order, has once become a dead letter, the Formula of Subscription, in which these same office-bearers promise to teach and defend the points of doctrine contained in the Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort, should not likewise become a dead letter. Signing the latter, too, would become a mere gesture. It would cease to partake of the character of a solemn pledge, and any consistory would be free to contradict the aforesaid doctrine in its pulpit.

(I speak here of revision of our Church Order. My so expressing myself is certainly justified. There is no essential difference between revising the Church Order and acting contrary to it. To do the latter is to place in the room of one or more of its articles

others of a different character and content).

I speak here of the authority of the creed and of our Church Order. What is authority? Whence does it proceed? The authority of the creed is its *right* to demand of us that we teach and defend the points of doctrine contained in it. The authority of the Church Order is its *right* to demand of us that its articles be observed. And this right proceeds from the pledge of the office-bearers in the churches to do this very thing. This pledge they make through their voluntarily organizing on its basis and through their attaching their signatures to the classical credential. This pledge, further, is the expression of their firm conviction that the Church Order sets forth the only system of government for the New Testament churches contained in God's Word. And as long as this is their conviction the Church Order (and the Creed) is necessarily as binding upon their conscience as are the Scriptures. As long as this is their conviction, it follows that, in acting contrary to the Church Order, they, before their consciousness, act contrary to the Scriptures and commit a sin just as great. Let me put this to a test. The very first article of the Church Order reads "For the maintenance of good order in the church of Christ it is necessary that there should be: offices, assemblies, supervision of doctrine, sacraments and ceremonies, and Christian discipline." Let anyone contradict if he can, this article, without being accused and denounced by his heart of contradicting the Scriptures.

We well understand that the Church Order (creed) is fallible. But, certainly, this does not mean that it *must needs be* in error. And if in this Church Order the Fathers of Dort have actually expressed what we firmly believe to be the Word of God respecting the system of Church government contained in it, the Church Order, according to our firm conviction, *is not in error*. (This applies also to creeds). For according to my unwavering faith, this very system is taken, actually taken, directly from the very Word of God. Of the great creeds of Christendom—those which have stood the test of ages—we do say that they are infallible. So, let us speak softly when saying that the Church Order (the creed) is fallible, and when saying that we commit a great sin when contradicting in action (or words or thoughts) the Scriptures but as to the Church Order! Well, brethren, it is only a Church Order! Let us make sure that when we say such things we are not giving expression to some such sentiment as this: No creed but Christ, or no creed but the Scriptures. Let us understand that what they who say such things really mean is this: No creed and *no* scriptures and *no* Christ. We do not place the creed on a level with the Scriptures or ascribe to it the authority that the Scriptures alone can and do have, but we do affirm that the creed cor-

rectly expresses what we believe to be the truth of Scripture respecting the doctrine contained in it.

VI *The right of a local consistory to act contrary to the Church Order would result in Chaos and the final dissolution of our entire Church Formation.* for

a) The Church Order would be supplanted by as many private Church Orders as there are churches in our organized denomination of churches. Each consistory would transact according to its own private Church Order. Classis and synod would be only two names. Their resolutions could have no binding power and their meetings would partake of the character of conferences such as those held by the independents or congregational churches. Now if this is what we want, let us say so, but let us then cease prating about our being Reformed in our church government.

VII *A local consistory has not the right to act contrary to the Church Order,* for

the right of private revision of the Church Order could be promotive of grossest injustices. To illustrate. A consistory could put a member under censure and then eliminate from the Church Order the article according to which anyone, who complains that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly, shall have the right to appeal to a major assembly, and that, whatsoever may be agreed upon by majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it can be proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the articles of the Church Order. (Art. 31). In the case which I now imagine the decision of the consistory is wrong, wicked, and thus the censure thoroughly unjust. Yet the classis can do nothing about it, as the consistory, having the right of private revision of the Church Order, deprives the aggrieved one of the right to appeal his case to classis, through striking out of the Church Order the article that gives him this right. The aggrieved one, though innocent, is finally excommunicated out of the Christian Church. A more horrible case of miscarriage of justice is not to be conceived of. But let us not say that it couldn't happen, with the right of revising the Church Order vested in a local consistory. Imagine a case of this kind. A consistory places a member under censure.

