

THE STANDARD

Bearers

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MEDITATION

The Christ-Child As The Lord Of All

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men, etc.

Matt. 2:1-12.

Glorious Lord of all!

The Babe of Bethlehem, Jesus the Christ!

And that He is the universal Lord, the firstborn of every creature, by Whom and unto Whom all things were created, that in all things He must have the pre-eminence,—that must be revealed even at His very coming into the world.

This is the meaning of the visit of the wise men.

For make no mistake. Do not change this revelation into a very interesting, while exceedingly human, story of some wise men that came to visit the baby Jesus. Do not lose yourself in speculation as to the identity and number of these magi from the east, nor exert yourself too much to explain this wonderful star that guided them to the house where the Christ-child might be found. Let your attention not be absorbed by the attitude of wicked Herod, who would fain destroy the Christ in His infancy; nor let your indignation against the cold-blooded theologians of Jerusalem detain you too long from contemplating the main theme of this narrative. . . .

For this narrative did not mean to be an interesting story.

It is a revelation of Jesus Christ!

Its theme is: the Christ-child as the universal Lord!

All the rest in this strange and marvellous narrative is but means and medium: the star, the wicked tyrant, the self-complacent scribes of Jerusalem. They must all point to Him, the Babe in Bethlehem. They must all serve to reveal Him in a certain light, from a certain aspect, that of His being the Lord of all!

They all stand in the service of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Lord, that is rich over all that call upon Him.

They together constitute but the mirror in which you may behold Him as the One of Whom the inspired bards of Israel sang to the tune of their harps; and of Whom the prophets spoke as the desire of the Gentiles.

And at the same time, a mirror in whose reflection you may behold the promise of better things to come.

The gospel of the King of kings!

The universal Lord!

Lord of creation!

By Whom and unto Whom the stars in the firmament were created in the beginning.

By Whom their course throughout the ages was determined and so arranged that, in the fulness of time, one of them might serve as His herald, to bring the representatives of the Gentiles from afar to worship Him!

How otherwise would you explain this astounding sign?

It was in the days when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea, so the gospel narrator informs us. More definitely the time is not stated. In those days that belonged still to the birth of Jesus, when angels announced and sang of Him, when shepherds sought the sign of the manger and the swaddling-clothes, when Simeon spoke of Him as the sign that would be contradicted, and Anna spoke of Him to all that looked for Israel's salvation in Jerusalem; in those days, when Jerusalem must needs have been filled with rumors concerning the advent of the promised Messiah. It cannot have been long after the birth of Christ, therefore. Yet, it was definitely the last of the events connected with the birth of our Lord. And this was but proper, always according to the rule: Israel first, then the Gentiles.

It was then the wise men came.

To see the born King of the Jews they came, for they had seen His star in the east.

Evidently, they were men that were accustomed to gaze into the firmament, and to investigate the starry heavens. It is quite probable, too, that somehow, whether through those that travelled land and sea to make proselytes, or through contact with the Jews, that were scattered over the earth, they were acquainted with the Jews' expectation of the Messiah. And again, we may well surmise that they had received some revelation, either before or at the time the star appeared to them, that the latter was a sign to them of the birth of the expected King of the Jews. Certain it is that, while they were still in their own country, a very distinctive and remarkable star appeared in the heavens, such as they had never seen before, and that they explained this strange phenomenon as the sign that the Messiah had come.

We have seen his star!

Quite in vain are all the attempts to explain this star, and to recognize it as one of the known astronomical phenomena. Calculations have been made, indeed, to show that about the time of Jesus' birth there may have been a special constellation or grouping of stars in the heavens; others prefer to explain that it was a *nova*, or perhaps, a comet, such as make their strange way periodically through the firmament. Yet, how would any of these, or any other theory, explain the strange behaviour of this star? It appeared to the wise men in the east; then, till the very end of their long journey, they saw it no more. It appeared to them again, as they departed from Jerusalem, went before them, and stood over the house where the Christ-child was.

It was His star!

So the wise men explain it; and so it had been revealed to them.

A star it was, not a mere appearance, that had been especially created in the beginning for this very purpose, to appear at this time only, and to follow this strange course, that it might herald the birth of God's Anointed. And all the stars in the firmament had been so arranged in their courses that they made room, in the fulness of time, for this herald of the king!

For that Babe in Bethlehem is the Lord of all!

He is the firstborn of every creature in the counsel of the Almighty. All things, even the stars in the firmament, are created by Him and for Him.

Him they must serve!

And He orders them to call His people from afar that they may come to worship Him.

Presently, the beasts of the desert pay Him homage, He walks on the sea, commands the storm to subside. . .

The sun darkens, the rocks split, the earth quakes. . . .

He breaks the bonds of death, and is exalted over

all in the highest heavens, angels, and principalities, and powers being subject unto Him.

And He will come again, to put off His old vesture of the present creation, and to put on the new garment of the new heavens and the new earth . . .

The Firstbegotten of the dead!

The universal Lord!

The heathen rage!

The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed . . .

Thus it had been foretold.

And thus it was fulfilled, even in the days when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea, when Herod was king.

For, naturally, expecting that the King of the Jews was born in Jerusalem, and, perhaps, that they would find the holy city in festive garb, they make their way thither; and finding that the people of the city of God went about their business as usual, they inquire somewhat amazedly: "Where is the born King of the Jews?" And thus their inquiry reaches the ears of Herod, the king.

This was that Herod, whom the world surnamed "the Great," the Edomite, worthy son of Esau, the reprobate, who at this time occupied the throne of David, though always in subjection to, and as a representative of the anti-christian world-power, the beast of the Roman empire.

And it is but proper that the born King of the Jews should announce His coming into the world to this representative of Antichrist, thought it be through the star, and through the Gentiles from afar, that the announcement is made. Is not this Babe in Bethlehem the King of the Jews, and the King of kings, and that, too, not by the grace of a worldly emperor, nor by the will of the people, but by divine right? Is He not the stone that will crush to pieces the dream-image of Nebuchadnezzar, utterly destroy the anti-christian world-power, in order that His alone may be the kingdoms of the world, and His dominion may be everlasting?

How proper, then, that, at His very coming into the world, He should announce His advent to the enemy He had come to destroy!

And Herod is troubled!

A king of the Jews? And he is born outside of his palace? The King of the Jews? The rightful heir to the throne of David, which Herod could occupy only as a usurper? O, the Idumaeon must have heard of Him! Moreover, that He is born is announced by these strangers from afar, and the reality of His birth is witnessed by a star in the heavens! Small wonder that the wicked monarch is troubled. But his troubled soul

is motivated by hatred and envy against this born King of the Jews, and by the desire to maintain his own dominion in opposition to Him.

He plots to kill that Babe!

The heathen rage! The people imagine vain things! The rulers take counsel against the Anointed of the Lord!

Indeed, even at this early time, it becomes evident that this Babe is the fulfillment of prophecy.

The Lord of lords, the Christ of God!

Light of the Gentiles!

Even in the attitude of the leaders of Israel, it is already discernible that Israel's house shall be left desolate, and that this Babe will obliterate the distinction between Jew and Greek.

For all Jerusalem, that is, no doubt, especially official Jerusalem, was troubled with Herod, the reprobate! *With him* they were troubled, that is, the same kind of trouble that disturbed the soul of the wicked king also agitated their minds. Jerusalem that kills the prophets, but decorates their sepulchres, is troubled at the announcement that Jerusalem's King is come to establish His throne, and to claim His rightful dominion!

O, it cannot be that they had not heard of His birth before!

Jerusalem must have been filled with rumors concerning the birth of the Babe in the manger. How could it be different? Angels had appeared in the fields of Ephratha to preach the gospel of His advent to the shepherds that kept watch over their flocks by night; and they had sung of the glory of God and peace to men in connection with His birth. They had seen the Babe in the sign of the manger and the swaddling-clothes, and had returned, making known abroad the saying that was told them concerning this Child. Simeon had poured out his heart in gratitude because his eyes had seen the salvation of the Lord; and Anna had spoken of Him to all that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. Besides, there had been those earlier revelations that witnessed of the fact that the promise was about to be fulfilled, to Zacharias, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph. . . .

Surely, official Jerusalem must have been informed of these things!

But it seems that these reports of witnesses had left them rather indifferent and undisturbed.

This, however, was different. From afar these wise men came to inquire earnestly about the born King of the Jews! And when asked about the basis of their inquiry, these strangers replied that they had seen His star in the east!

Now they were troubled, because even now they apprehended that His coming would disturb their carnal tranquility, and ultimately leave their house deso-

late! Even now they dimly apprehend that the visit of these strangers signifies that the coming of this King will mean the obliteration of the difference between the Jew and the Greek.

And even now they reveal that they will despise Him.

They are called into conference with Herod. And they show, these theologians, that they know the Scriptures: in Bethlehem of Judaea the Messiah will be born. But they treat Him with contempt and cold indifference. The Gentiles they must show the way to the Christ of God; as to themselves, they calmly remain in Jerusalem, in utter contempt for the born King of the Jews.

Jerusalem is troubled, and rejects their promised Messiah!

With the same contempt they will presently nail Him to the cross.

That salvation may come to the Gentiles.

And this Babe may be the Lord of all!

The universal Lord!

Rich over all that call upon Him!

For, indeed, these wise men from afar, represent the nations that shall flow unto Jerusalem to call upon the name of the Lord.

Deeply disappointed they must have been because of their reception and experience in the city of the great King. And, perhaps, as they left the palace of the king, and departed from the holy city, dismay and doubt began to fill their soul, as to whether their quest would not prove to have been in vain.

But now, having fulfilled their mission in Jerusalem, the Lord of hosts comforts their hearts, and the star they had seen in the east, appears to them once more, guiding them, and standing over the house where they would find the object of their search. They rejoice with exceeding great joy. And having entered the house, they fall down before this Babe, worship Him, and offer Him their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Wonder of grace!

Who shall say how much these strangers understood of the mystery of the Babe of Bethlehem? Yet, they perform an act of profound faith when they fall down to worship this Babe, and of complete devotion and consecration, when they lay their treasures at His feet, acknowledging Him as their Lord and their God!

Yet, even so, their act is still prophetic of better things to come.

For in more glorious light than these wise men possessed, He shall be revealed, after His exaltation, as the Lord of all.

Rich over all, forever! And all shall bring their treasures unto Him!

In the New Jerusalem!

H. H.

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EDITOR: — Rev. H. Hoeksema.

Contributing Editors: — Rev. G. M. Ophoff, Rev. G. Vos, Rev. R. Veldman, Rev. H. Veldman, Rev. H. De Wolf, Rev. B. Kok, Rev. J. D. De Jong, Rev. A. Petter, Rev. C. Hanko, Rev. L. Vermeer, Rev. G. Lubbers, Rev. M. Gritters, Rev. J. A. Heys, Rev. W. Hofman.

Communications relative to contents should be addressed to REV. H. HOEKSEMA, 1139 Franklin St., S. E., Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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EDITORIALS

Smoke Screen

We sent the following communication to *De Reformatie*:

Prof. Dr. K. Schilder,
Redakteur, *Re Reformatie*.

(Hooggeachte Redakteur: —

Een klein plaatsje in uw blad, dat ook ten onzent nog gelezen wordt, naar aanleiding van eene opmerking van Ds. L. Doekes in het nummer van 2 Nov., 1946, zult U mij zeker niet weigeren.

