

THE STANDARD *Bearer* A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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MEDITATION

All Enduring Love

*But God commendeth his love toward us,
in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ
died for us. Romans 5:8.*

Herein is love

Not that we loved God, but that He loved us

And sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins!

That is the story of the wondrous cross, its meaning, its eternal source, its glorious revelation.

God loved us! That is the source of the amazing spectacle on Calvary. God, the Creator of the heavens and of the earth, the Triune, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; the righteous and holy Sovereign of all, Who is too pure of eyes to behold sin, loved us, sinners in ourselves, corrupt and damnable. That is why that simple, yet astonishingly significant sentence could be written in the gospel narrative: "There they crucified Him!". . . .

God loved us! That incomprehensible, unfathomable truth alone explains the cross of the Man of sorrows, the Servant of the Lord, the Son of God, Jesus: Jehovah-salvation! Not: God was our enemy, but Christ loved us and turned God's enmity into love, can interpret that cross. He loved us before Calvary. He loved us with an eternal love, before the world was; and the cross is but a revelation, the deepest, the highest, the most amazing revelation of that abiding love.

God loved us! As an interpretation of the accursed tree, that statement must stand alone. Beware lest you add to it! Say not: He loved us and we loved Him. For that would render Calvary impossible. Not herein is love; that we loved God, and that therefore He loved us; nor herein that our love met His; but herein, always in this must be found the nature, the essence, the constant operation of love, that God loved us. Of God is love. And because love has but one source, not two;

and because that one source of love is in God, not in us; therefore, it could be written: "There they crucified Him!"

The Triune loved us!

And one the Holy Three were in that love! That is the possibility of the cross!

The Father loved us: and He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. The Son loved us, and He came to do the Father's will, even unto death, yea, the death of the cross. The Holy Ghost loved us, and He proceeded from the Father and from the Son, to sanctify the Son of man that He might offer Himself, without spot, a sacrifice for sin, acceptable to God!

Of the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Ghost, is also that accursed tree: the triune God is in Christ reconciling us unto Himself!

God loved us!

And because love is of God, and of Him alone, it is sovereign, eternal, unchangeable, enduring, victorious!

Many floods cannot quench the fire of this love!

And to reveal the glory, the power, the all-enduring strength of that love, it pleased God to combine in one historic moment the darkest, evillest, wantonest manifestation of enmity on our part with the most amazing revelation of His love.

Herein is love

And that "herein is love" and in nothing else, is revealed when God commendeth His love toward us, while we were yet sinners!

O, blessed paradox of the cross!

Alas! and did my Saviour bleed,
And did my Sovereign die?
Would He devote that sacred head
For such a worm as I?

Was it for crimes that I have done,
He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity, grace unknown,
And love beyond degree!

While!

While we were yet sinners!

God commended His love toward us, in that Christ died for us!

Mistake not the meaning of that word *while*. For it does not denote the state and capacity in which God loved us: He did not love us as sinners. That would be quite impossible. Besides, had that been possible, the death of the Son of God has been quite unnecessary. Exactly because He could not love us as sinners, because He could not bestow His love upon us in our state of damnable and corruption, the mighty stream of His love dug its own way through the deep and awful canyon of His righteousness and holy wrath to reach us. Nor does that little, but profoundly significant conjunction *while* merely indicate when He loved us, although it is certainly true that He loved us when we were yet sinners. But the point is that He *commended*, set forth, showed and indubitably proved His love toward us, while we were yet sinners.

The *while* points to the moment of the cross!

Sinners we were then; and o, more terribly we were sinners then, at that very moment, than at any other moment!

Sinners are those that deliberately miss the mark, that is, the glory of God, in their whole life, in all their secret thoughts and desires, and in all their manifest deeds and speech, and that, for this reason, are guilty and worthy of damnation. They are those that, instead of being motivated by the love of God, stand in enmity against Him, hate Him, rise in proud rebellion against Him; and instead of having their delight in doing His will, and in ascribing all glory to His holy name, wantonly curse Him in His face.

Such sinners we were.

And our wanton rebellion and presumptuous pride we manifested in all our walk and conversation.

We began to reveal it in paradise. There we stood endowed with many excellent gifts, natural and spiritual, for He had formed us after His own image, and we were gifted with the glory of clear and beautiful light, the light of knowledge, of righteousness, of the love of God in our hearts. There we dwelled, surrounded by the tokens of the blessed favor of the Most High, which, with lavish hand, he displayed all about us, and showered down upon us. And we deliberately turned our neck upon Him, wantonly despised His Word, gave heed to the lie of the devil, and became enemies of the living God!

And ever since, we manifested our enmity.

For we could not escape Him. We must needs meet Him, Whom we meant to repudiate, and Whose name we intended to obliterate from our very consciousness, everywhere. The invisible things of Him are ever clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and divinity. God did not leave Himself without witness. But the truth we held in unrighteousness. We saw His glory,

and we refused to acknowledge it. We lived in His own creation, we ate His bread, and drank His water, and breathed His air, and received His rain and sunshine; in fact, in Him we lived, and moved, and had our being; and we refused to be thankful: we scorned Him to His face, and changed His glory into the shame of corruptible creatures, and exalted ourselves to the height of divinity in our mad and conceited imagination.

Such sinners we were.

And while we were yet sinners, He commended His love towards us, though He must needs be angry with us and reveal His wrath.