But the brother will not submit to church discipline. So he notifies his consistory that he is leaving and receives a certificate of dismissal. A neighboring consistory of a sister church receives the censured brother, lifts his censure and admits him to the Lord's supper. But to do so, it had to eliminate from the Church Order article (61) i.e., the last clause of this article which requires that those who come from other churches shall not be admitted to the Lord's supper except they be reputed to be of a godly walk. The consistory struck out this clause, as it has the right to privately revise the Church Order. But if the censure

was just, something terrible has taken place. Now we must not say that a thing like this couldn't happen. It could certainly. To return to the first case imagined, the consistory could allow the censured one to appeal his case and await the advice of classis. But classis' advice is not to its liking, so it frees itself from its binding power by erasing the last clause of the above-cited article. One more case. A consistory, for reasons of its own, deposes an elder without the advice of a neighboring church. Rare some reason it recoils from seeking this advice and thus lifts out of the Church Order the article that requires that it shall be sought. If the elder was unworthy of deposition, something terrible has again taken place, without the classis being able to do anything about it, as a local consistory has the right to revise the Church Order.

Thus, in the light of my entire argument, it is plain that the Church Order, as the common property of all the churches, thus as maintained and adhered to, as honored and loved as one of our priceless heritages, by all the members of our organized denomination of churches, is indeed the only foundation of just rule and order and the only guarantee of freedom and security, of fair and just dealing within this organization, and that, therefore, to transfer the right of revising it from classis to a local consistory is to destroy this foundation, is to lay the foundation for unjust practices and insecurity for chaos and the eventual dissolution of our church formation. Isn't it about time that we refrain from scoffing at the Church Order? Isn't it about time that we stop saying, "Well brethren, its only the Church Order." Methinks it is. Such talk is positively dangerous. And so I come to my final issue.

VIII *A local consistory does not have the right to act contrary to the Church Order, the right of private revision of its articles, for*

a) *It cannot be otherwise but that to insist that a local consistory has this right proceeds from a wrong, a sinful motive, for*

1. It is not at all necessary, for

a. As my opponent also concedes, the classis has this right. Why then should a local consistory also have it?

2. The vesting of this right in a local consistory would lay the foundation of all the evils enumerated above. No good at all could come of it; only evil could come of it.

But, one may say, cannot the classis (synod) err? It can certainly. But the danger of a local consistory erring is certainly much greater than the danger of twenty five churches erring. If we don't believe this, let us then say so, and forthwith dissolve as an organization of denomination of churches.

G. M. O.

Uit De Diepte

(Psalm 69; derde deel)

Als de Heere Zijn lieflijk aangezicht voor David, voor Jezus, verbergt, dan wordt het waarlijk benauwd. Dan worden zij bang. En de reden is doorzichtig: "Gods vriendelijk aangezicht, geeft vroolijkheid en licht voor alle oprechte harten!"

David bidt: ". . . en verberg Uw aangezicht niet van Uwen knecht, want mij is bang; haast U, verhoor mij!"

We kunnen daarin komen. Als men door den Heere geroepen is uit de duisternis tot het licht van Zijn aangezicht, dan kan men voorts nooit meer gelukkig zijn, dan in den wandel van dat licht dat van Zijn aan'zicht straalt. De wedergeborene en bekeerde geloovige is een kind des lichts. Hij ontving dat licht in het diepste van zijn bestaan, van zijn wezen, van zijn hart. Ook ontving hij daardoor verlichte oogen des verstands. Het is voorts zijn lust en zijn leven om te wandelen in dat licht. Daarom is zulk een mensch niet volkomen gelukkig, totdat hij in den heme! bij God wandelt.

Doch de Heere verbergt zich. O, Hij ziet hem altijd, Hij denkt aan hem in gena in de bangste ure, Hij zal ons nooit begeven en verlaten. Doch hier is het punt waar het in dezen psalm om gaat: God verbergt Zich voor ons *in het bewustzijn*. En dan wordt het bang in het hart, verstand, gemoed.

Dat dit zoo is en niet anders, blijkt uit wat volgt. Let er op, dat David zegt: "*Nader tot mijne ziel!*" *Tijdelijk was zijn ziel in duisternis*. Dat is vervuld in Jezus. Denkt hier aan de drie-urige duisternis rondom het kruis. Het eigenlijke van die duisternis is, dat we niet langer wandelen in het vriendelijke ervaren van Gods aangezicht. Daarnaar verlangde David en smachtte Jezus. Waarom hebt Gij Mij verlaten, o mijn God!

Soms is daar ook objectieve openbaring van. Ik hoor David spreken van versmaadheid, schaamte en schande. De versmaadheid is de uiting van de vijanden; schaamte is de ervaring ervan in ons binnenste hart; en schande is het gevolg daarvan rondom ons in den kring die ons omringt. Denkt hier aan de huilende massa rondom het kruis. Het leek wel of de hel losgebroken was.