Ik heb het oog op het volgende van de hand van bovengenoemden broeder:

“Het is de oude strijd, dien wij hebben te voeren: de strijd om de vastheid en heiligheid van Gods verbondswoorden en verbondszegelen, om de klare helderheid van de vragen, die de ouders hebben te beantwoorden bij den doop van ieder kind in de kerk. *Over die duidelijke beteekenis van Gods verbondsbeloften is door de synodale theorieën een rookgordijn gelegd. En dienzelfden mist zien we ook in vele uitingen van onze geestverwanten in het buitenland* (cursiveering van mij, H. H.). Dat alles is al verdrietig. Maar het ergste is, dat men ons tot op heden heeft gesmaad en gebrandmerkt, omdat wij het hebben durven opnemen voor de heldere opmerkingen van Afgescheidenen als Wormser en Pieters (om van anderen, b.v. Helenius de Cock, maar te zwijgen.”

In een footnote bij het artikel lees ik: “Zoo b.v. bij Ds. Hoeksema, doch ook bij zijn tegenstanders.” Ik wordt dus ingedeeld bij die “geestverwanten in het buitenland,” die een rookgordijn leggen over de duidelijke beteekenis van Gods verbondsbeloften.

Nu kan ik broeder Doekes wel verzekeren, dat wij niet behooren tot degenen, die de “vrijgemaakten” hebben gesmaad en gebrandmerkt.

Doch hierop heb ik niet zoozeer het ook.

Dat “rookgordijn” zit mij scheef. Het is juist niet mijn gewoonte om *smoke screens* te leggen over de waarheid. En ik zou gaarne willen, dat Ds. Doekes mij een kans gaf om duidelijk te maken, dat, hetgeen hij ziet als rookgordijn en mist, niets anders is dan het klare licht van Gods Woord. Het kan immers ook zijn, dat wat iemand ziet als een rookgordijn, moet worden toegeschreven aan een cataract of staar of zijn oog. Of echter het een of het ander waar is, kan niet uitgemaakt worden door Wormser of Pieters, noch ook door onze Belijdenisschriften, die ons nu eenmaal geen duidelijke en volledige verbondsbeschouwing bieden, maar alleen door Gods Woord.

De algemeene opmerking van Ds. Doekes biedt mij echter de kans, die ik zoek, niet. Laat de broeder, in plaats van zulke algemeenheden, waaraan ik geen houvast kan krijgen, dus man en paard noemen. Laat hem precies zeggen, waar ik het rookgordijn gelegd heb, en uit de Heilige Schrift bewijzen, dat het metterdaad een rookgordijn is. Dan zal ik hem antwoorden. Zulk eene discussie zou ten dienste van de waarheid kunnen strekken, en onze onderlinge verstandhouding kunnen bevorderen.

Ik beloof tevens, dat ik onze discussie, zou Ds. Doekes op mijn verzoek ingaan, woordelijk in het Engelsch zal weergeven in ons blad, *The Standard Bearer*.

Ik twijfel er heelemaal niet aan, dat *De Reformatie* gaarne zulk eene discussie zal opnemen. Het groote verschil tusschen de "synodalen" en de "vrijgemaakten" ligt immers daarin, dat de laatsten "ongebonden" zijn? Dat wil dus zeggen: er is alle ruimte voor broederlijke bespreking van de verbondskwestie.

Mak ik eindigen met mijn hartelijke groete, amice Schilder, aan U?

H. Hoeksema,
Grand Rapids, Mich.
U. S. A.

To those readers that have difficulty to read Dutch, let me explain, briefly, the occasion and contents of the above communication.

A Rev. L. Doekes, writing on the covenant question in favor of the view generally held by the "Liberated Churches" in the Netherlands, made the remark that I, as well as my opponents in this country, cast a smoke screen over the covenant promises of God.

In the above communication, I kindly invite the brother to refrain from making such general statements, to point out just where I cast such a smoke screen, to prove that I actually am guilty of such an act, and to give me an opportunity to discuss this matter with him in *De Reformatie*.

At the same time, I promise the brother that I will offer a faithful translation of our discussion, should he consent to it, in our paper.

Let us await results.

H. H.

Three Points And Four

Merely to state that the natural man does not use remnants left to him after the fall and his natural light aright, leaves room for the possibility that he might use them aright, if he would.

The Canons, however, exclude even this possibility.

The natural man is so corrupt that he *cannot*, that he is *incapable* of using this natural light aright, even in things natural and civil. There is no good left in his nature. He is, indeed, totally depraved.

It is plain, therefore, that the formulation as found in the Canons is to be preferred, and that the declaration of Utrecht definitely weakens the Confessions on this point.

Let us now turn our attention to the third of the declarations of Utrecht under *Common Grace*.

It defines the purpose of the remnants and of the natural light left to man after the fall. According to this third point, their purpose is three-fold: 1. To render man without excuse; 2. To bridle the working through of sin; and 3. To cause that possibilities, given in the original creation, may still be developed in the sinful world.

To the first of these statements concerning the purpose of the remnants, we have little objection. The Confession also speaks of it that the sinner is left without excuse. However, here, too, it may be remarked that the statement in the Canons on this point is more correct than that of the declarations of Utrecht. For it is not so much the remnants and the natural light as such that renders the sinner inexcusable before God, as the fact that he wholly pollutes his light, and holds it under in unrighteousness. But we may let this pass.

It is to the second and third of these points that we have serious objections.

First of all, let us note that in making these declarations the Synod of Utrecht left the basis of our Confessions. Nowhere do the latter state that the remnants of natural light serve the purpose of bridling the course of sin. It is true, the Canons state that by the "glimmerings of natural light" the sinner retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the difference between good and evil, and discovers some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintaining an orderly external deportment. But did the fathers of Dordrecht mean to declare thereby the same thing as what is meant by the restraint of the course (*doorwerking*) of sin? Did they mean that the "knowledge of God" which the sinner has induces him somewhat to love Him, or to bridle his hatred of God; that his knowledge of the difference between good and evil causes him to do good; that his regard for virtue renders him virtuous? Did they mean to deny that even good order in society may be the channel in which the course of sin moves? Was there no good order in society under the Nazi regime, and will not the Anti-christ introduce the perfect order? Or is it not true, according to our fathers of Dordt, that even though the sinner may have regard for an external orderly deportment, he camouflages this orderly deportment whenever he sees fit, and, moreover, the things he does

in secret are a shame even to mention?

The last part of the same article of the Canons that speak of these "glimmerings of natural light" ought to be sufficient answer to all these questions: "Nay further, this light such as it is, man in various ways renders wholly polluted, and holds it in unrighteousness, by doing which he becomes inexcusable before God."

And how could it be different?

How could the natural remnants and the natural light possibly serve to restrain the working through of sin?

After all, these remnants are *natural*, are they not? They imply that man still is a rational and moral being, that he still has a mind and is able to think and reason; that he still has a will, and is able to act is a moral being. It means that he is capable of knowing that God is, and that He must be glorified and served; that he is able to distinguish between good and evil, and to know that he is obliged to do the good; that he is in a position to discern that the precepts of the law of God are good for him, and that to violate them leads him to destruction. But whatever else one may say about these remnants, the fact remains that they are *natural*. They are not spiritual. There is no power of ethical good in them. They are not at all remnants of his original righteousness or goodness. Nor did our Reformed fathers ever intend to intimate that there is any remnant of positive good in fallen man.

How, then, could these natural remnants act as a restraining power upon sin which is spiritual and ethical corruption? Sin means that the whole nature of man is perverse, is motivated by enmity against God, that all man's light, such as it is, is change into darkness all his righteousness is perverted into unrighteousness, his holiness into corruption.

Now, then, let this be noted clearly: *this perversion of sin, this ethical corruption, operates exactly in and through the remnants of natural light.*

The natural light does not restrain the ethical corruption, nor even the operation and expression of it. It is foolishness to even state such a thing.

On the contrary, the perversion of sin corrupts the remnants.

If man had no remnants of natural light he could not be sinner. If, in his natural light, he could not have some knowledge of God, he could not hate Him. If he could not discern the difference between good and evil, he could not possibly sin as a moral being. If he had no regard for virtue, he could not wickedly trample it under foot. If he did not know his obligation to do righteousness, he could not hold the truth in unrighteousness.

His natural light is ethical darkness.

How, then, could it possibly be said that the remnants serve the purpose of restraining the course or

working through of sin? The declaration is based on misunderstanding, on a confusion of conceptions.

And the only thing a sinner can do with his remnants is to wholly pollute them, and hold them in unrighteousness, thus rendering himself inexcusable before God.

This our fathers clearly saw. And this Utrecht failed to discern.

H. H.

THE TRIPLE KNOWLEDGE

An Exposition Of The Heidelberg Catechism

Part Two.

Of Man's Redemption

Lord's Day XXI

3.

The Gathering of the Church (cont.)

A comparison of the two passages speaks for itself.

While the passages from Hosea speaks of the nation of Israel, to which the Lord said Lo Ammi, not my people, and Lo Ruchama, no object of mercy; but which shall be restored, so that the Lord will be merciful to them, and they shall be called the children of the living God; the passage from the Romans quotes this passage in proof of the fact that the Lord fulfilled this promise of the restoration of Israel in the calling of the New Testament Church, "not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles."

This passage alone establishes beyond any doubt the unity of Israel and the Church of the old dispensation.

Further proof must wait till we discuss the Scriptural ground for the baptism of the children of believers.

The Word of God abundantly sustains the teaching of the Catechism, that the Church is gathered out of the whole human race, from the beginning even unto the end of the world.

4.

Assurance Of Membership.

The Catechism concludes its answer to the question concerning the holy catholic Church with a personal confession: "and that I am and for ever shall remain a living member thereof".

A double assurance of faith is expressed in these words: the assurance of personal membership, not of a certain church in the world, but of the one, holy, catholic Church, the spiritual body of Christ; and the assurance that this membership can never cease: once a member of the Church is to be member forever.

The question may be asked: how does the believer in this world attain to this height of personal assurance of belonging to the holy catholic Church, and, therefore, of his salvation?

In answer to this question, we may state, first of all, that this personal assurance is certainly possible. There are Christians who virtually deny this. They not only are constantly in a state of doubt as to their personal part with Christ and His Church, but they also insist that such a state is normal. And when they meet someone who glories in Christ, and professes to be assured of his own salvation, they view him with suspicion, and usually venture to express their opinion that such a glorying believer takes matters too lightly, and that his boast is too superficial. Yet, the Word of God everywhere strikes a far different note, certainly teaches that the believer ought to rejoice in the God of his salvation in Christ, and exhorts us to make our calling and election sure. It is certainly true that the Christian in this world may have, and often does have, times when his faith is not bright, and does not reach the height of glorying expressed here by the Catechism. But such a weak and wavering condition must not be coined as normal, still less as ideal. Rather should the believer in such moments of doubt and unbelief examine himself with a view to discovering the causes of his spiritually sick state. The spiritually healthy believer may certainly be assured of his membership of the holy catholic Church, and glory in the God of his salvation.

Besides, such assurance and glorying, and not a state of darkness and spiritual gloom, are to the glory of God our Redeemer.

But in what way may such a glad and healthy assurance of salvation be attained?