But never did we express this enmity against the living God more furiously, than at the very moment when He commended His love to us, the moment when He poured the vials of His wrath, that must needs have consumed us forever, over the head of His only begotten Son! For God commended His love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us! And this Christ was His Son! He came because He loved us, to deliver us from our sin and death, and to bring us back home, to the Father

And how we hated Him!

As never before we revealed our pride and corruption. For we opposed Him, contradicted Him, blasphemed Him, mocked, reproached, spit upon Him; accused Him, buffeted and scourged Him, put Him to shame, condemned and crucified Him

O, say not that we knew not that He was God's own Son. For the fact remains that He was the highest revelation of the Father, and the deepest reason why we hated Him so was our enmity against the living God!

And then, at that very moment, God commended His love toward us!

All our hatred did not change His love!

He took all our abuse of Him and bore it in love!

Amazing paradox of the cross!

All enduring love!

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

God commended His love!

In that Christ died for us!

For, mark you well, that death of Christ was an act of the triune God!

He died, yes; and we killed Him. But never could we have killed Him, had He not laid down His life voluntarily. Never could we have laid our wicked hands on Him, had He not allowed Himself to be led as a lamb to the slaughter. Do you not remember

how he testified that, as the Good Shepherd, He would lay down His life for His sheep; that no man could take His life from Him, but that, in obedience from a commandment of the Father, He would lay it down of Himself?

He died, yes; and we killed Him

But this monstrous deed would have been impossible, if the triune God had not ordained Him to be the Head of His body, the Church, and decreed that, in the dark hour of wrath and judgment, He would take the place of those whom the Father had given Him. For, indeed, we have taken Him, and, by wicked hands, have crucified and slain Him, but this was possible only because He was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of the triune God. Acts 2:23.

He died, yes; and we killed Him

But never could we have stretched His already bleeding form upon the tree of shame, never could our wicked hands have hammered the cruel spikes through His hands and feet, never could we have raised Him, as a spectacle, on the Hill of the Skull, between those two malefactors, had not God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting love.

God commended His love, while we revealed our hatred!

Through the darkest horror of our enmity, God caused the glorious light of His love to shine brilliantly, amazingly

The triune God!

The Father sent Him to Calvary!

The Son, in human flesh, set His face toward Jerusalem

The Spirit of God, proceeding from the Father and from the Son, led Him thither, all the way!

Of the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit, Christ died! God commended His love toward us in that Christ died for us!

For He died! All that is in death He tasted. To the bitter dregs He drank the cup the Father gave Him, and He tasted every drop. Death He tasted in such a way as we could never finish tasting it in ages unending. All that is in death of pain and agony, yes; of trouble and amazement, to be sure; of fear and utter desolation, without doubt; but then, as all this pain and fear and trouble and astonishment are the oppressing hand of the unchangeably righteous God, meeting the sinner in His wrath in the hour of just judgment,—all this, and so He tasted it!

He died for us!

For His death, as He tasted it in all its bitterness of just wrath, was an act of obedience. Every drop of blood that was pressed out of Him, He sprinkled upon God's altar, in perfect obedience of love to the Father. And thus His act of dying was the perfect sacrifice for sin, the perfect *Yes* of the Son of God, blotting out

the wanton *No* of our rebellion.

For us He died.

In our stead, He suffered the agonies of hell, that we might have the forgiveness of sins, and be clothed with everlasting righteousness, and thus become the objects of God's favor.

In our behalf He shed His lifeblood, that we might be delivered from the corruption of sin, and from the dominion of death, and be led into the everlasting tabernacle of Him Who loved us!

God commended His love

In that Christ died

Died for us

And all this while we were yet sinners!

Forbid it Lord, that I should boast,

Save in the death of Christ, my God!

All the vain things that charm me most,

I sacrifice them through His blood.

While we *were* yet sinners!

O, blessed past tense, blessed Word of God, which now the believing Church may joyfully, triumphantly, take upon her lips!

We *were* sinners, but we are sinners no more!

No longer are we loaded with the burden of the guilt of sin, and are we oppressed by the heavy hand of God's holy wrath! We are redeemed! We are acquitted! There is no condemnation! We have the forgiveness of sins! And we are justified, clothed in garments of righteousness in which we may enter and forever dwell in heavenly tabernacles of fellowship!

Can you doubt it?

O, about us and within us, the darkness still lingers. A thousand voices from within loudly clamor that we are corrupt, that we cannot stand in judgment, that we sin and increase our guilt daily, that we must be condemned. And all about us is darkness, the darkness of death, still revealing the wrath of God from heaven. But God commended His love toward us. In the inky darkness that envelopes us there shines a light that will never be extinguished, we know. It is the light of the all enduring love of God, shining from the face of the Man of Sorrows on Calvary

Sinners we were, but sinners we are no more!

For, that love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts. And through the power of that love, we have been set free, in principle, even from the dominion of sin

We love Him, because He loved us!

And we know that His love, commended in the death of Christ, will never rest, until we have been perfectly delivered.

To be the objects of His love forever!

H. H.

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EDITORIALS

O, Shades Of 1905!

Recently, the Rev. N. J. Monsma, editor of the rubric "The Reader Asks", in *The Banner* received the following question: "Can one serve as elder in a Christian Reformed Church, who openly claims not to believe in 'presupposed regeneration' of covenant children, because, as he asserts, it is against the Bible?"