Alle mijne benauwers zijn vóór U! De smartelijke zang getuigt van Gods alwetendheid. De zanger kent God. Grijpt Hem aan in Zijn deugden keer op keer.

En nu worden we bij de hand genomen om weer het kruis van Jezus te zien. Jezus buigt Zich en weent vanwege al den smaad die op Zijn heilig hoofd neerdaalde. Die smaad heeft Hem doorpriemd. De klanken van spot en hoon dringen diep door tot in het binnenste hart en daar doen die spot en hoon hun helsch werk. Luistert maar. "De versmaadheid heeft Mijn

hart gebroken, en Ik ben zeer zwak; en Ik heb gewacht naar medelijden, maar het is er niet; en naar vertroosters, maar heb ze niet gevonden!"

Het hart des menschen (en Jezus had een echt menschelijk hart) is gaaf en wel en blijde, als God en menschen zulk een hart wel bejegenen. Als men be mind mag worden en uitgaan in liefde tot God en den naaste. Dan popelt het van vreugde en blijdschap. Dan zegt Jezus: "Daarom is Mijn hart verblijd, en Mijne eer verheugt zich!" Petrus hoorde die klanken en sprak ervan op den dag toen de Heilige Geest uitgestort werd. Ja, Jezus' hart heeft zich verblijd, toen Hij gewaar werd, dat de Heere "aan Zijne rechterhand was". Dan leeft Hij weer na bangen dood; dan zegt Hij: "ook zal Mijn vleesch zeker wonen."

Doch nu was het anders. De Heere hield zich verre. En het was bang voor David, voor Jezus.

Hij wachtte op medelijden en vertroosters!

Men spreekt wel eens van een pathetisch spektakel. Welnu, in alle eeuwen eeuwigheid zult ge niets bedroevender zien dan den beteren David in dit Zijn wachten. vertroosters onder de duivelen en zijn kinderen zoeken? Medelijden opwekken bij hen die God haten?

Neen, Hij ontving juist het tegenovergestelde. "In Mijn dorst hebben zij Mij edik te drinken gegeven en gal tot Mijnen spijs!" Dat is echt duivelsch.

En als ge nu eens wilt zien hoe diep wij door de zonde tot den duivel overhellen, dan moet ge U zelve eens bestudeeren. Bestudeert den mensch en ge zult van hem gruwen. Dat begint al in ons kindsheid. Laat een kind schreien: spoedig staan er sommigen rondom hem te lachen. En dat lachen bij tranen klinkt helsch. Noem het niet onschuldig, doch zie de vieze vrucht in Uw latere jaren, toen ge een groot mensch werd; en merkt er op, dat wanneer Uw broeder, dien ge nu eenmaal niet uit kunt staan, in smart komt, eer ge het weet, een zingend blij gevoel in U opkomt dat mompelt tusschen de tanden: "Serves you right!"

O, laat ons er steeds om denken, dat smart wacht naar medelijden en verbreking des harten om vertroosting. Dat doet God. Dat is Jezus. Dat is het Evangelie dat eeuwig is.

Wat zal dan het loon zijn van dezulken? Leest verder en huivert. Ja, huivert, doch zegt: Het is recht; het past precies. Helsch werk vraagt om de hel.

Jezus vraagt den vloek en de hel voor Zijn be nauwers.

Hij bad voor die Hem kruisigden, doch dit was immers voor Zijn volk?

Let er op dat in dit vragen om Gods toorn den tekst gevonden wordt die in Handelingen 1 op Judas toegestapt wierd. Dus hier hebben we een vragen om den vloek over de verworpenen.

Hoe kunnen we hier vertoeven?

Onze tafel is tot verzadiging en vroolijkheid. Zóó

had de Heere het verordend in Zijn scheppingsordina tiën. Onze tafel hoort bij ons, zullen we gelukkig zijn. Onze oogen moeten we hebben om al den rijkdom Gods te zien en te jubelen van vreugde. Onze leden enen moeten kracht geven om te wandelen op de paden des rechts. Uiteindelijk moesten we toch wonen, rusten, verkeereren bij God? En daarom zien we uit naar de tente Gods, naar het paleis des hemels.

Doch als we verworpen zijn en op het pad der verworpenen wandelen, dan komt de vloek over ons. Dan wordt de tafel een strik. Dan werken alle dingen verkeert. Dan brengt heerlijk voedsel ons al verder van God af en tieren we in duisternis. Dan zijn we blind. En brallende en tierende waggelen wij als dronkaards.

Totdat we aankomen in de plaats waar God niets dan vloeken heenslingert en dat is de put die brandt van vuur en sulfur. Dat is de hel. Jezus vraagt om de hel voor de verworpenen.