Negatively, we may answer, that this spiritual certainty cannot possibly rest on the ground of certain experiences of conversion which we may have had in the past. It is not unusual to meet people who appeal to their past experiences of the grace of conversion as a basis of assurance that they are children of God. They like to relate the story of their conversion, how they lived in the mire of sin, and in what marvellous way they were brought to conviction of sin, true repentance, and faith in Christ. It is to be feared that, as these stories are repeatedly told, they grow in vividness of color and detail. And they are designed to leave the impression that, unless one can speak of similar experiences, he cannot claim to have a part with the grace of Christ. However, this appeal to the past

as a basis for present assurance of salvation is morbid and very weak. For, first of all, how easy it is, in the course of time, to foster doubt as to the reality of those past experiences, and to raise the anxious question whether, perhaps, we deceived ourselves at the time we had them, and whether they were after all not merely the product of our own imagination! Or, if we really rely upon the experience of the grace of conversion in the past, such morbid appeal to the past may make us careless and profane indeed, and cause us to neglect the working out of our own salvation in the present. The question is not, whether we were converted some ten or twenty years ago, but whether we are walking in the way of salvation today. Besides, let us not forget that these experiences of sudden and vivid conversions are not everybody's, and certainly should not be set up as a standard for all. They who do so only confuse the minds and hearts of those that, like Timothy, were brought up in the fear of the Lord and in the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures from early childhood, and who, while they never departed from the way of God's covenant, will never be able to speak of a sudden calling and transition from the darkness of sin into the light of God's glorious grace. Yet, the way of the latter is far to be preferred to that of those who were vividly and suddenly converted. It is better to fear the Lord from childhood, than to wallow in the mire of sin for a while, in order then to be converted.

Let those, therefore, who really were called and converted in this marked way, beware, lest they begin to boast in self, and in their own shame, rather than in the grace of God.

Nor can this true assurance of personal salvation be gained in the way of morbid introspection and search for evidences of grace. O, to be sure, these manifestations of the grace of Christ are certainly present in the consciousness and life of the believer. He is sorry for sin and repents. He has a delight in the precepts of his God, and strives to be pleasing to the Lord. He loves the brethren, and is not a friend of the world. But healthy spiritual certainty and assurance of one's part with Christ will never be attained by searching for such evidences and by attempting to make them a basis for our certainty. The trouble is that, before long, he that seeks to reach assurance in this way will have no end of questions concerning these evidences of grace, to which he will never find a satisfactory answer. He is sorry for his sin, yes, but is his sorrow sincere? Or is it deep enough? Does he, perhaps, repent because he is afraid of punishment? Is not his love of God miserably lacking in depth and fervency? Besides, all these evidences are present only in principle. And the believer who earnestly examines himself can find a thousand evidences to assure him that he never was a child of God. For the motions of sin are still in his members, and they loudly

protest against the testimony of whatever evidences of grace he may find within himself.

Although, therefore, it is salutary daily to examine ourselves whether we be *in* the faith, we should not rely on evidences of grace to determine whether we *have* the faith.

Needless to say that this blessed and joyous assurance cannot be found in the way of the mystic, of waiting for some special revelations or whispering of the Holy Spirit, assuring us that we are the sons of God. For it is, indeed, the Spirit that witnesses with our spirit that we are the sons of God, but this testimony is never to be divorced from the objective witness of the Word of God as contained in the Holy Scriptures. For such special revelations we can but wait in vain.

What then? Shall we base our assurance of being a living member of the holy catholic Church on the fact that we are members of some church in this world, or on some other related matter, such as that we are baptized, that we have believing parents, or the like?

God forbid!

This is quite impossible. Even though someone should be a member of the very best of churches in the world, where the Word of God is most purely preached, he could not possibly make this a ground of his personal assurance of salvation. For the fact is that there is always chaff among the wheat, and that all are not Israel that are of Israel. One may, therefore, very well be a member of some church on earth, without being a member of the holy catholic Church of Christ. That our name is found on the church register below is no guarantee that it is written in the book of life.

Fact is that the assurance of our sonship is found spontaneously by our walking faithfully in the way of that assurance.

Let us not forget that the assurance of which we speak is an assurance *of faith*.

And faith, as the Catechism has taught us in the seventh Lord's Day, is a *certain* knowledge of all that God has revealed in His Word, and a hearty confidence, that not only to others, but also to me, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation, are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits.

Faith, therefore, *is* assurance.

In order, therefore, to live in the consciousness of being a member of the Church of Christ, in the joyous assurance of my personal salvation, my faith must be conscious and healthy. I must not simply have the *power* of faith, but faith must be *active*.

Our fathers sometimes made the distinction between the *being* and the *well-being* of faith.

It is, indeed, quite possible and proper to make and to apply such a distinction. One may have the one

without always enjoying the other. The faculty, the gift, the power of faith can never be lost. But it is quite possible that one who has the gift of faith in his heart, has times when he fails to enjoy the healthy, conscious activity and assurance of faith. Various causes may cooperate to cast a veil of darkness, of deadness, of doubt and gloom over his soul, so that it seems as if he never had the faith in Christ.

And the assurance of one's personal salvation is a matter of the *well-being* of his faith.

How, then, in what way, can this well-being of faith be attained?

The answer to this question cannot be doubtful.

Faith must constantly be nourished and strengthened. And it is nourished by the means of grace, the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments. It is, therefore, indispensable for the assurance of my personal salvation that I diligently attend the preaching of the Word of God, and faithfully partake of the sacraments the Lord has instituted for the confirmation of our faith. Through the Word as it is preached by the Church the Holy Spirit will nourish our faith, cause us to grow in the knowledge and grace of Christ, and witness with our spirit that we are the sons of God. After all, there is only one that can give us the assurance that we are saved, and that is God Himself; there can only be one ground of such assurance, and that is the Word of God; there is only one that can bring that Word to our hearts, so that we know that it is not only for others, but also for us personally, and that is God, through Christ, by His Holy Spirit. And it pleases Him to do so through the preaching of the Word by His Church in the world, and to strengthen the same assurance through our partaking of the holy sacraments.

For the well-being of our faith, therefore, it is indispensable that we diligently and prayerfully attend the preaching of the Word, and make use of the means of grace.

But this is not all.

The way in which we may so hear the Word of God that we are assured of our calling and election is that of *obedience* to the Word, and of *sanctification*.

If we walk in the ways of the world, of carnal lust and pleasure; if we do not put off the old man, and put on the new; or if there be some sin in our life which we nourish, for the which we will not repent, the Spirit does not witness with our spirit that we are the sons of God. And even though we regularly attend the preaching of the Word of God, and are never absent from the table of communion, it will be of no benefit to us, and we will not possess the glad assurance of our personal salvation, as long as we refuse to cleanse ourselves from every defilement of the flesh and of the Spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

This connection between hearing the Word of God

and a walk in true sanctification, and, therefore, between a life of obedience to the Word and our personal assurance of salvation, the Bible emphasizes frequently.

The epistle of James exhorts us: "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only." James 1:21, 22. The one is impossible without the other. You cannot receive the saving power of the Word, unless you put away sin and walk in holiness. Fact is, that if you walk in ways of the flesh, you cannot even hunger and thirst for the bread and the water of life. Hence, the apostle Peter writes: "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby: if so be that ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." I Pet. 2:1-3. The implication of this exhortation is very plain: if we are to be desirous of the sincere milk of the word, we must put away from us the old man of sin; if we nourish sin in our hearts, we cannot hunger for the Word, nor be benefited by its preaching. And how, according to the same apostle, can we make our calling and election sure? He tells us in the following words: "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you and abound, they shall make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall." II Pet. 1:5-10.

Attending the preaching of the Word, and partaking of the Lord's table, pleading, too, upon the assurance of God our Saviour in baptism, and walking in the way of obedience to the Word, so that we put off the old man of sin, and put on the new man in Christ, we will not need to appeal to past experiences, neither be in need of special revelations, nor search for evidences of grace; but we will spontaneously rejoice in the assurance that we are members of the Church, and sons of God, for it is in that way that the Spirit witnesses with our spirit that we are the children of God.

We may add, that thus our assurance of faith will be supported by a twofold testimony from without.

On the one hand, there is the testimony of our fellow saints in Christ. As we walk in the light, we have fellowship with one another. The saints will bear

us witness that we are of them, and we will experience that we belong to the company of them that are saved, and that, with them, we are living members of the Church. This, too, is impossible if we walk in darkness. If we nourish sin in our hearts, the fellowship with the saints in Christ is severed, as far as our conscious life is concerned.

And, secondly, if we walk as children of light in the midst of the world, and confess the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in word and walk, the world will bear us testimony that we are not of them. If we would be friends of the world, we will be accounted enemies of God. If our walk is such that the world numbers us among its friends, we will surely have the testimony in our consciousness that we are not of God.

Hence, if we find that we cannot take the words of the Catechism upon our lips, and confess that we are living members of the Church which the Son of God gathers out of the whole human race, we ought to examine ourselves whether we be *in the faith*, in order that we may discover where the cause of our spiritual weakness and gloom lies. And having found the cause, we must humble ourselves in true repentance, and implore Him for grace that we may forsake the world, crucify our old nature, walk in newness of life, and thus, through the preaching of the Word, hear the witness of His Spirit that we are the sons of God.

Such self-examination is healthy and salutary.

H. H.

THE DAY OF SHADOWS

Samuel Displeased

Though the people's asking for a king was deeply sinful, the kingship as such was not a sinful institution. It was needed to shed a new light on the promise. David, the warrior-king, to whom the Lord swore truth, and Solomon in his glory typified Christ. But the people did not ask for a king because of their desire to serve the cause of the Gospel; their purpose was to rid themselves of Jehovah, whom in their hearts they had rejected, that He should not rule over them. And the Lord gave them their way; He did set a king over them and thus made these motions of sin, also willed by Him, serve His purpose, according to which the people of Israel had to be brought into being as a visible kingdom.

Who would have thought that in asking for a king, the elders as the spokesmen of the people were

motivated by the desire to get rid of Jehovah? Doubtless it surprised even the elders, when later it was told them by Samuel. They asked for the removal of corrupt judges. Ostensibly they were good men interested in righteous government. And it may well be that they believed themselves to be men of this character, men who wanted for the nation a king who should walk in the ways of Samuel, a king who feared the Lord. Did they not complain to Samuel about his sons' not walking in his ways? And the character of their request should not remain unnoticed. On the surface it was wholly justifiable; it thus betokened, it would seem, a genuine concern of just men about the plight of their nation. Samuel was old. It is true. And he felt his age. Why, if it were otherwise, should he have appointed his two sons to assist him in his judicial office? The infirmities, incident to old age, had slowed him down, no doubt. There are still other evidences that he was getting old. His sons were taking bribes and perverting judgment and it seems that he knew nothing about it, so that it was necessary for the elders to tell him what went on. Samuel was old; and was not a serious objection to his age especially this; that it disqualified him for taking the field in time of war to fight their battles for them as the captain of Israel's army? And they could say, too, that his influence with the people amounted to little. He had judged Israel for several years now, and still every man did that which was right in his own eyes, the reason being that there was no king in Israel. And all the while the nation was being harassed by foreign dominions. Was it not high time that Samuel resign with his sons? The judgeship was not hereditary in Israel. Yet, Samuel had made his sons judges. Should not the people have a king? Was not right on the side of the elders? Were they not just men? Only apparently so. The Lord makes the amazing disclosure that they asked for a king because in their heart of hearts and perhaps without their being fully aware of it they rejected the Lord and knelt before the shrine of idols; they were behaving, in petitioning for a king, true to form, "according to all the works which they did since the day that I brought them out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods." Who would have thought this? We are at best poor judges of the moral character of human conduct. The mainsprings thereof lie concealed in the heart of man, the heart which is deceitful more than anything. Only the Lord can know it. As for the right being on the side of the elders and the people, if they believed that right was on their side, they were willingly ignorant of the fact that what they needed was not a change of government but a change of heart and that the cause of all their troubles was not that they had no king to go out before them and fight their battles and were

being judged by an old man but that they did not fear the Lord and keep His commandments.