And the answer given by the above named editor was as follows: "No, such a one cannot serve as elder in the Christian Reformed Church, for the simple reason that he disqualifies and excludes himself." The Rev. Monsma then proceeds to explain this answer. He prefers the term "presumptive regeneration," states that this does not imply the doctrine that presumptive regeneration is the ground of baptism, appeals, as a ground for his answer, to the "Conclusions of Utrecht," and to the "new translation" (sic!) given of these Conclusions by the Synod of Utrecht, 1942, (does not the Reverend know that there is a still newer "translation," that of 1946?), which states that the "seed of the covenant" must be "held to be regenerated," while, at the same time, it states that it cannot be held "that every elect child is on that account already in fact regenerated even before baptism . . . seeing that God fulfills His promise sovereignly in His own time, whether before, during, or after baptism," and, finally, appeals to Art. 34 of the Netherland Confession, ostensibly to suggest that baptism seals "internal grace."

When I read this answer, I could not but wonder whether the inquirer was satisfied, and whether, on the basis of this answer, he forthwith instituted proceedings to prevent the brother elder that did not believe in "presumptive regeneration" from serving another day in his office.

And I wondered, too, whether this brother elder, upon reading this answer, found, perhaps, sufficient ground in the answer to combat his attempted deposition.

He might, you know.

For, according to the above answer, "presumptive regeneration" means that we presume that the seed of the covenant is regenerated, and . . . that, at the same time, we presume that they are not regenerated! Or, rather, for the last statement is not quite correct, *that we do not presume that they are regenerated!*

O, yes, most assuredly: we presume it, and we do not presume it!

When it is said that we must believe in "presumptive regeneration," the meaning is, of course, that we

must consider the seed of the covenant to be regenerated from their birth. If this is not true, the theory has no sense whatever.

But when it is said that this same seed of the covenant may also be regenerated after baptism (and that leaves lots of room, even three-score and ten, or four-score years!) we definitely state that we do not presume that they are regenerated from birth.

Now, what must the poor elder, that is in danger of being deposed as elder, do? He must, of course, cling with all his might to the tail end of the fourth of the Conclusions of Utrecht, and of the declaration of 1942, and of that of 1946.

And what, then, must the equally poor inquirer do, that is zealously watching over the purity of doctrine in the Christian Reformed Church(es), and impatient to remove that poor elder from his official seat? He must, of course, cling with might and main to the head-end of this same fourth Conclusion, and of these same declarations.

And what, further, must the poor Consistory do, and, perhaps, the Classis, and the Synod, when they are called to judge in this case. They must, of course, say: "Brethren, you are both right; let us have peace!"

O, shades of 1905!

I had almost forgotten to reflect upon this reply of the Reverend Monsma, when I was reminded of it by an article in the "Rijnlandsche Kerkbode." In this article the writer quotes from another paper, in which an article occurred written by Ds. Popma on this question of "presumptive regeneration." Now, the Rev. Popma most emphatically denies that the Conclusions of Utrecht, or the declaration of Utrecht 1942, or that of Zwolle 1946, is an official adoption of the doctrine of "presumptive regeneration."

Now, this I find a bit ironical.

Ever since the Synod of Utrecht 1942 spoke, the leaders of the Christian Reformed Churches here exerted themselves to make plain that they fully agreed with the "synodicals," and must have nothing of the position of the "liberated." The editor of *The Banner* emphasized that the Christian Reformed Church(es) took their position firmly on the ground of "presumptive regeneration." Former Prof. Heyns had to suffer a *post mortem* repudiation. His skeleton was safely locked in the clothes closet of oblivion (though one can hear the bones still rattling). And now the Rev. Monsma, recently returned from a trip to the Netherlands, and a few day of very harmonious fellowship with the "synodicals", boldly declares that all elders in the Christian Reformed Church(es) that refuse to believe in "presumptive regeneration" be deposed from office!

But the brethren "synodicals" in the old country have a different problem on their hands.

They must show that the "Liberated" have no ground for their "act of liberation." Now, these "liberated" constantly and incessantly accuse the "synodicals" that they adopted the theory of "presumptive regeneration," and that they left no room in their Churches for anyone that cannot subscribe to this doctrine. Hence, they, the "synodicals" deny the truth of this allegation. Nothing was changed, say they. There is just as much room in their Churches for those that must have nothing of "presumptive regeneration" as ever. And in this connection, the Rev. Popma writes:

De leer der onderstelde wedergeboorte is noch in 1905 noch in 1942 te vinden."

That is: "The doctrine of presumptive regeneration is to be found neither in 1905 nor in 1942."

And the Rev. C. Houtman, who quotes the Rev. Popma in the "Rijnlandsche Kerkbode," has this to add:

Daarom, de conclusie kan na de verklaring van 1946 dubbel onderstreept worden: *De leer der onderstelde wedergeboorte is op geen enkele manier tot kerkleer verheven en niemand is daaraan gebonden.* Voor de tweeërlei opvattingen, die elkaar in 1905 gevonden hebben, is nog alle plaats."

That is: "Therefore, after the declaration of 1946, the conclusion may be doubly underscored: *The doctrine of presumptive regeneration is in no wise elevated to a church-dogma, and no one is bound by it.* For the two views that found each other in 1905 there still is plenty of room."

Now, what is wrong?

Basing his reply to a question on the Conclusions of Utrecht, 1905, and on the declaration of Utrecht 1942, the Rev. Monsma declares: "No one that denies the doctrine of presumptive regeneration can serve as elder in the Christian Reformed Church(es)."

Taking their stand on the same ecclesiastical declarations, the brethren "synodicals" in the old country insist: "The doctrine of presumptive regeneration was never elevated to a church-dogma; it is binding upon no one."