Ook zal de Heere Jezus zijn vragen om den vloek goed motiveeren. Het zal duidelijk worden, dat dit volk waarlijk wandelt op den weg der hel. Luistert: "Want zij vervolgen die Gij geslagen hebt, en maken een praat van de smart Uwer verwonden!"

Gods volk doet dat niet. Zij mochten zich bekeeren. Zij weenen bitterlijk met Petrus en blijven achter in den tempel om voorts op hun borst te slaan. De liefde van God vindt dat volk en zij openbaren de liefde en de barmhartigheid Gods. Ziet God dat volk, dan zegt Hij: Zalig zijn de barmhartigen, want hunner zal barmhartigheid geschieden!

Doch de verworpenen bewijzen hunne verwerping door de daden en woorden en gedachten den ganschen dag. Zij hebben schik in het pad dat naar de hel voert.

Als Gods volk den lijdenden Borg zien, werpen zij zich aan de voet van dat kruis en roepen om genade. Als de verworpenen dat kruis zien, lachen ze en hoonen het Lam van God.

Daarom: "Doe misdaad tot hunne misdaad, o God! Laat ze toch niet komen tot Uwe gerechtigheid!"

't Gaat net andersom met Gods volk. Van dat volk zegt Jezus: Vader, Ik wil niet dat deze in het verderf nederdale; Ik heb verzoening gevonden. Vader, bekleed al degenen die Gij Mij gegeven hebt met de gerechtigheid die Gij van eeuwigheid hebt uitgedacht en Ik aan het kruis verworven. Doch van de verworpenen bidt Jezus: Doe misdaad tot hunne misdaad. Dat beteekent dit: Jezus vraagt om goede, nauwkeurige boekhouding bij Zijn Vader. Stapel al die zonden op, Vader! En breng straks die zonden in het rechtvaardig gericht. Later, veel later, heeft Johannes het gehoord op Patmos. Babel's zonden zijn de eene op de andere gevolgd tot den hemel toe.

Laat ze uitgedelgd worden uit het boek des levens!

Hoe kan Jezus dat bidden? Zijn er dan verworpenen ooit opgeschreven geweest in dat boek?

Dat zit zóó: Er zijn twee copiën van dat boek des levens. Er is één copie van het boek des levens op aarde; en één in den hemel. Die eene copie kunt ge vinden in het kaartsysteem van den scriba Uws kerkerads. Daar staan alle leden op die tot de kerk van God behooren. Gedoopten en belijders altegader. Vraagt ge dan aan den scriba: Waar zijn de namen dergenen die opgeschreven zijn tot eeuwig geluk en blijdschap? dan verwijst hij U naar het boek des levens des kerkerads.

En op die lijst stond Kaïn, Ezau, Judas.

Doch straks worden de twee copiën van dat boek des levens naast elkaar gelegd. En dan zullen we zien, dat sommige namen die op de aardse copie stonden, niet voorkomen in de hemelsche copie ook zal de Rechter des hemels en der aarde duidelijk maken, waarom zij niet passen in dat hemelsche boek.

En nu vraagt Jezus om die actie van God. Laat ze uitgedelgd worden uit het boek des levens!

Ik kan mij best voorstellen waarom Jezus dat vroeg toen Hij aan het kruis hing. Wie waren het die rondom het kruis de hoofdtoon aangaven? De Farizeërs en de Schriftgeleerden; de overpriesters en de wetgeleerden. Daar waren er heel wat die bedreven waren in het boekhouden van het boek des levens van Israel. Zij sierden zich met den naam van kinderen Gods.

Dat kan Jezus niet zien. Alles vloekt er tegen. Delg die namen uit, Vader! Zij hooren niet in Uw paleis!

Ook heeft de Heere Hem gehoord en verhoord.

Elken dag en nacht wordt het vervuld.

Als een naamchristen daarboven voor God komt, nadat hij op aarde stierf, hoort hij het al aanvankelijk. Dan zegt God: Vriend, wat doet gij hier? Denkt aan Judas.

Doch Jezus was ellendig en in smart.

Hoort Hem bidden: Uw heil, o God! zette Mij in een hoog vertrek!

En God heeft Hem ook verhoord. Jezus, en David ook, zij zijn aangekomen daarboven bij God. Jezus werd de steen des hoeks van dat hoog vertrek. Hij heeft den schoonsten naam in de paleizen Gods. En we zullen allen David herkennen in dat Huis. Hij zal wel een eereplaats hebben.