The Lord commanded Samuel to "hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not rule over them." To these words we must again have regard. *Just because* they have rejected the Lord, Samuel must hearken unto their voice and set over them a king. What could be the Lord's purpose in setting over them a king on account of their having rejected Him? Israel had many kings, only some of whom were godfearing. As limited to Israel's first king, the ungodfearing Saul, through whose self-will and rebellions the nation was brought to the brink of ruin, the question is to be answered thus. The Lord wanted to punish the nation for its sin of rejecting Him and thus demonstrate unto it, in the hard school of experience, the sinfulness and great folly of wanting a king in the room of Jehovah. Saul was the kind of a king for which they had asked, one who should usurpe the Lord's place in the nation. But Saul's career was ended by a war with the Philistines in which he died a suicide and in which the nation suffered a defeat of the first magnitude. All the Israelites that dwelt in the maritime plain forsook their cities and fled to escape the wrath of the Philistines; and the Philistines dwelt in their cities, I Chron. 10:7. And finding Saul dead, they stripped him and decapitated him. They "put his armor in the house of their gods and fastened his head in the temple of Dagon." The nation's first king was a failure. He feared not God. He came to a tragic end. And had the Lord not regarded the true Israel, the nation would have come to a tragic end with him. The great lesson to the people of Israel is obvious. The nation with its king must serve the Lord, its king invisible, or be consumed by His wrath. Its safety still lay solely in covenant fidelity. But the lesson was not taken to heart except by the true Israel. The nation persisted in demanding a king that would serve with it in Baal's temple, and fight its battle without placing it under the necessity of eschewing evil and fearing God. It persisted in demanding victory, freedom and prosperity without truth and righteousness, heaven without God. In a word, the nation persisted in rejecting God through all the centuries of the future as revealed in its Godfearing kings and prophets; it finally crucified God as He stood before them in Christ. For the Lord hardened its heart.

But we must now attend to the text at chapter 9:16, "Tomorrow about this time—it is the Lord speaking, communicating His will to Samuel—I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin—the reference is to Saul—and thou shalt anoint him to be captain over my people Israel, that he may save my people out of the hand of the Philistines: for I have looked upon my

people, because their cry is come unto me." Thus the Philistines had recovered from their defeat suffered in the battle of Mizpah some fifteen or perhaps twenty years previous, and by their incursions into the coasts of Israel were again making life unbearable for God's people. Samuel must anoint Saul that he may deliver them. Thus Saul's elevation to the throne had at least a twofold purpose. The Lord wanted the nation punished on account of its sin of rejecting Him; and for the sake of His people, the true Israel, he wanted the nation saved from the Philistine oppressions, which were hard and cruel. But also the catastrophies that befell the nation on account of Saul's rebellions were turned to the advantage of the true Israel.

The notice that the nation again groaned under the oppression of Philistine and other dominions raises questions. Had the people of Israel forsaken the Lord anew and was the house of Israel again prostrating itself before the shrine of idols. Was Baalim and Ashtaroth again being served openly? The sacred writer makes no mention of it in his narrative. But the notice of the Lord's instructing Samuel to anoint Saul that he might deliver God's people out of the hand of the Philistines makes it certain that idolatry was again raising its fowl head everywhere in the land. This need cause no surprise. Some fifteen or twenty years had elapsed since the disastrous defeat of the Philistines at Mizpah. During those years there had risen another generation that, as the one that arose after the generation to which Joshua belonged "knew not Jehovah and the works that he had done for Israel." Only here the great work of Jehovah was His scattering by His thundering and lightnings the Philistines advancing against the congregation of the Lord assembled in Mizpah. The old generation had witnessed that mighty wonder, demonstration of the Lord's power and readiness to save His contrite and penitent people; and they thus knew the Lord by the seeing of their eye, and had been mightily impressed. And the true believers had blessed God's name because they were men born from above. But as to the new generation, it had acquaintance of the Lord as revealed in that work of deliverance only through the report of their fathers most of whom were dead. But there is more meaning to this new generation's not knowing the Lord and that mighty work of His. The idolatrous men of this new generation, the great majority of them, were devoid of grace and therefore did not *acknowledge* that the wonder of which they had intelligence, through the report of the fathers, was the work of the Lord, by which He had wrought salvation in Israel. Thus their not knowing the Lord and His work must also mean that they knew little *about* the Lord and His works, of the idea and purpose of their history, nation, institutions, promises of God and His worship. They lacked the spiritual per-

ception necessary to a right evaluation of the things of God. They could detect little difference between the worship of Baal and that of Jehovah. The contrarities and the differences were smoothed away by the evil influence of habitual intercourse with the idolatrous Canaanites. It could be expected therefore, that, with the restraints fast being removed through the death of the fathers, this new generation more and more openly forsook the Lord and returned to the idols. Samuel still lived. But he was old and his sons took bribes and perverted judgment. True, he judged Israel. But the circle of his direct influence—he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpah,—was small. It included only a small portion of the land of Canaan. And as he advanced in years he more and more shifted the burdens of his office from his own shoulders to those of his two sons.

He was aware, to be sure, of the new tide of unbelief and apostacy that again threatened to engulf the nation. But he was also reminiscent of the glorious spiritual revival that had swept the land of idolatry twenty years ago. All the house of Israel had lamented after the Lord. The strange gods and Ashtaroths were put away, and the nation served the Lord only. And they gathered together at Mizpah and drew water and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the Lord. Then the Lord had done wonders. He thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines and discomfited them: and they were smitten before Israel. It all stood out clear in Samuel's memory as though it had happened but yesterday. He loved to dwell on those events in his solitude, when he sat in his house, an old man now, grown old in the service of His God and His people. Those were glorious days! For the nation served God. But now it groaned under new oppressions. The anger of the Lord again was hot against His people. Whithersoever they went out, His hand was against them for evil. For the Lord was again being forsaken. And Samuel's spirit was heavy. Would that the elders of the people came to bring him tidings that the house of Israel once more lamented after the Lord. How his heart would rejoice! He would know how to answer them. "If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts," he would say to them, "put away the strange gods from among you, and serve the Lord only, and He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." It was only in the way of their return to the Lord, that He would deliver them out of their troubles. Another way there was not. How firmly that truth had embedded itself in his soul.

For some time now, it must be, the elders in Israel everywhere were holding meetings on which they discussed the plight of the nation; and the concensus of

opinion among them was that Israel should have a king to judge them and to go out before them, and fight their battles. Gathering themselves together, they came to Samuel in Ramah, as we have seen. It seems that their request took him by surprise. Certain it is that it vexed and troubled him greatly. "But the thing displeased Samuel (the Hebrew text has, "The thing was evil in Samuel's eyes), when they said, Give us a king to judge us," and they must have added, 'to fight our battles and free us from the yokes of our oppressors.' God forbid that he should hearken unto their voice. Jehovah was their king. If only they would repent, He would again do wonders, and they would be free. Why then should they be asking for a king? Did they not want God? Samuel turned to himself. Had he given them occasion? It was true what they had said. He was old; and his sons, whom he had appointed to assist him in his judicial office walked not in his ways. Such at least was their contention. They meant to tell him that both he and his sons were disqualified for the high office of judgment, he on account of his age and his sons on account of their misrule. How was he to reply to them? Of one thing he was certain, he might not hearken to their voice. Samuel was in a quandary. Dismissing the elders, Samuel prayed unto the Lord. And it must be assumed that he laid before the Lord the wickedness of the people in their asking for a king, and also that he accused himself before God for not having taken a better oversight over his sons and thereby having brought on the crisis perhaps.

(It must not be imagined that the Lord's saying to Samuel, "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them" must be taken to mean, that Samuel complained to the Lord about the insult done to his person, as if his one great grief was merely the ingratitude of the people for all that he had been for them through the years of the past—ingratitude here revealing itself through their request that he step aside with his sons to make room for a king. That he felt the insult done to his person; that it wounded his soul and cut him to the quick, is certain, for he was human. But to maintain that, because of his love of position and power, what he was occupied with in his prayer to the Lord is their lack of appreciation of him—the fact that in their estimation he had served his usefulness and therefore should make an end of himself as judge in Israel—so that it was necessary for the Lord to tap him on the shoulder, so to say, and remind him that he should be less occupied with the injury done to his own person, and concentrate on the great wrong done to the Lord—is to give

evidence of a woeful lack of right understanding of the true character of the terrible zeal of this righteous man. True, Samuel, too, was a saint with but a small principle of true obedience. This will become apparent as we proceed with our narrative. But what must continually be born in mind in explaining his reactions is this: Samuel was not a Saul; he was Samuel. But this is but another way of saying that also in explaining Samuel, to be sure, Scripture must be interpreted in the light of Scripture. Samuel's great grief in that crisis was that the people, instead of wanting to be saved by the Lord in the way of return to Him, demanded that a king be set over them to fight their battles, and save them from the hand of their oppressors. Therefore the thing was evil in his sight. This is evident from all his remonstrances, as will become evident. Thus in saying to Samuel "They have not rejected thee but me" the Lord was telling Samuel that the deep motive of their wanting a king was not that they wanted to rid themselves of Samuel on account of his age and the misrule of his sons, but that they wanted to rid themselves of the Lord. Though he understood this, Samuel, it must be, was not sufficiently mindful of it, so that he was allowing himself to be tormented by the thought that the basic explanation of their rebellion was his age and especially the misrule of his sons).

Samuel having unburdened his heart, the Lord replied. The Lord's answer must have puzzled him quite as much as the request of the elders had vexed and disquieted him. Mark you, they had done with the Lord and wanted a king to fight their battles, though they pretended to be interested in righteous government. Samuel certainly was sensible of the vile intent of their hearts, and the thing was therefore evil in his eyes. All the days of his judgment he had admonished them to serve the Lord, put their confidence in Him, and look to Him for deliverance out of the hand of their oppressors. All along he had insisted that the sole cause of all their troubles was that they refused to do just that. But they would not be instructed. They came to him and insisted that he set a king over them. Having heard them out and dismissed them, he complained about them to the Lord. Doubtless he expected the Lord to instruct him that he tell the elders that no king would be set over them. But instead the Lord instructed him to hearken unto their voice in all that they had said. This must have caused him surprise; for the thing was evil in his eyes, and evil, he now knew, also in the eyes of the Lord. If so, how could the Lord command him as He did? And would not those sinful men conclude that they had no sin, seeing that Samuel must set over them

a king by divine mandate? And finally did not the Lord's command really really militate against what had formed all along the very heart of all Samuel's admonitory discourses to the people, namely, that the safety of the nation lay solely in its keeping covenant fidelity. As has been shown, Samuel's position was that they needed no king to fight their battles if only they feared the Lord. That this was his position is evident from all his remonstrances. And this was also the position of the Lord; for in remonstrating with them, Samuel spake by divine inspiration.