It is evident, then, that there is still considerable confusion about the real meaning of Conclusion IV, Utrecht, 1905, about the declarations of Utrecht 1942 and 1946, and about the meaning of the term "presumptive regeneration."

And I would suggest that, before the Rev. Monsma issues his bulls of deposition and of excommunication (for one that, on account of false doctrine, cannot serve as elder, can neither be member), and thus causes more schism in the Church than was already caused, he define his terms clearly, so that every one (himself included) may understand just what he is talking about.

That would be salutary to the Church.

H. H.

Yes, Something More Concrete, Please!

At the close of an article in *Concordia* Nov. 28, 1946, defending Ladies Aid Sales, Mr. G. Ten Elshof dropped a remark that should not pass unchallenged. I quote: "Perhaps if the brother would make an exhaustive study of the reasons why our various church expenses are continually rising and who are doing this and why, and that at 'company expense', we shall have something more concrete to discuss."

This remark has nothing to do, of course, with the debate about the sales conducted by our Ladies Aid Societies. It is not my purpose to become a party in that debate. Nor is this necessary. The arguments raised against such sales in the debate will not prevent our ladies to continue, with a free conscience, to devote their time and efforts to the support of various causes such as the Standard Bearer, Christian Schools, our own School, and the like. Only, instead of being compared to the money changers in the temple, our ladies deserve a word of commendation and encouragement.

But the remark at the close of the article by Mr. Ten Elshof must not pass unnoticed. Perhaps, it will be challenged in *Concordia*, but up to the present I have not noticed any reflection on this remark.

In the brief paragraph we quoted above, the brother makes some very evil suggestions and insinuations, and, by implication, is flinging serious accusations against some parties in our churches, and against our churches in general as a denomination. Concerning these insinuations as such, I would say:

1. If there is any truth in them at all, the brother should have brought his objections and indictments to the proper ecclesiastical gathering rather than shout them from the housetops in *Concordia*.

2. If the brother, nevertheless, considered it more proper to publish his indictments to the world, he should have clearly stated them, rather than move about in the foul air of dark insinuations.

3. If they are not true, and the brother cannot substantiate them, he should openly retract them, and confess his wrong.

Let him, therefore, answer his own questions:

1. Are our church expenses continually rising at a rate disproportionate to the rise in the general cost of living, and of wages, and to the need of our churches?

2. Who are doing this except the proper parties?

3. Why are they doing this, if not for the well-being of our churches, and for the cause of God's kingdom?

4. Are they doing this "at company's expense," i.e., without proper authorization from the company itself?

Is not the company itself doing this, quite according to the incorporation laws of this company to which also brother Ten Elshof subscribes, that is, the Church Order?

Indeed, we must have something more concrete to discuss!

H. H.

Correspondentie Met Nederland

Dr. Schilder heeft ons artikeltje over "Smoke Screens" in "De Reformatie" opgenomen. En hij teekent daarbij het volgende aan:

We hopen ds. Doekes over dezen brief het antwoord te geven. Wegens zooeven genoemden hinder heeft ds. Doekes nog niets gelezen van Rev. Hoeksema's briefje. Voor ons zelf volstaan we thans met volgende korte opmerkingen:

1. Dat Rev. Hoeksema met ons wars is van het leggen van rookgordijnen, is; ik weet zeker bij ds. Doekes, en ook bij mij, buiten discussie.

2. Dat we ook in Amerika worden aangezien voor remonstrantsch (een insinuatie, die voor rekening ligt van een verlegen en nu in laster zich vergetende synodalistische clan) is een feit; ook uit den naasten kring van Rev. Hoeksema is me dat door een besten vriend zoowel van hem als van mijzelf zwart op wit geschreven, als ook zijn meening.

3. Rev. Hoeksema zou op de vragen der synode van 1944, aan mij gesteld, evenzeer als ik NEEN geantwoord hebben. Want a) hij verfoeit haar „kerkrecht”; b) hij bestrijdt in zijn "De Geloovigen en hun zaad" de formule van 1905-1942; en de vraag der synode was, of ik beloofde NIETS te leeren dat NIET TEN VOLLE in overeenstemming was met die formule. Zoo dwaas en dom of-gemeen om op DIE vraag „ja" te zeggen, zou Rev. Hoeksema evenmin als ik geweest zijn.

4. DAT is in geding. Niets anders. Wij hebben als kerken geen eigen verbondstheorie, geen eigen sacramentstheorie, geen eigen kerktheorie. Alleen de 3 formulieren. Ieder kan bij ons Heyns of Bouma of Hoeksema of Greijdanus of Schilder of bepaalde punten bijvallen en op andere afvallen.

5. Natuurlijk zullen we graag onzen vriend

Hoeksema het woord geven en beantwoorden. We zien in zijn blad een Christelijk protest tegen de andere amerikaansche organen, die zich zonder verstand hebben verkocht aan de V. U.-clan. Tot later dus.

K. S.

Waarbij ik weer het volgende opmerk:

1. 'k Geloof gaarne, dat Dr. Schilder mij met hemzelf wars van rookgordijnen houdt. Buiten discussie is dit echter niet heelemaal, daar immers ds. Doekes mij juist "smoke screens" liet werpen over Gods beloften. Ik zie uit naar zijn antwoord.