En nu komt er het vooruitgrijpen naar de verlossing en eeuwige vreugde. Petrus heeft er van gezegd, dat Jezus hart zich in Hem verblijdde als Hij de verlossing uit den dood van verre zag.

David heeft het beloofd aan God en het ook volbracht. Later, veel later, heeft David ons zijn Halleluja psalmen nagelaten.

Doch de glorie Davids moet tanen bij die van Jezus.

Als Jezus zegt: Ik zal Gods naam prijzen met gezang, dan moeten wij zeer stille zijn en eerst leeren om goed te luisteren.

Hebt ge wel eens gelezen van het lied van Mozes en het Lam?

Mozes heeft de eerste editie van Jezus' lied mogen zingen aan de Schelfzee. De spotters en wreede lieden van Egypte waren gesmoord in de golven. En Mozes zong zijn lied. Het was een vooruit beleven van de dingen die hun vervulling hebben in Jezus.

Als alle duivelskinderen met hun geestelijke vader, den duivel, geworpen zullen worden in de poel van onuitblusschelijk vuur, dan zal Jezus Zijn God prijzen.

En dan zullen wij instemmen met dat lied.

De menschen lijden de verwerping niet meer van daag.

Het zij zoo. God wist het al van te voren en Jezus profeteerde door Zijne dienstknecten, dat in de laatste dagen de menschen zullen zijn liefhebbers van zichzelf, meer dan liefhebbers Gods.

Want om in de verwerping te gelooven en God er voor te prijzen, neemt veel liefde tot God.

Doch als ge God bemint, dan zult ge het kunnen rechtvaardigen als Hij verhardt dien Hij wil. Dan legt ge de hand op den mond nu. En als ge dan later bij de glazen zee staat, met vuur vermengd, dan zult ge Jezus zien. Alsdan zal Hij den wijs aangeven en den maat slaan. En dan zult ge zingen van Gods gerechtigheid. Bij Mozes was het thema: Hij heeft het ros en den rijder in het meer verdrongen. Bij Jezus is het thema: Gods oordeelen zijn openbaar geworden.

Daar bij die zee schittert het alles van Goddelijke schoonheid en pracht. Loof dan den Heer, mijn ziel, met alle krachten!

G. V.

IN MEMORY

In loving memory of our dear husband, father and grandfather,

MR. BERT POLS

who left us one year ago, Dec. 9, 1942.

In loving memory we recall
 'Tis just a year ago
 Our loving husband, father, dear,
 Has left his home below.

God called him from his life of pain,
 Our dear one, whom we love.
 And though he's gone we soon shall meet,
 In heavenly rest above.

Mrs. Bert Pols,
 Children and Grandchildren,

Current Events

International Conferences.

Of late we have been hearing a great deal about international conferences. No less than three such conferences were held, the last of which has just come to a close according to a dispatch from Moscow.

First there was the Moscow conference. At this conference the foreign ministers of England, China, Russia, and our own Secretary of State, Mr. Cordell Hull, were the principal parties. This conference was hailed as a great success and the American Press certainly gave Mr. Hull a large share of the credit for the accomplishments at Moscow. We were told in glowing terms about the splendid achievements and wonderful harmony among the 'big four.' Various questions about present political and international problems in connection with the prosecution of the war were settled in an amicable way around the conference table. And also on the postwar problems they came to certain very important agreements. Secretary Hull assured the American public that there were no secret agreements. However, subsequently it became clear that some of the most important postwar problems were not discussed. Nothing was said for example about the fate of some of the smaller nations in postwar Europe. It was agreed that the Italian formula of self-government, the people choosing their own leaders and form of government, would be applied to the liberated nations. However, it was significantly added that this formula of self-government, the people choosing their own leaders and form of government, would be applied to the liberated nations. However, it was significantly added that this formula of self-government will not apply until the boundary disputes are settled. This means in none diplomatic language that e.g. a country like Russia which has boundary disputes with Finland, Rumania, the Baltic states, Poland etc., will first 'settle' these disputes before the people can choose their own form of government. In other words Russia will first take what it wants and then the people that are left can do as they desire. Concerning this particular agreement there appeared an article in the Herald American of Nov. 22, under the caption "Sacrifices to Communism." The article states among other things: "It is plainly evident that Poland, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, probably Czechoslovakia, and many others have been abandoned to Russia by a formula which says no "self-determination" will be extended to them until their territorial future is determined, since that will be when Russia has taken armed possession of them, and practically incorporated their territory in Russia, and says "take them away if you can—

which would necessarily mean another war." Thus far the quotation. Hence, even though there was the greatest harmony among the conferees, and even though Austria was promised independence after the war, the Moscow conference looks very much like a great victory for the 'Russian Bear.' And it certainly would be most logical that Russia becomes the dominant power on the European continent after the war is finished and won by the Allies. Naturally the Christian Church fears the power of ruthless, atheistic communism.