What must have increased Samuel's perplexity was his hearing the Lord say that he must hearken unto their voice in all that they said, *just because* they had rejected not Samuel but the Lord. These words must have raised also in Samuel's soul the question why he must set over them a king on account of their having rejected the Lord. Now the answer to all these questions, is in the final analysis, Christ. But the thing we must here observe is that Samuel, living as he did in the dispensation of shadows and having therefore not Christ as the direct object of his vision, continued to be perplexed by the Lord's mandate. As will appear in the sequence, in obeying the Lord, he acts more or less contrary to his own understanding. In obeying, he follows the Lord more or less blindly, being able to do so, because, being a true believer, he stands firm in the conviction that the Lord, being righteous and holy God, is, must be righteous in all His doing. The truth of these statements is already born out by Samuel's reactions to their reply to his first remonstrance. The Lord commands him to hearken unto the voice of the people: howbeit, he must protest solemnly against them and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them. He does so, and the substance of his protest is that the people will lose all their liberties under the kings that will be set over them, and be their servants. The pressure of their tyrannical rule will be that great that the people will cry out in that day because of their king; but the Lord will not hear them. In thus remonstrating with the people, Samuel, says the sacred writer, speaks not his own words but the words of the Lord. And it is also evident that the discourse originated not with Samuel but was indeed put into his heart by the Lord. For had Samuel originated this protest, it would have been a declaration to the effect that no king was to be set up over the people and a command that they cease asking for a king. But no such declaration or command passed over his lips. What he tells them directly is that the kings that they will choose will be insufferable and indirectly that with these afflictions they must not end in these kings but in the Lord and consider that it is He who in that day will be punishing them on account of their sin of having rejected him; and finally that they will have no one to blame but

themselves. But the people would not hearken. They would rather groan under the hand of tyrannical kings, if only they were allowed to serve their idols, than be free as servants of the Lord. Samuel again complains about them to the Lord. He rehearses their words in the ears of the Lord, and receives as answer, "Hearken unto their voice and make them a king." This curt reply, as coming from the Lord, plainly indicates that Samuel was reluctant to do just that.

G. M. O.

THROUGH THE AGES

The Avignon Popes

As was said, in 1305 Clement V, being a Frenchman, was elected pope, and chose Avignon, a city surrounded on all sides by France, as his place of residence. Here, as was stated, the popes remained for seventy years. As this period so closely corresponds in its duration with the span of years of Judah's exile, it is known in history as the Babylonian captivity of the Papacy. It included the successive reigns of seven popes, all of whom were Frenchmen: Clement V, 1305-1314; John XXII, 1316-1334; Benedict XII, 1334-1342; Clement VI; 1342-1352; Innocent VI, 1352-1362; Urban V.; 1362-1370; Gregory XI, 1370-1378. As was stated, this absence of the papacy from Rome did the papal system much harm. The papacy threatened to become a French institution, and its morals became notorious throughout Europe. Petrarch, as was stated, called it the sink of every vice and the haunt of all iniquities.

The most conspicuous figure among these seven popes was John XXII. He was said to be the son of a cobbler, and like all his predecessors with but few exceptions, he was far advanced in years—he was 72 at the time—when, as cardinal-bishop of Porto, he was elevated to the papal throne. He is remembered not so much for his ability as pope but rather for his restlessness and lust of gold. He issued numerous bulls and other writings. He wanted to be a theologian as well as pope, and was devoted to France.

One of the outstanding features of this John's reign was his attempt to determine the imperial succession of the German throne, as Germany's temporal lord. For, as could be expected, also this pope was addicted to the view and stood firm in the conviction that Christ had appointed the pontiffs of Rome to rule the world—worldly kingdoms—as well as the church, as Christ's vicars. The aforesaid attempt involved this pope in

a bitter struggle with Lewis the Bavarian. Henry VII, emperor of Germany, had died. The imperial electors were divided in their choice for a successor, some casting their votes for Lewis the Bavarian and others for Frederick of the house of Hapsburn. Both were crowned, Frederick by the archbishop of Bonn, and Lewis by the archbishop of Mainz. Civil war broke out in Germany. It was terminated in 1326 by the compact of Ulm. Frederick received Germany as his domain and Lewis Italy and the title of emperor. But the pope refused to recognize Lewis as king of Italy, as the papacy regarded most of Italy as belonging to its private possessions. The pope therefore requested Lewis to surrender his claims which of course he refused to do, and the struggle between Lewis and the pope for the lordship of Italy commenced. The pope refused to crown Lewis emperor. In retaliation Lewis had the pope denounced as an anti-christ and deposed from the papal throne. The pope responded by calling Lewis a heretic and appointed a crusade against him. Lewis lost all his support in Germany and Italy, and the pope now demanded that he step down from the imperial throne. The order was repeated by Clement VI in 1343 and again two years later. The electors of Germany, weary of the strife, chose Charles IV, who before his election had promised full submission to the pope. Shortly thereafter Lewis died and the struggle was ended.

Another achievement of Pope John XXII, to return to him, was his reduction of the papal taxation of Christendom to an organized system. The sources from which the papacy drew its moneys were: 1) free-will offerings, which were given to the pope for church appointments and other papal favors. These appointments were numerous, as it was held that the pontiff of Rome may dispense all the dignitaries in the Christian world; 2) tributes from the states of the papacy in Italy and several other states including England. Besides the popes received fees for divers spiritual privileges; letters confirming the titles of Archbishops, bishops, and abbots to their offices; and for all kinds of concessions and indulgences. The income of John XXII is said to have been 260,000 florins or about \$600,000 of our money. Even this amount did not defray the expenses of the papal court and the popes got loans from bankers and cardinals.

John XXII was succeeded by Benedict XII, a more upright and scholarly man. He dismissed the parasite prelates of his household and refused to enrich his relatives, saying that the vicar of Christ, like Melchizedek, must be without father and mother or genealogy. He was followed by Clement VI, who wasted in high living the fortune accumulated by John XXII. He loved horses and daily provided for his household to whom he added a company of women, good and plentiful food. He remembered his relatives, giving

cardinals' hats to thirteen, one brother and twelve nephews. Being gifted with eloquence, he continued preaching after he became pope. It was during his pontificate that Lewis the Bavarian died. He had implored Clement for the grace of the church and in response the pope added to the curses already pronounced upon him by the two preceding popes. In a bull he prayed God to smite Lewis with blindness and insanity, called Peter and Paul and all the elements to fight against him, and the earth to open up and swallow him alive. He damned his house and children to everlasting desolation.

It was during Clement's pontificate that Europe was visited by a terrible plague, the Black Death. According to chroniclers it commenced with a swelling under the armpits or in the groin, sometimes as large as an egg. The victim was consumed with fever and vomited blood. His lungs and throat were inflamed and his breath was foul. After a day he died. The disease attacked animal and man. All over Europe men died by the tens of thousands. One half of the population of England fell. No class was exempt. In the cities the streets were strewn with dead. Ships floated on the seas with every sailor dead. But even while the plague ravaged, many of the people abandoned themselves to reveling and drinking.

Clement was followed by three good popes. They were sober-living men. Innocent VI dimmed the splendour of the papal court and reduced its ostentation. He sent home all the idle bishops. In the eyes of the multitude, Urban V was a pope of such worth that they called him a saint and he was so canonized by Pope Pius, 1870. The last of the Avignon popes was Gregory XI. By him the papacy was re-established in Rome. He went to Rome but was soon making preparations for a return to Avignon, when overtaken by death, when but 47 years old.

The papacy was in a bad way. The taxations of the popes of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was a scandal, and the burden was much increased when the incomes from the states of the church in Italy were cut off by the removal of the papacy to Avignon. The papacy was an extravagant spender and its reputation in this respect grew worse till the Reformation. With the death of Lewis the Bavarian the imperial power of Germany in Italy collapsed. Italy, as a result, was in the wildest political confusion. And in no place was the situation worse than in Rome.

G. M. O.

CLASSIS EAST

will meet in regular session, the Lord willing, Wednesday, January 8, 1947, at 9 o'clock A.M., at Fuller Avenue.
D. Jonker, S. C.

IN HIS FEAR

Christian Instruction

In our last article in this column we called your attention to an unscriptural tendency in the present Christian School system, the tendency, namely, of a "social gospel". There are other errors. We believe that the mixing of numerous denominations into a Christian School constituency is also an error. (Cf. Pamphlet by M. Fakkema, entitled, "New Christian Schools on the Pacific Coast"). It must lead to generalization of principles and finally to colorless instruction. There is moreover the danger of opening the doors of our schools to the unchurches, against which also the last held Union Meeting raised its voice (Cf. Christian Home And School, October, p. 17). There is likewise the tendency to change our Christian Schools into mission stations, or at least use them in the process of doing missionary work. Present is also the danger of giving a good course in Bible study but neglecting to permeate all the branches with the Word of God. At the root of many of these evils lies the error of Common Grace, which has been adopted by the Christian Reformed Churches and is bearing its fruit.

When we mention these errors we do so, not in the spirit of fault-finding, for faults lie on the surface of everything which we do in this world. But we do it in the spirit of love for the type of instruction which we believe the covenant dictates.

There are certain definite principles at stake.

In how far these tendencies manifest themselves in any given community and in any local school depends to such a great extent upon the teachers, the board and the constituency of the society.

Of primary importance is first of all,

How Much Are We Parents Interested?

Yes, how much are we really interested in obtaining instruction which is covenant dictated.

How much are we interested in Christian instruction at all?

As a whole, not much.

This is the general complaint. The chilliness and the take-for-granted attitude which the pastor sometimes finds in his work among covenant parents is pretty well duplicated in the matter of the school. Catechism starts, and the parents take for granted that it will continued. Seldom does a parent visit the catechism class purely in the interest of the instruction which their children receive. Sometimes one discovers

that the parents hardly know what their own children are studying. There are happy exceptions to this rule, but there are nevertheless many parents who manifest plain disinterest. Indeed they are concerned that their children go to catechism, but for the rest they let it to whomever it may concern. It is frequently even with great difficulty that one can get periodic visits from the consistory. In the Society life one often meets the same attitude. The parents as a whole are very little concerned about what goes on there. I suppose in congregations where there are Sunday Schools the same complaint holds good.

Now this some tendency seems to be still more pronounced when it comes to Christian instruction. We frequently talk with teachers and principals about these things, and the complaint always returns, the parents show so little interest. They perhaps do actually have more interest than they show, but this is slim comfort. The fact remains.

If the parents are not vitally interested, what will we do?

The interest of the parents should go beyond settling for the tuition. One can do that, even if one is very disinterested. There is such a thing as "obligation" isn't there? Our interest ought to reach at least to that point where we attend the School Society meetings, the P. T. A. or the public programs. If we are absent from all these your thermometer registers near zero as far as interest is concerned.

But our interest ought to reach much farther than that too.

Do you as a parent show daily interest in the instruction which your children receive, and the progress which they make? Do you ever talk with the children about school, or take time to glance over the work which they do, the books they study and the notes they keep? A hasty glance at the report card is not enough. Do you ever go to see your teacher about your child or your children? Do you ever commend your teacher or speak a word of encouragement? (they are human). Or, if you find something wrong with their instruction, have you ever seen your teacher about it? Or have you ever been present at the board meeting, or have you contacted the board about the welfare of the school where your children attend?

Perhaps some of us will call this silly. If you do, you only betray that you lack the proper interest and attempt to find an excuse for it. No, we are convinced that all these things which we have mentioned, and more, go into the making of an interested person.