2. Dat men hier in Amerika, in de Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken, de "vrijgemaakten" voor Remonstrantsch aanziet, geloof ik nog niet. Doen ze het wel, dan moet dat niet al te ernstig opgevat worden. Het is wel waar, dat men Heyns hier nu officieel heeft veroordeeld, *post mortem*, en zonder dat er ook maar iemand een lans brak voor den professor zaliger, die zich niet meer verdedigen kan; en dat men zomaar de "onderstelde wedergeboorte" als de officieele kerkleer in de kerkelijke bladen heeft geproclameerd. Maar, ach, amice Schilder, wat beteekent dat nu anders dan dat men zich haast om aan zekere zusterlijke obligaties te voldoen? Trek U daarvan dus niet al te veel aan.

Wat ons betreft, ik bedoel, de Protestantsche Gereformeerden, ofschoon ook wij er geen officieel aangenomen verbondsbeschouwing op na houden, dat dit ons als "gangbare meening" geldt, dat de beschouwing van Heyns ons in de Arminiaansche richting voert, is ieder bekend. Dat is niet thans onze meening geworden, maar dat is ze al jaren geweest. Dat de "vrijgemaakten" die richting niet op willen, geloof ik gaarne. Dat U, Dr. Schilder, die kant op zou willen, is mij eigenlijk ondenkbaar. Hetzelfde geldt van Dr. Greydanus. Maar dat wij hier in Amerika groote behoefte hebben aan meer licht (en ik schrijf dit nadat ik schier alles gelezen heb, wat in Nederland over deze kwestie is gepubliceerd in den laatsten tijd), dat is ook een feit. Misschien zal mijne discussie met ds. Doekes deze vrucht afwerpen?

3. Zeker, ik spreek het onomwonden uit, ik zou belist geweigerd hebben, om op de vragen der Synode toestemmend te hebben geantwoord. In een keurslijf of dwangbuis van synodale uitspraken kan geen Gereformeerd mensch, laat staan predikant, die elken Zondag moet preeken, leven. Ik betreur het diep, dat de Synode van Amsterdam 1936 de z.g.n. meeningsgeschillen niet aan de vrije discussie heeft overgelaten. Men had destijds Dr. Hepp een flinke tik op de vingers moeten geven, inplaats van officieel op de dingen in te gaan, zonder den kerkelijken weg te bewandelen. En dat de Synode van Sneek-Utrecht zoo het Gereformeerde kerkrecht met voeten kon treden, als ze gedaan heeft, grieft mij nog veel meer.

4. Ik begrijp goed, dat er bij de "vrijgemaakten" geen officieel aangenomen verbondsbeschouwing is. Maar men kan het ons niet kwalijk nemen, dat wij hier toch spreken van de verbondsbeschouwing der "vrijgemaakten", daar immers alles, wat in dit opzicht door hun leiders, in blad en brochure, geschreven werd en nog wordt, in dezelfde richting wijst: de richting van Heyns.

5. Ik zal voorts met het "woord te nemen" wachten tot ds. Doekes mijn artikeltje heeft beantwoord.

H. H.

P.S. Our readers that cannot read Dutch will, please, excuse me, if this time I have no room to translate all the above in English. In the future I hope to do better.

H. H.

THE TRIPLE KNOWLEDGE

An Exposition Of The Heidelberg Catechism

Part Two.

Of Man's Redemption

Lord's Day XXI

6.

The Forgiveness Of Sins (cont.)

In God, this act of mercy, whereby He ordained His Son to be the head of the Church, so that He represented them in the hour of judgment, and might bear their sins and iniquities, is eternal.

For in God's eternal counsel, Christ is the firstborn of every creature, and that, too, as the head of His Church, and as the firstborn from the dead. And, therefore, there is, there eternally is, forgiveness with God, and there is no condemnation, there never was, with God, condemnation for them that are in Christ Jesus, Rom. 8:1. And in Christ, we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins, Col. 1:14. That eternal mercy, that sovereign good pleasure of God, is the ultimate fountain of all the spiritual blessings we have in Christ. For the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ "hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: *According as he hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world*, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the

adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." Eph. 1:3-7.

Without eternal, sovereign election, there is neither atonement nor forgiveness.

Except for this eternal forgiveness in God, there is no remission of sins in time.

In time, this act of mercy, whereby our sins are blotted out, is realized through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The death of Christ is vicarious satisfaction. It is the actual blotting out of our sins, because it is the perfect satisfaction of God's justice. It is the ground of a perfect and everlasting righteousness, because it is the infinitely precious death of the Son of God in the flesh.

His resurrection is God's own seal upon this atoning work of Christ, His declaration that, by His death, sin is blotted out, and perfect righteousness is obtained for all that are in Him.

And this righteousness God imputes to us.

In Him, therefore, we are not guilty sinners, but redeemed and righteous.

And upon this eternal mercy of God, according to which there is and always was forgiveness with God, we lay hold by faith, wrought in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, and through the Word of the gospel. Thus, finally, the Church comes to write with indubitable certainty in her confession, and, in her fellowship, the individual believer takes that confession upon his lips: "I believe the forgiveness of sins".

In the fellowship of the Church, and, therefore, in the communion of saints, the believer lays hold upon this blessing, and makes this confession. This is the connection between the article concerning the Church and that concerning the forgiveness of sins.

Outside of the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, there are no spiritual benefits, the forgiveness of sins cannot be appropriated. If, for some reason, the believer severs himself, as far as his conscious life is concerned, from that communion, the first effect of this error is always that he lacks the joy of forgiveness. Perhaps, for a time, he lives in hatred over against some of the brethren; or he evinces an unforgiving spirit; or he seeks the friendship of the world; or he lives in whatever other sin may sever his fellowship with the saints, and disturb the exercise of the communion of saints: in that state of separation from the body of believers, he forfeits the forgiveness of sins.