The Moscow conference had hardly come to a "successful conclusion" or there were rumors in the air about another conference and that there was great political news in the making. By now we know that another conference has taken place in Cairo, Egypt, among the 'big three:' Roosevelt, Churchill, and Chiang Kai-Shek the Generalissimo of the Chinese Republic. That important discussions were held among the 'big three' follows from the nature of the case. At this conference the questions of strategy, of the immense complications of global warfare, and matters of territorial boundaries, the latter especially in connection with the Japanese Empire, were discussed. That it was an august body which met in Cairo is plain from the fact that both Mr. Churchill and Mr. Roosevelt were accompanied by their entire general staff. There were more than two hundred British diplomats and military men, the American delegation numbered a hundred men, and China had about twenty men present. We are told that the conference decided on a final drive on the Reich due this winter. Various details were worked out at the conference and unrelenting pressure on Germany was promised. At this conference it was also decided that the Japanese Empire is to be broken up and that Japan is to be reduced to a minor power. The daily papers stated that the heads of the three governments had agreed: (1) "Japan shall be stripped of all the islands in the Pacific which she has seized or occupied since the beginning of the first World War in 1914." (2) "All the territories Japan has stolen from the Chinese, such as Manchuria, Formosa and the Pescadores, shall be restored to the Republic of China." (3) "Japan will also be expelled from all other territories which she has taken by violence and greed." (4) "In due course Korea shall become free and independent." Naturally, various political questions and postwar territorial claims are to be settled at a later date. But if the agreement of the 'big three' is to be executed and realized this would mean a realignment in the Orient. Japan would become a small, unimportant country and China would become the leading and dominating power of Asia.

Hardly had this conference come to a close or Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Churchill presumably with

their general staffs proceeded to go to Teheran, the Persian capital, where they were to meet with the Russian dictator Joseph Stalin. While I am writing this article word has just been released that this conference has come to a close, however its decisions and results are as yet not known to the general public. One of the chief topics has undoubtedly been the war strategy against Germany. Detailed plans were perhaps drawn up with respect to a coordinated drive against Germany from the West by the Allies, England and America, and from the East by Russia. A new psychological 'war of nerves' may also be expected against Germany in the near future. The conference also may have dealt with problems about postwar reconstruction of Europe, the rebuilding of Russia's devastated cities, perhaps an agreement has been made about various territorial boundaries, the rehabilitation of the conquered nations etc. etc. It is also expected that these 'big three' have drafted an ultimatum to Nazi Germany demanding immediate unconditional surrender or suffer total destruction. However it is not likely that Russia has made any agreements with the Allies which would conflict with her present well known policy to divide Europe as she sees fit. Before the conference ever started the papers stated already: "Washington officials are confident of complete understanding between the President, Churchill, and Stalin, on all the remaining major questions with the possible exception of boundary problems." Russia is a powerful nation, thus far she has stood the brunt of the fighting, and she naturally has a strong voice and a determined will at the conference table.

Reading about such momentous decisions and political maneuvers it seems that the destiny of mankind is in the hands of a few men. However, it is a great comfort for the child of God to know that the Lord, God Almighty, reigns as King Supreme and that He executes His will and realizes His counsel. If this was not so we might indeed be apprehensive about the future. Thanks to God we know that He will bring in His own way and by His eternally determined means the climax of all things.

Progress of the War.

The latest news can be briefly summed up as follows: In the Russian theatre much bloody fighting is going on at the present. The Russians have scored tremendous gains this past summer. At present however the Russian offensive seems to have slowed down considerably and Germany is making a supreme effort to regain the initiative. We are told by the daily papers that bloody battles along a 600 mile front are raging wherein Germany attempts to regain the control of vital communications and supply lines and halt the surging Russian drive to the old Polish border. It still remains to be seen whether Germany can make

any worthwhile gains or whether the Russians are strong enough to hold on to their present positions and get ready for new, crushing offensive battles. Fact is that although Germany has sustained terrific losses both in men and material, as to date the German Army shows no signs of an immediate collapse.

It becomes more evident by the day that the Allied drive in Italy was a great disappointment and certainly upset the time table for the conquest of Italy. Our Armies are still more than 60 miles away from Rome. Our men in the 5th Army, under General Clark, who at present are slashing into the Nazi winterline, have seen some bitter fighting, and their progress is slow. The 8th Army under Montgomery has finally crossed the Sangro river and thereby threatens the main German positions of its so-called winterline. How long the battle will last before the Allies enter Rome, no one knows. Hopes are high that the worst is over in this particular theatre of war. But that leaves Northern Italy still full of German soldiers. The continual rains and the difficult terrain of fighting have done much to slow up the progress of the 5th and 8th Army.