Perhaps some of us would produce the argument that if we had schools of our own we would be interested, at least we would show more interest. That remains to be seen. We have only your past record by which to judge. A situation can become of that nature where reform is necessary, but at the root of

this reformation must lie the genuine interest of a band of parents.

Genuine interest in truly reformed Christian instruction is basic.

If we have that interest we will show it right now, and in the present schools also. The attitude of postponing our interest until we get schools of our own is like that of the young man who refused to show interest in his lady-love until she found him a permanent position and built him a house. We are of the opinion that if we have schools of our own they must be the result of a conviction; a conviction concerning what Christian instruction really is, a conviction that in your local school such instruction is no longer being given and is no longer possible, and a conviction that your interest in positive instruction requires a reformation. There are many and great difficulties involved in such a project, difficulties which we can meet only by faith and the conviction of faith. A school of our own is something which must grow on us, and it grows out of our interest in positively reformed instruction. I should hate to have it grow on us for any other reason.

Interest In Thoroughly Reformed Christian School.

If we are interested in thoroughly reformed Christian instruction, I'm sure you are interested in schools where thoroughly reformed instruction is given, and where the Truth permeates all the branches of study. The truth of Scripture, as it is embodied and confessed in the Three Forms of Unity, as well as the Baptism Form, must permeate the studies which our children receive. Is that expecting more than we have the right to expect? Surely not. And should this fact not be expressed before and brought to bear upon our local schools? We have the right, have we not, and the duty as parent, to require that our schools abide by the truth of Scripture and the Confessions? The school belongs to the parents, and you are a parent. You are not a subversive element when you champion a strictly reformed type of instruction. You are not undermining the school when you seek to keep her on the reformed basis where once it began. The school belongs to the parents and you have rights there. But we also love our schools and seek their welfare. We regret any departure from the reformed conception. One may say a thousand times over that it is hopeless and futile to expect a truly reformed instruction from the present schools, but we have the right to require it. . . . on the basis of the Confessions.

But, an undeniable fact stares us in the face. And that is, that the Christian School system as a whole is permeated with the addition to the Confessions of the Three Points and the error of doctrine which they

represent. In such a system we can not expect a Protestant Reformed Christian instruction. Even if the system would allow it, what teachers would render it? In one locality the instruction which is given may be more nearly reformed than in another, that is true, but none of it reaches the goal which we desire it to reach.

And therefore there is no substitute for a school where distinctly reformed teachers give instruction according to a distinctly reformed interpretation of any application of that truth in the several branches of the elementary and high schools. And that requires schools of our own.

We urge our parents everywhere to exert themselves for the type of instruction which the Covenant dictates.

(To be Continued)

M. G.

FROM HOLY WRIT

James 1:9-11: — "Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun in no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways."

The reader will recall that in the preceding context of these words which we now consider, James had exhorted the church of the living God to pray unto God for wisdom. Wisdom is that Divine gift of grace whereby the child of God uses the best means unto the best end and therefore has his eye of faith riveted upon the eternal inheritance. We need wisdom. The way of the Christian unto the city which has foundations is a difficult way. He must therefore let patience have her perfect work, be patient unto the end. Always he must regard the present in the light of the future, what is now in the light of what shall be. Now we also understand the place which verses 9-11 occupy in this context. One of the most grievous of all the afflictions of all the people of God is the ill treatment which they constantly must endure at the hands of those of high degree or estate. James has more to say of these economic conditions in his epistle. Also in regard to this matter let the church of God be truly wise, look to the future, comfort herself with the assurance that the rich shall be made low and that the brother of low degree shall be exalted.

Several questions demand an answer in the consideration of this particular Word of God. Who are the poor and the rich in this text? Do you refer to the people of God? What does the holy writer mean when he tells us that the rich shall be made low? Must the rich rejoice because he is made low? Does verse 11 require a deep, spiritual, allegorical interpretation?

First of all, who are the poor and the rich in this text, and in what sense are they poor and rich? It can certainly be established beyond every doubt that James distinguishes here between the godly poor and the ungodly rich. That he is referring to the godly poor is evident because he speaks of the *brother* of low degree. It must be equally plain, on the other hand, that he is speaking of the godless rich. It is possible from a grammatical point of view to regard the rich man of verse 10 as a rich brother. The word "brother" does not occur in this verse, then, simply because it already appears in verse 9, and James does not consider it necessary to repeat it. Viewing the rich, then, as a rich brother, the words "he is made low" of verse 10 and the admonition that he rejoice because he is made low are spiritualized. He is made low in the sense that he is humbled in his pride, he has learned to flee his riches, not to set his heart upon them, and to seek his God and the things which are above. Such a man may surely rejoice when in that sense he is made low. This reasoning is based upon the concluding words of verse 11. James declares there that "the rich man shall fade away in his ways." All emphasis, we understand, is laid upon the words "in his ways." *He* shall not fade away, but his ways, his former conduct shall pass away.

This spiritualizing of the words of James is definitely impossible and unwarranted. The text militates against this interpretation. We read of "brother" only in connection with the lowly. And although it is true that the word need not be repeated because it had already been used with respect to the lowly, it is nevertheless a fact that the holy writer speaks only of the lowly brother and then of the rich man. This is further emphasized in the text when James declares that the rich himself shall perish. It is true that in verse 11 we read that "he shall fade away *in his ways*." But in verse 10 we read without any reservation, "*He* shall pass away." Besides the text itself, the entire epistle is opposed to the above conception, as if the rich also refers to the actual people of the living God. In chapter 2:7 we read: "Do not they blaspheme that worthy Name by the which ye are called?" The reference in these words is to the rich. One would hardly apply this statement to the people of the Lord. And in chapter 5:1-6 the language is such that one need not doubt the meaning of James in that particular Word of God. There the rich are told to weep and

howl because of the miseries that shall come upon them, that they have condemned and killed the just who did not resist them.

We conclude, therefore, that the distinction between the godly poor and the ungodly rich must be maintained in this text. We must bear in mind, of course, that James, in this passage of Holy Writ, is not a humanitarian who is deeply concerned merely with earthly economic conditions, and that, therefore, he is writing of generally existing conditions in this world. Such would undoubtedly be the interpretation of this and similar passages in the Word of God by the Modern church of today which simply regards the Scriptures as a book of ethics and as applying only to general conditions among mankind. James is addressing the Church of God. He is referring, to be sure, to economic conditions, to class distinctions between the poor and the rich. However, it is also in this economic field that the people of God are afflicted, that especially the Church of God is afflicted. And he would comfort the Church of God in the midst of the world also in this respect.

In the light of the foregoing, who, then, are these lowly brethren? We understand, of course, that not all the poor are meant. James, here, is not addressing all the poor people of the world. There are ungodly poor and godly rich in the world. The text addresses the lowly *brother*. It is also plain that the writer does not refer to the spiritual lowly. It is true that the word "lowly" which appears in this text is commonly used in Scripture as referring to humility, particularly our humble relation to the living God. This applies to a passage such as verse 5 in chapter 4 where we read that God giveth grace to the humble. The humble in chapter 4:6 are contrasted with the proud. However, in verse 9 of chapter 1 James is not addressing the spiritual lowly. This is, first of all, evident from the text. On the one hand, these lowly are contrasted with the rich. It is true that James does not literally speak of the poor but of the lowly. However, he does mention the rich. And the idea of poverty can therefore not be excluded. On the other hand, also according to the text, the idea of their exaltation conflicts with the interpretation of spiritual humility. True spiritual humility will never pass away. However, these lowly will be exalted. Besides this text, does not the entire epistle emphasize the thought that James is continuously contrasting the people of God and the people of the world as worldly poor and worldly rich? Hence, we may conclude that these brethren in this text are poor from a worldly and material point of view.

In the first place, then, the lowly brother of verse 9 is poor according to the standard of this world. In chapter 2:5 James calls the people of God the "poor of this world." And in chapter 5 the people of God

are again contrasted with the rich—there they are the poor laborers who do not receive enough to live and have “too much” to die. Poverty must have characterized to a large extent the condition of the church to whom this epistle is addressed. And it is the oppressed people of God throughout the ages who are comforted by the words of James. The people of God, generally speaking, are poor throughout the ages.

The cause of their poverty is two-fold. On the one hand it must be attributed to the good pleasure of the Lord. We read literally in chapter 2:5 that God has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the Kingdom of heaven. And this thought is confirmed by the apostle Paul in his epistle to the Corinthians in chapter 1, verses 27-28, the first epistle, where we read that God hath chosen the foolish things, the weak things, the base things of this world, and the things which are despised. On the other hand, however, the poverty of the people of God also has a spiritual cause, can also be explained from the people of God themselves. We must notice that James speaks of the lowly brother. God’s people are brethren. They are brethren of each other, and together they are united with Jesus Christ, our Lord. As such the people of God are the party of the living God and separated from the world. This, too, explains their material poverty. God’s people have higher, heavenly interests.

They surely do what their hands find to do. But their heart is set upon the things which are above. They do not seek the earth, they do not crave the things below. Their citizenship is in heaven. Besides, the people of the Lord are God’s party here below. There are indeed many godless poor who would fain become rich. All men are by nature seekers of the things below—the rich possess them and the poor, who are destitute, crave them. In every way these poor of the world would improve their social and financial position. The people of God, however, are the friends of God. They abstain from evil. They are content with the place which God has given them. They testify against sin and trust in the Lord. They do not resort to violence and bloodshed and striking and boycotting and the closed shop. They testify against sin and, for the rest, rest their case with God. Is it surprising that such a people remains poor? One other factor explains their poverty. These lowly brethren have church interests and spiritual obligations. They contribute for the maintenance and the development of God’s Church and covenant in the midst of the world. Their children must receive Christian instruction. And these items must head the list of our necessities. To love the Church of God and the things which are above requires the use of the pocketbook. To be sure, spiritual things

are not always first in our lives. Personal conveniences and modern luxuries often engage our attention first. But we must seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and then believe that whatever we need will be added unto us.

Besides being poor the people of God are also lowly. They are lowly as considered by the world. The world views them as of no account. They are on the bottom rung of the social ladder. They simply are not considered, they are “good for nothing.” Such is the “lowly brother” whom James addresses in this ninth verse.

To be continued.

H. V.

PERISCOPE

The Conference

Final Session. . . .

The Rev. R. Veldman led us in devotionals on Thursday afternoon, the final session of the Conference. He also introduced the speaker, the Rev. L. Doezeema, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Bellflower, California. The final aspect of the development of the general theme: “The Church” had been assigned to Rev. Doezeema. His topic was “The Reformation of the Church”.

Resumé of Lecture. . . .

“Our topic forms a fitting close to our discussions since reformation of the Church has always been considered important. That we so consider it, is evident from the fact that it, as a principle, is incorporated into our very name—we are Reformed Churches. We are Reformed Churches because we maintain and believe in the principle of Reformation.

“The history of the Church, since the beginning, has been of reformation. To be constantly reforming the Church is, in fact, our calling. The history of the Church reveals a continual deformation in the face of which our calling is always to reform. It is through this constant reformation that God calls and preserves His Truth in the hearts of His own.

“We wish to develop our topic as follows:

- I. The Need for Reformation
- II. The Principles of Reformation
- III. The Pattern of Reformation
- IV. Our Calling Toward Reformation.