The truth of this is strongly emphasized in the Bible.

For "this is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." John 1:5-7. This implies, evidently, that outside of the sphere of that light, and of that fellowship with one another, the blood of Christ does not function in its cleansing efficacy, and that, apart from that communion, we cannot have the forgiveness of sins.

The Lord teaches us to pray: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." The two parts of this petition are inseparably connected. You cannot pray for the one, without being able to state the other before the face of God.

In answer to a question by Peter, inquiring as to the limit of the obligation to forgive the brother that sins against us, and suggesting that seven times might be considered sufficient, the Lord spoke the well-known parable of the unmerciful servant, to impress on His disciples the fact that, as soon as they ceased forgiving one another, they must needs forfeit the blessing of forgiveness for themselves.

The unmerciful servant in that parable dare not be interpreted as representing the ungodly, who never seek and receive forgiveness of sins, for his debt was once cancelled: his lord forgive him all. Besides, the Saviour is not addressing the ungodly, but Peter, the disciples, the people of God. Rather, therefore, must we explain this unmerciful servant as a picture of the unforgiving child of God. Now, notice that this servant broke the tie of fellowship with his brother, his fellow-servant, severed himself from the communion of saints. For his fellow servant humbly implores his mercy, and he refuses, and remains adamant. The result is that he forfeits the blessing of forgiveness. The meaning cannot be that, objectively, the child of God loses the righteousness which he has in Christ, and which God once imputed to him, for there is no falling away from grace. But the parable certainly teaches that, for his own consciousness, the child of God that refuses to forgive the brother, and who, therefore, lives outside of the sphere of the communion of saints, is shut up in the prison of his own condemnation as long as he lives in that unforgiving state of mind. And it is to His disciples, and to the people of God in general, that the Lord addresses the closing words of this parable: "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." Matt. 18:21-35.

"I believe an holy catholic church; I believe the communion of saints." In the line of that faith, the believer can continue his confession, and say: "I believe the forgiveness of sins."

Nor is it difficult to understand why this relation between our living in the communion of saints and in the joy of forgiveness exists, and is so inseparable that the one cannot be enjoyed without the other.

It is never in our own power to lay hold on the forgiveness of sins. That we are sorry for sin, repent, seek forgiveness, and obtain it, is the work of Christ Himself. By His Spirit and grace He works the true sorrow after God in our hearts. By that Spirit, He brings us to repentance, leads us to the cross, and assures us of redemption, even the forgiveness of sins in His blood. But that Spirit, on Whose constant indwelling and operation our appropriation of the forgiveness of sins continuously depends, is the Spirit of Christ, and, therefore, the Spirit of the body, that is, the Church. For there is one Lord, and one Spirit, and that one Spirit dwells in the one body. He does not dwell in you or in me, individually, apart from the body, but in the body as a whole, and, in the individual believers, only in fellowship with the body. Hence, outside of that body, the Spirit does not operate to bestow the blessings of salvation upon men. If, therefore, through some sin, the believer separates himself from the body, and does not live in the communion of saints, he immediately forfeits the forgiveness of sins.

And as he loses the forgiveness of sins, he necessarily forfeits all the blessings and joy of salvation, for the remission of sin, as we have seen, is basic for all other benefits in Christ.

The article concerning the forgiveness of sins, therefore, occupies a most proper place in the *Apostolicum*.

By its very position, we are exhorted to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace!

Lord's Day XXII.

Q. 57. What comfort doth the resurrection of the body afford thee?

A. That not only my soul after this life shall immediately be taken up to Christ its head; but also that this my body, shall be reunited with my soul, and made like unto the glorious body of Christ.

Q. 58. What comfort takest thou from the article of life everlasting?

A. That since I now feel in my heart the beginning of eternal joy, after this life, I shall inherit perfect salvation, which eye hath not seen, nor ear

heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, to praise God therein forever.

1.

Our House In Heaven.

But for the one exception that, in the answer to question fifty eight, "possess" is a more literal translation of the original (*besitzen*) than "inherit", the English version is quite correct here.

In this Lord's Day the Catechism explains the last two articles of the Apostolic Confession. But it adds a third subject, of which the Confession does not speak, that of the intermediate glory which, immediately after death, and before the final resurrection, the believer hopes to enjoy with Christ. Of this, therefore, we must treat first.

It may be admitted from the outset that the Word of God reveals comparatively little about the state of the soul immediately after physical or temporal death. Far more it speaks of the *parousia*, of the final advent of our Lord, and of the glory that shall be revealed in the day of Christ. Rather than direct our expectation to the glory of the soul before the resurrection, it fixes our hope upon the perfected kingdom of heaven, and the final resurrection through which we shall enter into it. And this need not surprise us. For the fulfillment of the promise of God must wait until the day of Christ. In comparison with that final salvation that shall be revealed in the *parousia*, the glory the believer hopes to enter "when the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved, is very partial and imperfect. Incomplete this glory must be, first of all, because when, as the Catechism expresses it, "my soul after this life shall immediately be taken up to Christ its head," my body is still in "hades" and delivered over to corruption. Yet, that body is an essential part of man's nature as he was originally created, and until it, too, is glorified, my salvation and glory is not complete. Moreover, to the perfect salvation of the saints, the fulness of the body of Christ is paramount. Not until the last of the elect shall have been saved can the blessedness of individual believers be full and complete. And, finally, to the perfect salvation of the saints belongs, too, that the fashion of this present world passes away, and that the promised new heaven and the new earth, in which righteousness shall dwell, be created. But all this must wait until the coming of the Lord. It is but natural, then, that the Bible directs the longing eyes of those that are saved in hope to that final day, and to the eternal state of glory that will be ushered in by the coming of our Lord, rather than to the intermediate state of the soul before the resurrection.