Recently the U.S. marines launched an offensive against some of the Gilbert Islands in the Mid-Pacific. Our marines were victorious in their adventure, but at a very heavy cost of men. The conquest was accomplished at a cost of 3772 American fighting men, either killed or wounded. At this rate the loss of life will be terrific when our Navy undertakes major offensive battles against the Japanese. Recently we read an article about the fanatical tenacity of the Japanese soldier. One of our military men stated: "The Japanese soldier fights to die, the Allied soldier fights to live." One thing is clear, we should not underestimate the Japs. It is reasonable to expect that during the coming winter our Navy will undertake more offensive blows against the outer defence ring of the Japanese empire.

The Allies are still waging the air offensive against Germany. Berlin, the capital of Germany, has of late been severely bombed. Within the last two weeks no less than 7500 tons of bombs have been released upon the city. It is claimed that from one fourth to one third of the city is in complete ruins. According to reports many more severe aerial blows are to be executed against Germany during the winter. No less than fifty two cities are on the list for total destruction. It is horrible to think about it what all this means in terms of sorrow, trouble, destruction, fear and death.

Of late there have been several peace rumors, but high officials tell us not to put any stock in them. The opinion seems to be quite general that Germany will not collapse internally this winter under a sustained aerial offensive, and no decisive defeat is expected on the battle fields till next year. If this estimation is

correct it means that some very bloody fighting lies ahead of our armies and that the future rate of casualties will be heavy when the Allies invade the European fortress. Some experts believe that our casualties will be extremely heavy when the Allies start their invasion of the West. And then of course we still have to deal with Japan. Hence, it is not true that the war is over except for the shouting. The worst, climatic history in terms of loss of men, perhaps with the exception of Russia, is still to come. Raymond Clapper wrote in one of his latest syndicated articles these significant words: "Many people think the war is over when Germany surrenders, but for us the dying will only have begun." The latest list of our American casualties for all branches of the armed forces has reached already the formidable figure of 126,969 killed, wounded, prisoners, missing.

On the Domestic Front.

Space does not permit us to broaden out on this point at all. Let me mention a few of the things that are going on at home.

As far as eating is concerned the American people certainly are well fed. Those in authority claim that food supplies of most things are adequate and will continue so.

We are piling up a tremendous bill of war. Only part of the cost of this war is paid for at the present. The future generation will be burdened with a tremendous debt the equal of which has not been in all the history of the world. It is estimated that the present war will cost the U.S.A. at least 300,000,000,000 dollars. An astronomical figure which we can mention but none of us has the slightest idea how much 300 billion dollars really amounts to.

Both business and labor makes money on this war. In fact practically all classes of people in our Country benefit financially from the present war. And still people are never satisfied, much to the chagrin of the boys that have to do the fighting.

The inflation which our government tries to curb and control is of late threatening to expand faster than ever. Washington we are told is full of lobbyists, each fighting for his own group. Labor wants higher wages, especially since John Lewis practically got what he asked for. The so-called 'little steel' formula is out of date, so the labor leaders claim. The farmers fight tooth and nail for the abandonment of 'subsidies.' They want a free market for their products and uncontrolled prices. The politicians in Washington seem to be afraid to take matters in hand, afraid to curb inflation, afraid to tax the people etc. With them the trouble seems to be votes. They want to offend no more people than is necessary, lest they lose out in next year's election.

Daily the American people are told to be patriotic

and to put everything in the war effort. However, a great many individuals and groups try to squeeze out of the war as much as they can. No wonder that one hears a protest every so often from our boys that do the fighting in the fox-holes, in the air, and on the seven seas. Yes, indeed, 'democracy' as we speak of it and have it in our own country is very cumbersome, has its many weaknesses, and certainly will never bring the glory and the golden age of which many philosophers and politicians dream.

What are we to do? We should be faithful in our task as citizens of America. But let us not be deceived as if a future ideal state of affairs were in store for us. Our expectations are not from man. Our goal is not the earth. With the patriarchs of old we should evermore intensely seek the Country and the City that is above. For we expect new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwelleth.