“What conditions in the Church call for reform-

ation? It is the deformation that constantly demands reformation. The form of the Church becomes defective, not its essence. The essence of the Church cannot and need not be reformed. In its essence the Church is Holy, Pure and Perfect. Since its essence is the life of Christ which cannot sin, we cannot speak of reformation of the essence. However, this essence as it comes to manifestation in the world takes on a form. This form continually becomes deformed and demands reformation. The invisible, essential life of the Church becomes manifest in the form of the Church. To this form belongs the faith and walk of believers, the organization—the institutional form of the Church. We must bear in mind that this form is not the essence of the Church but is yet necessary to the well-being of the essence. If the form becomes defective the essence is in danger. If there is no form, there will be no essence in the future generations of a particular Church. This form becomes defective and demands reformation for the institute exists to maintain the organism. The purpose of the institute is to preach the Gospel and when this is not accomplished it becomes a den of thieves and robbers.

“An interesting question arises in this connection. What is first to deform, the institute or the organic life of the Church? This is difficult to determine. It may be that the organic life deforms first, due to the fact that the flesh of the members always clamors for false preaching. On the other hand, it may also be that the institute first deforms, due to the same fleshly desires in the ministers.

“What is the reason for this deformation and defect? We read in Gal. 1:10: ‘For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ’. Here the heart of the matter is presented. If we seek to please men, the preaching is defective and becomes instrumental in deforming the Church. On the other hand, if we seek to please Christ, we are true ministers of His. The real corruption—deformation—of the Church, is that condition in which the Church does not walk according to its confession. This may be in defective preaching or a defective walk of the members. It is this condition which calls for reformation.

“We find this situation described among the seven Churches of Revelation. The Church at Ephesus had left its first love. This leaving of first love is the beginning of deformation, for thus the Church has lost its love for the Truth and is susceptible to heresy. The end will be that it gives heretics a place of authority and leadership and the essence will be endangered and finally removed. Sardis was carnal in all its manifestations. Finally, Laodicea has so far deformed that Christ calls the faithful to come out of her. In this connection, we might also point out that not every

form of the Church calls for reformation. Two of the Churches mentioned, Smyrna and Philadelphia, need no reformation and receive only commendation. That does not mean that they were perfect but that they maintained the pure preaching and walked according to their confession.

“In comparison, what is the condition of the Church today? Is she in need of reformation or not? I believe that there are none that do not need reformation. No one can say that we compare with Smyrna or Philadelphia, not even we as Protestant Reformed Churches. The Church today is in need of reformation, for even though the preaching be pure the walk and life always need reforming. We should bear in mind that the false Church cannot be reformed. It does not preach the Word and cannot claim the name of Church and be the object of reformation. Where the Word is not maintained there is desire for union. The striving of the false Church is for power and acquisition of material advantages, contrary to the maintenance of the pure preaching and practise of the Word of God. It is quite evident in our day that the organic life of the Church is deformed. The more we look at the Word the more we are aroused to the calling to reformation.

“There are two principles of reformation. In the first place, every reformation is a return to the Word by the true Church. This was the formal principle of the Reformation of the 17th Century. Both in the organic and institutional life of the Church there was a return to the Word. Reformation is a return by the true Church to that Word from which it has departed. This is a return in both preaching and walk. And again, the false Church cannot return. It is a return by the true Church. In the second place, all reformation is the work of God. God causes and accomplishes all reformation. And that absolutely. He does not merely begin and the Church and its leaders continue, it is God’s work from beginning to end.

“Therefore also, the character of reformation is not revolution. Revolution is of man. Man revolts from the norm and standard and desires something new. Reformation is not revolution. Reformation is God’s call to His own to return to the old. Man’s work is always temporal and fades away. God’s work is spiritual. He begins that work contrary to the desires and ways of man and without the power and might of man. His methods are apparently foolish, yet His power is revealed in the weakness of the instruments He uses. Man always uses methods of the world: campaigns, advertising, etc. God is His own standard and norm since He alone is *the* standard and norm. Reformation is, therefore, God’s returning His own to His norm. We must understand

that reformation is God's work. It is a return to God by God.

"The pattern which reformation takes can be gathered from history and Scripture. We, especially, can determine it from our own history. Reformation usually takes the following pattern:

1. God begins the work in the heart of an individual or individuals by impressing upon them a consciousness of sin and the need of reformation. This is evident from both history and Scripture. As examples of each we might cite Luther and John the Baptist. Sometimes it is limited to one individual and at other times several are so moved.

2. God working through these individuals reveals the deformation and a resulting tension follows. The Church is brought to a consciousness of the issues involved. God causes His people to be persuaded of the Truth. On the other hand, the opposition also grows in intensity and deflection and manifests itself in hatred and persecution of the true people of God. Thus the tension grows as the confession becomes stronger and the thesis and antithesis are more clearly formed.

3. Finally, the false element, which is usually in the majority, casts out the true. Notice, the false does not put away its defected form but maintains the false form and casts out the reformers. Sometimes, the pattern is such that the carnal element is so dead that it pays no attention to the voice of reformation and doesn't even bother to eject the reformers. Then Christ stands at the door and knocks, calling the true Church to come out.

"One other pattern can be cited as a rare case in history. It is the exception in which the true Church is in the majority and maintains the truth by expelling the error. This was the rare case at the great Synod of Dordt 1618-19.

"Many problems arise in the attempt to carry out our calling toward reformation. Some will maintain that we must have a pure and perfect Church here on earth. That was the teaching of the Donatists. They maintained that the Church must continually separate the wheat and the chaff and that the Church could only be composed of Saints. If we demand that we will always be separating and there will be no unity at all. So our calling becomes difficult as these maintain that we should always split and separate. At the other extreme, are those who maintain that the Church must never be separated or divided. Only if there is absolutely no hope left, which, to their minds, is extremely unlikely a case, is it our calling to separate. Stay in as long as possible and reform from within, so they say. Still more, Church reformation makes enemies and these enemies will hurl accusations at us. Reformers will be called schismatics and separatists and although that is not the issue, it makes

our calling difficult for these things are hard for the flesh to bear. Again, our calling is made difficult when the issues are not clear. We must support Church reformation, yet it becomes difficult if the issues are not sharply defined.

"We might bear in mind the following points to guide us in the execution of our calling:

1. Remember that all Reformation is the work of God. He causes His people to confess the Truth.

2. Confession of the Truth implies a continual calling. All Truth must be confessed, not only the great issues but also the small.

3. This confession of Truth demands a protest against the lie and sin. This belongs to a proper confession of Truth.

4. Confession and protest is our first duty and it causes separation. It is not a question whether we *shall* separate, for separation follows confession as God causes tension. It is forced upon us.

5. For after official action of protest and finding that there is no more room for protest it is our duty to separate. The false Church has made true life within her impossible.

6. If reformation is a work of God and our purpose is the glory of God, the cause can never be minor. So also we may be assured of the spiritual victory even though it seems that the cause is a losing one. God's cause always has the victory!

(Discussion to appear next issue).

W. H.

— ATTENTION —

MINISTERS OF CLASSIS EAST: — The Ministers' Conference will meet on Tuesday, January 7, 1947, in Fuller Ave., at 9:30 A.M., the Lord willing.

Program: —

"Faith and Works in the Epistle of James". — W. Hofman.

"The Covenant of Grace". — B. Kok.

W. H.

IN MEMORIAM

The Men's Society of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Kalamazoo, Michigan, hereby wishes to express their sympathy with our fellow-member, Mr. Homer Kuiper, in the death of his mother,

MRS. ALICE KUIPER

May the Lord comfort the bereaved brother and his family and give them the assurance that He doeth all things well.

The Men's Society,

Rev. H. Veldman, Pres.

D. F. Langeland, Sec'y.

The Tension Of The Church*

The doctrine of the Church is for the student of Holy Writ a fascinating subject. This is true, on the one hand, because of the many current erroneous views of this subject. Whereas Holy Writ emphasizes the unity of this Body of Christ, in history she continually reveals herself as torn by dissension and strife. An outstanding example of this throughout the Old Dispensation was Ephraim's jealousy of Judah which finally culminated in the division of the kingdom. Soon, in the New Dispensation, an hierarchical band is cast about the Church and unity is achieved to a certain extent. Even so, the papal hierarchy cannot prevent the division between the Church, East and West. The Reformation, however, also in this respect effected a great change. Rejecting the hierarchical band of Rome, championing the Word of God as the only basis of fellowship, and once more acknowledging the office of believers, the freedom of the Christian was again maintained. The effect of this on the Church, however, was inevitable—the unity of the papal hierarchy was replaced by hopeless division. This division has been constantly increasing. Also this conference strikingly illustrates this truth. Instead then of the "one holy catholic church", whereof the Scriptures and the Confessions speak, we today may witness an apparently hopeless segmentation of the Church of Christ, each part heroically (?) striving to surpass the other in its bid for popularity and fame.

On the other hand, the doctrine of the church is fascinating because of its importance, especially in Reformed circles. Articles 27 and 28 of our Confession of Faith, our Thirty-seven Articles, both emphasize the significance of the doctrine of the Church, the former declaring its faith in the catholic or universal aspect of this Body of Christ while the latter affirms it to be each person's obligation to join himself to the true Church. And it is the doctrine of the Church of God which has evoked from Ursinus and Olevianus one of the most beautiful and inspiring answers of the entire Heidelberg Catechism, in Lord's Day 21, and I quote: "That the Son of God, from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself by His Spirit and Word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith; and that I am and forever shall remain, a living member thereof." We know that this inspiring language of our Confessions is based upon the Holy Scriptures of God.

Fascinating is also the subject which has been assigned to me: The Tension of the Church. From Adam until now the Church of Christ Jesus, our Lord, has been characterized by a tense, a gripping, a tremendous spiritual strain—she has been exerting her-

self throughout the ages to the utmost, without one moment of relief or relaxation. The Church's position in the midst of the world, her state of tenseness resulting therefrom, is surely an amazing phenomenon, and it, too, fascinates the student of the Holy Scriptures, as does the doctrine of the Church itself. I will endeavor to treat this subject, to develop this phase of our Conference's discussion of its general theme, "The Church", without encroaching, too much, upon the papers of the other speakers who will address us.

THE TENSION OF THE CHURCH

Let us note:

- I. *Its Idea.*
- II. *Its Reality.*
- III. *Its Purpose.*

It is not necessary for me to define and elaborate on the concept "Church". This would ordinarily be a logical procedure as far as a strict interpretation and discussion of my subject is concerned. One can hardly discuss the tension of the Church without being familiar with and having a basic understanding of the Church of Jesus Christ, our Lord—our conception of the one necessarily determines our view of the other. It is surely a basic requisite that we know what the Scriptures declare concerning the Church, both as to her essence and her manifestation in the midst of the world. This sphase of the theme of this Conference, however, has been treated by the speaker of yesterday evening, who addressed us on "The Idea of the Church".