It is, perhaps, not superfluous to call attention to this fact.

For we often do the very opposite.

Even if, in a vague and indefinite manner, we do not speak of the "immortality of the soul," rather than of the resurrection of the dead, at the graves of our dear ones our thoughts are often concentrated upon the "soul of the departed" rather than upon the coming of the Lord, and final salvation.

And this is, in the light of Scripture, the wrong attitude to assume.

For the Bible, almost uniformly, directs our hope to the final and perfect fulfillment of all the promises of God, the day for which all the saints that have gone before earnestly longed in all their tribulation, and for the glory of which they were willing to be strangers and sojourners in the world.

However, this does not alter the fact that Scripture is sufficiently clear in its teaching concerning the intermediate state of the soul to support the statement of the Catechism that the soul of the believer shall, immediately after death, be taken up to Christ its head.

As might be expected, this revelation is clearer in the New Testament than in the Old. In fact, there can be no doubt that the hope of the old dispensational saints, with a view to *Sheol* or *Hades*, the state of the dead, was less bright than that of the believers of the new dispensation.

The explanation of this fact must not be found in the alleged fact that the Old Testament itself fastens the hope of the saints upon earthly, rather than upon heavenly things, upon a long life on the earth rather than upon the future glory, as Dr. H. Bavinck would teach us. (*Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, IV, 660 ff.) Writes he (I translate): "Wholly in harmony with the dispensation of the covenant of grace of that time, and with the election of Israel to be the people of God, the Old Testament presents the connection between the fear of God and life in such a way, that the former receives its reward in a long life on the earth. For this reason, the expectation of pious Israel was directed almost exclusively toward the earthly future of the nation, and the realization of the kingdom of God. Not until, after the captivity, Israel becomes a religious congregation, and religion becomes a matter of the individual, the question concerning the future lot of each individual is pressed. The spiritual antithesis, woven into the natural by revelation, worked through; the distinction between the righteous and the unrighteous more and more replaced that of Israel and the nations, and was extended to yonder side of the grave."

To this explanation we present the following objections: 1. The distinction which the Old Testament throughout draws is certainly not limited to that between Israel and the nations, but is, on the contrary, very sharply applied, as a distinction between the righteous and the unrighteous, to the nation of Israel

itself. That this is true anyone that is at all acquainted with the contents of the Old Testament, well knows. Think of the dreadful distinction that is made between the godly and the ungodly in the nation as it is led out of Egypt, in the majority of whom God had no pleasure, and who were struck down in the wilderness. Think of the sharp antithesis that is drawn in the book of the Psalms, and in the Proverbs, not to speak of all the prophets, between them that fear God and them that fear Him not. It is true, God separated the nation of Israel from all other nations to be His peculiar people, but throughout its history He makes it very plain that "all is not Israel that is of Israel." In fact, it was especially after the captivity that the Jews began to boast of their national preference and privileges, and that the spiritual-ethical distinction between the godly and the ungodly was relegated to the background. 2. It is a fact that exactly at the time of Jesus' public ministry, after the captivity, the expectation of the Jews was fixed upon an earthly kingdom, and upon earthly glory, rather than upon the heavenly city. 3. Throughout the old dispensation, there was in the hearts of the saints an expectation of heavenly things. This is especially plain if the Old Testament is read in the light of the New. The people of God in the old dispensation do not have their part in this life, are strangers in the earth, are often oppressed and persecuted by the ungodly, but seek the heavenly city, and hope for the recompence of the reward in Christ, considering His reproach greater riches than all the treasures of the world. Cf. Heb. 11. And Enoch was translated that he should not see death. Gen. 5:24; Heb. 11:5. It is true that in *Sheol*, which represents the cessation of all earthly life and light, no one praises the Lord: Ps. 6:6; 30:10; 88:11; but the psalmist rejoices, nevertheless, that the Lord will not leave his soul in hell, nor suffer His holy one to see corruption; but will show him the pathway of life, and lead him into His own presence, where there is fulness of joy, and where there are pleasures for evermore. Ps. 16:9, 10. In Ps. 17, the author speaks of the men of this world, that have their portion in this life; but his own portion is quite different, for he lives in the hope that he will see God's face in righteousness, and he shall be satisfied, when he awakes, with God's likeness. vss. 14, 15. And the same note is struck in the seventy third psalm. The prosperity of the wicked is but means in God's hand, whereby He sets them on slippery places, so that they hasten headlong into destruction. But the poet's portion is in God, Who shall guide him with his counsel, and afterward receive him in glory. vss. 17-28.

Not on earthly glory, or a long earthly life, but on the heavenly city, the expectation of the old dispensational saints was fixed.