J. D.

The Division of the Land in West Palestine

The matter of Caleb's inheritance being taken care of, a commencement is made of the distribution of the land among the nine and a half tribes. Being the kingly tribe, Judah was the first to receive his lot and was planted in a conspicuous territory. Pre-eminence was due to this tribe, which had inherited the patriarchal blessing, and from which He was to come in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed. But Judah was not planted in the heart of the country. That position was given to Ephraim and Manassah, while Judah obtained the southern section. According to some interpreters, Judah and the sons of Joseph seem not to have obtained their inheritance by lot, but by their own choice and early possession. This view militates against the notice at ch. XV:1. "This then was the lot of the tribe of the children of Judah by their families." And at ch. XIV:1 we read, "And these are the countries which the children of Israel inherited in the land of Canaan, which Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel, distributed for an inheritance to them. *By lot was their inheritance, as the Lord commanded by the hand of Moses, for the nine tribes and for the half tribe.*" The territory of the tribe of Judah included the most southern part of the land. It touched Edom in the east and in the south had the wilderness of Zin as its border. Its starting point is the end of the Dead

Sea. From this point the border runs toward the south, as appears from ver. 3 which says: It went out toward the south side of the ascent of Acrabbim. Thence it went up to the side of Kadesh-barnea, and passed along to Hezron. . . and went out at the river of Egypt, and the goings out of the border were at the sea. "This shall be your southern border" (ver. 4). This last statement also indicates certainly that also Judah had its territory assigned to him and did not obtain it by choice. The Dead Sea, in all its extent from south to north, was the chief part of the eastern border. The northern border began at Gilgal, and went forth westwards to the Mediterranean by a line that passed just south of Jerusalem (vers. 5-12).

According to some interpreters, the territory of Judah was not pre-eminently fruitful; it was not equal in this respect to that of Ephraim and Manasseh. It had some fertile tracts, but a considerable part of it was mountainous and barren.

At the present time, Judea is a country of this description but not the Judea of ancient times. It was mountainous but not barren. The mistake that these interpreters make is that they regard the present condition of the Holy land as an indication of its condition in Bible times. If we want to know what kind of a country it was that God gave to Israel, we must take the Scriptures as our guide. According to God's word, it was good land that He prepared for His people. At the time of its invasion by the Israelites, it supported a numerous population in abundance. The Canaanite cities were numerous, strong, and thriving. The territory of Judah alone included ninety cities with their villages. With the people of Israel as its residents, the yield of the soil was miraculous. Every sabbatical year the land could be left uncultivated without the nation falling into want. Every forty-ninth year this rest period was of two years duration. The report of the spies was to the effect that "We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey." The report agrees with the description of Canaan contained in the Lord's communication to Moses when He appeared to him in the burning bush. "I am come to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptian, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey." (Ex. III). Moses in one of his final discourses delineates on the goodness of the land in this language: "For the Lord bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depth that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack anything in it." (Deut. 8:7-9).

But today the land, and in particular the territory of Judah, has an opposite aspect and character from that which it then bore. The contrast is so great and dire, that unbelievers, among them Voltaire, wanting to discredit the scriptures, say that it can and could be esteemed fertile when compared with the desert, and therefore could not have supported a population so numerous as can accord with the testimony of the Scriptures. But the fact is that through the centuries of our Christian era, a host of enemies have made all the cities waste and brought the land, still naturally fertile, into desolation. Judea has been successively invaded by foreign nations and spoiled by despotic governments. And today the land is being trodden underfoot by pastoral or wandering tribes, chiefly the Bedouin Arabs. All their property consists in cattle. The mountains of Judea, terraced all over and thus giving the clearest demonstration of ancient glory, have been laid desolate. Their only covering now are weeds and creeping thorns. And all this in fulfillment of prophecy. "I will make your cities waste, and bring your sanctuaries unto desolation,—And I will bring the land into desolation: and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it. And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you; and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. Then shall the land enjoy her Sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies' land; even then shall the land rest and enjoy her Sabbaths." (Isa. 1:7-9). "I will give it into the hands of the strangers for a prey, and to the wicked of the earth for a spoil. The robbers shall enter into it and despoil it" (Eze. VII:22, 23). These prophecies began to be fulfilled with the invasion of Canaan by the Assyrian army: but they continued to be fulfilled through the centuries even of our Christian era. They are still in process of fulfillment. The bringing into desolation of the holy land continues. And the Jews continue to be a people without a country. Moses set blessings and curses before the Israelites, with the purpose that they might choose between them. Choosing, they chose the curse. But God does not cast off His people among them—the remnant according to the election. *All Israel*—the elect of all nations—shall be saved.

G. M. O.

NOTICE

Classis East will meet D.V. Wednesday, January 5, at 9:00 A.M. in the Fuller Ave. Church.

D. Jonker, S.C.