Of immediate concern to us is the meaning of the word "tension". According to Webster, tension can refer to the stretching or degree of stretching to which a wire, cord, piece of timber, etc., is strained by drawing it in the direction of its length. Tension, then, is synonymous with strain. Figuratively speaking, again according to Webster, the word refers to "mental strain, stretch, or application; strong or severe intellectual effort; great activity or mental strain of emotions or the will". In the attempt to determine the meaning of the term "tension" as it appears in and applies to my subject, I must confess that, to me, the term "Tension of the Church" is new. Perhaps it is a term of very recent coinage. My difficulty in the preparation of this paper has been that the term "Tension of the Church" appears to me to permit more than one interpretation. Does it refer, for example, to the fact that the new life of the Church of God is always rigidly and uncompromisingly opposed to whatever opposes the Cause of God and of His Christ, and that this life of God, as in the midst of the world, is, negatively, never in a state of relaxation. The "tension" of the Church would then be synonymous with relentless and uncompromising con-

flict. However, Webster also defines "tension" as a severe intellectual effort, great activity or strain. The tension of the church can therefore also be applied to that tremendous strain to which the Church of God is continuously subjected. The Church of God, if you will, the child of God is continuously in a strait betwixt two. To illustrate this truth from natural life many examples could be quoted. What a tension characterizes the man who, aware of a physical stress, consults his physician to learn whether or not he has cancer. That man is in a strait between his desire to live and the fear of death. Or, permit me to remind you of the soldier just before the battle, yea, when the onslaught of the enemy is already in progress. Many of our young men can readily understand the tension of that soldier as he strains every part of his body and soul to meet that attack. The greatest tension, strain of the child of God and of the Church of God refers undoubtedly to a tremendous conscious spiritual strain or pressure underneath which that Church of God labors and to which she is constantly exposed throughout the ages.

Although I need not define and elaborate on the concept "church", I must call your attention briefly to the idea of the church insofar as it determines our correct understanding of her tension. Beautifully and pungently, revealing wonderful insight into the truth, our Heidelberg Catechism, in its answer to the question, "What believest thou concerning the holy catholic church", declares, and I quote: "That the Son of God, from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself by His Spirit and Word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith; and that I am and forever shall remain, a living member thereof".

To ascribe the gathering of the Church to the Son of God is surely Scriptural. "*I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generation for an everlasting covenant*", Gen. 17:7. "And Jesus said unto them, Come after Me, and I will make you to become fishers of men", Mark 1:17, this surely does not imply that Christ, having made His apostles to be fishers of men, Himself has ceased to be *the* Fisher of men. "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, ALL power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, *I am with you always even unto the end of the world, Amen.*" Matt. 28:18-20. "And this is the Father's will which hath sent Me that of all which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it upon again at the last day", John 6:39. "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice;

and there shall be one fold and one shepherd". John 12:32. And again, "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth". Rev. 3:7. But why should I quote more? Scripture surely speaks this language from Genesis to Revelation.

Of particular interest to us now is the fact that the gathering of the Church is presented by our Catechism as the exclusive work of the Son of God by His Word and Spirit. We need not emphasize at this time that only the Son of God can gather His Church. Suffice it to say that it is He alone Who *does* gather His Church, and that He does so by His Word and Spirit. From this we conclude, on the one hand, that the Church of God is a spiritual entity. Does she not owe her existence to the Son of God Who calls her into being by His Spirit? The Church of God is therefore not born but reborn, is not from below but from above, is not out of the first Adam but out of the second Adam, is the spiritual body of Jesus Christ, our Lord. But the Heidelberg Catechism also declares that the Son of God gathers His Church by His Word. We may therefore conclude on the other hand, that the Church also refers to the gathering of the people of God as they consciously are called into being as an elect Body of Christ, chosen from before the foundation of the world, and called to be the party of the living God.

It is this peculiar and wonderful calling of the Church of God which also determines her tension. We should understand that we can speak of tension only with respect to the Church, the Church as called by the Son of God out of darkness into His own everlasting kingdom. One can certainly not speak of tension in the natural man. In him everything drifts along with the tide. There is no tension in merely drifting along with the current. Such an one knows no restraint. Man is by nature wholly darkness. Hence, he knows no tension, no strain. In the seeking of the things below his entire being is engaged. Neither can we speak of tension in the modern, carnal church of today. What is true of the natural man applies also to the false church. There is principally no difference between the modern church and the world. The world denies the reality of sin—the same is true of the modern church and the world. The world denies the reality of sin—the same is true of the modern church, is it not? To be sure, this church recognizes many social faults, but is there anyone in the world who will deny them? The modern church does not recognize atonement, the guilt of sin, the holiness and righteousness of God. The world seeks a righteous and an enduring and a lasting peace for a world of whom the Lord declares that it shall have no peace—do we not

hear the same resolutions among those who claim to be of the church of God? The church would improve the world and modern society—but is there anything distinctive about this program? We may therefore safely conclude that it is vain to speak of tension in the modern church of today. The modern church is not a spiritual, heavenly entity in the midst of a natural, earthy, carnal world. It is as carnal as the natural man himself. And at the end of time the world and this church will indeed reveal that they are one when they unite their forces in the final attempt to trample into the dust and crush forever the Church of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Two outstanding phenomena must be born in mind, it seems to me, if we are to understand the tension of the church. In the first place, the Church of God, from the aspect of her spiritual rebirth, is a spiritual, heavenly entity. To prove this from the Scriptures is hardly necessary. "And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins". Eph. 2:1. "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him Who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light." I Pet. 2:9. "For our conversation (literally 'citizenship') is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ". Phil. 3:20. And do the Scriptures not speak of "a being born from above", as in John 3:3, where we read literally: "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born from above, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." The Word of God, therefore, speaks literally of the child of God as being born from above, and it is therefore the literal teaching of Holy Writ that the Church of God, from the aspect of her spiritual life, is born of God, is partaker of His divine nature, has her source in the heavens, is a heavenly-spiritual entity in the fullest sense of the word. The child of God has received the life of God Himself, shares God's divine nature according to the measure of the creature, possesses therefore the life of the heavenly Jerusalem because the heart of that Jerusalem is nothing less than the living God Himself, and, consequently, his expectation, his intense longing and hope is fixed upon that heavenly city from which he expects his Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, this is but one aspect of the Christian's, the Church's existence, but one phenomenon which must be borne in mind in connection with the tension of the Church. The other amazing phenomenon is the fact that the Church is such a spiritual entity in the midst of an utterly sinful, corrupt, and earthly world. This, too, is abundantly affirmed in the pages of Holy Writ. In the text which we have already quoted the apostle declares of the Church of God that their citizenship is in heaven. Nevertheless, they are still in the midst of the world. Already in the Old Dispensation

David declares in I Chron. 29:15: "For we are strangers before Thee, and sojourners, as were our fathers: our days on earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding." And the same thought is expressed by the holy writer in Heb. 11:13-16 where we read: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city." The church of God scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, the apostle Peter addresses as elect strangers, and the meaning of the expression is surely that they are strangers because of the election. And the Scriptural figure of the pilgrim is too well known by any student of the Holy Scriptures to require verification. The people of God are therefore born from above, are a heavenly people, but their sojourn continues upon the face of the earth.

The Church of God, however, is not merely heavenly in distinction from the earthy, but they are also a spiritual people in the midst of sin and corruption. They are children of God, born of God, partakers of the life of God only in principle. Romans 7 clearly teaches us this truth. And throughout the Word of God this fact is continually verified. We are saints but also sinners, light in the midst of darkness, righteous but also unrighteous, heavenly but also earthy. We are a heavenly-spiritual people in the midst of the earthy and carnality, not only in the sense that the world round about us is from below, but also because we ourselves continually experience these constantly conflicting forces within ourselves.

Hence, as far as the idea of this tension of the church is concerned, we may conclude that it is caused, follows invariably from the spiritual-heavenly identity of the church and her position in the midst of the world. This occasions the constant strain, the continuous pressure underneath which the church of God must incessantly labor, the terrific pressure to which we are constantly subjected. We are reminded of that word of Paul in his epistle to the Philippians, where we read in chapter 1, verses 23, 24: "For I am a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ which is far better. Nevertheless to abide in the desire to depart, and to be with Christ which is far better. Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you." The church of God is continually betwixt two irreconcilably conflicting forces, the one drawing him irresistibly heavenward, and the other invariably



inclining him to the things which are below. Thus we would define the idea of this tension of the Church of God. Let us now attend to the reality of this amazing phenomenon.

II. *Its Reality.*

First of all, let us attend to this tension as experienced in the life of the individual Christian. On the one hand, the child of God is constantly in a state of spiritual tenseness. I would base my observation in connection with this experience of the Christian on II Cor. 5:17 and Rom. 7, especially the verses 15-17. In the former passage we read: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." And in Rom. 7:15-17 we read: "For that, which I do (literally 'complete') I allow not: for what I would, that do I not (literally I read here 'that do I not carry into practice'); but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it (literally 'that complete it'), but sin that dwelleth in me". Notice, as far as this passage in Romans 7 is concerned, that the apostle is not speaking the language here of an unregenerated man. This must be evident from the language used throughout this passage and chapter. The unregenerated man does not hate what he does, cannot confess that no good thing dwelleth in him, cannot speak of the good which he would do, cannot declare that he has a delight in the law of God after the inward man, and cannot thank God for the deliverance which is his through Jesus Christ, his Lord. Neither must we understand Romans 7 as if the apostle Paul were speaking of two individuals, two persons, or even of the Christian as he speaks of himself according to both, the old man and the new man. A careful perusal of verses 15-17 will certainly disclose that the subject in this passage is continuously the same. The child of God is speaking here in the consciousness of himself as a new man.

What then, does the Christian experience within himself according to the Scriptures? On the one hand, he rejoices in complete victory, declaring that old things are passed away and that all things have become new. His old life, old desires, old purposes, old acquaintances, old fellowships are passed away. His entire life of the past is no more. All things have become new. He is aware of a new life, of new desires and purposes and aspirations, of new acquaintances and fellowships, of a new hope, the hope of everlasting life. And, on the other hand, the Christian groans underneath the burden of a fearful struggle. In Rom. 7 he is conscious that, in him, all old things have not passed away, that the old man in him is still very much alive, so that although he would do the good,

yet, when he finds the act to have been completed, he discovers to his unutterable sorrow and distress that it has become so polluted with sin that he knows it no more—this is the literal teaching of the apostle Paul in Rom. 7:15-17.

The result of this experience for the child of God is a state of tremendous tension. It is well, in connection with this amazing passage in Romans 7, to note especially two things. In the first place, the Christian is not a duumvir, a "twee-mensch", a man with two persons, so that when the one person sins the other is not responsible. The Christian, we understand, is a single person, one who in the deepest fountain of his life has become a child of God called out of darkness into the Lord's marvellous light. Secondly, the Christian does not speak the language of a defeatist in this passage of Holy Writ. One might possibly conclude this from Paul's infallible description of the life of the Christian. However, we must bear in mind that, although it is true that we do not complete what we would and hate that which we do, nevertheless the victory of the child of God lies exactly herein that he continue to hate the evil and has an inner delight in all the commandments of the Lord. Even so, he is surely in a state of constant tension. The Christian is incessantly betwixt two. The one power within him draws him irresistibly heavenward, away from sin and the things which are below, and toward the life of God and His eternal tabernacle. But he is also aware of another power within him, a power which invariably draws him into the opposite direction. And the child of God is betwixt both and therefore constantly under pressure.

H. V.

* Paper read before the Conference of Ministers of the Reformed Church in the U. S., and of the Protestant Reformed Churches, October 1946.

IN MEMORIAM

The Consistory of the Protestant Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa, hereby expresses its sincere sympathy to our brother-deacon, Mr. Ben VanderMolen and family, in the loss of his mother,

TILLIE VANDER MOLEN

at the age of 56 years.

May the Lord abundantly bless the bereaved and comfort them, with the knowledge that what the Lord has done, is done WELL, also when He took mother unto Himself.

The Consistory,

Rev. L. Vermeer,

W. S. De Vries, Clerk.