H. H.

THROUGH THE AGES

The Healing of The Papal Schism

As we stated, though the papal schism was a scandal, churchmen were at a loss how to end it. For the view had embedded itself in men's souls that there was no power on earth to which the papacy was responsible. But there were individuals who openly declared that under Christ the supreme judicial power in the church is not the pope but the believers as assembled in a general council and who therefore urged that a general council be called for the healing of the schism. The idea of a general council made speedy and many converts; and finally, in 1408, the cardinals of both popes—Gregory XII, the last pope of the Roman line, and Benedict XIII—were prevailed upon to issue a call for such an assembly in Pisa. There it met, as we have seen, in 1409. It tried the popes in their absence and the sentence pronounced was to the effect that both were "notorious schismatics, promoters of schism, and notorious heretics, errant from the faith, and guilty of the notorious and enormous crimes of purgery and violated oaths." The cardinals, as instructed by the council, now elected Peter Philarges, archbishop of Milan, who assumed the name of Alexander V. But, as we saw, Gregory and Benedict refused to yield their authority, so that there were now three popes each with a following among the nations of Europe. Rome, Naples and many sections of Germany adhered to Gregory XII, who sat in Rome; Spain, Portugal and Scotland supported Benedict XIII; Alexander V was acknowledged by England and France.

A year after his election in 1409, Alexander V died, and the cardinals chose Bathazar Cossa, who assumed the name John XXIII. So there were again three popes. John XXIII was of noble birth. Having begun his career as a pirate, he studied at Bologna, where he was graduated in law. Boniface IX made him a cardinal. If he was the youngest and most able of the three popes, he was also the most detestable, being sunk in guilt and lowest debauchery. But the deeply depraved clergy felt no repugnance at his election. Cardinal, Peter d' Ailly, said openly that the church had become so corrupt that a good pope would be out of his element, and that she could only be ruled by unbelievers.

Under the three popes the scandal over the schism grew more and more unbearable. The best men violently protested against the denunciation of one pope against another and the division of the Roman patriarchate between rival claimants. It is unquestionably true that nothing did so much as the schism to

prepare the way for the abandonment of the papacy in the sixteenth century.

In 1410, Sigismund, king of Hungary and Bohemia and the son of Charles IV, king of France and the last of the direct Capetian line, was elected emperor of Germany (Holy Roman Empire). He was proud and arrogant. In the electoral assembly he voted for himself, with these words, "There is no prince in the empire whom I know better than myself. No one surpasses me in power, or in the art of governing, whether in prosperity or adversity. I, therefore, as elector of Brandenburg, give Sigismund, king of Hungary, my vote, and herewith elect myself emperor." Besides, he was immoral and deceitful, and he had little sense of justice and honor. Yet he was zealous for the church and state and on him men fastened their hopes for healing the schism. What was wanted is a new Council called by the emperor with the consent of one or more of the popes. The emperor called the council to meet in Constance on November 1, 1414. To the call pope John XXIII, who had been driven from Rome and thrown into the emperor's hands, affixed his seal.

The council lasted four years. It was the most august, brilliant and largest assembly of the middle ages. It included all the temporal and spiritual powers of Europe. They were present either in person or by their representatives. The temporal powers present in person were the emperor, almost all the electors, the great vassals of the empire, the members of the nobility, the ambassadors of all the Catholic sovereigns, even those of Greece and Russia. The spiritual dignitaries consisted of three patriarchs, thirty three cardinals, forty seven archbishops, one hundred and forty five bishops, one hundred and forty five abbots (heads of monasteries), eighteen hundred priests, seven hundred and fifty doctors, and a crowd of monks. The popes Gregory and Benedict sent their legates. John XXIII appeared in person. The council was formed of the following nations: the Spaniards; the Germans, including the Danes, Swedes, Norwegians, Poles, Hungarians; the Italians, French and, English.

Constance was a city of 5500 people. Its location, its fields and vineyards were beautiful "even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt." Its climate was healthful and its municipal laws were just for the strangers, the reports of whose number vary from 50,000 to 100,000, including, besides the temporal and spiritual rulers already mentioned, bakers, beadles, to walk before dignitaries, grooms, scribes, goldsmiths, merchantmen of every kind, and 171 doctors of medicine, 1500 knights, 142 writers of bulls, 1700 buglers and fiddlers and players on other musical instruments. The number also included 700 harlots. And they practiced their illicit trade openly or in rented houses. Huss wrote, "The council is a scene of foulness, for it

is a common saying among the Swiss that a generation will not suffice to cleanse Constance from the sins which the council has committed in this city." There were fairs, dances, and shows in the streets. Yet no one was allowed to be out after curfew. The city council put a ceiling on prices of all victuals.

Sigismund and John XXIII were the principals of the notables present. The emperor was praised without measure. He was likened to David and Daniel of the Scriptures. He was pleasure-mad, was much in the company of women, and was always short on money, but he was a sworn enemy of heretics. His queen Barbara, the daughter of a count, was there, too, a tall and fair woman with a questionable reputation.

The lay rulers, representing the people, demanded reform of the internal abuses of the church. But the clergy, the spiritual lords, who ruled the council, were solely bent on putting an end to the scandal of the papal schism, and upon restoring the external dignity of the church. The two main subjects of discussion were the healing of the schism and church reform. The deliberations were unhurried, for in that age men had leisure. In February the first notable decision was made to the effect that the voting be by "nations", by Spanish, English, German, French, and Italian, and that each nation have one vote. The purpose was to neutralize the vote of the eighty Italian bishops and doctors, who were supporting John XXIII. Each nation met in separate places. On the sessions of the council, what was decided by the vote of the majority of nations was binding. It became evident to John XXIII, who hoped to secure the endorsement of the council, that the scheme was the removal of all three popes. He therefore tried to bring the council to a sudden close by flight. Dressed as a groom, he left the city at noon on a "little horse" during the progress of festivities of a tournament, purposely instituted by Frederick, duke of Austria, whom John had vested with the office of commander of the papal troops on a yearly salary of 6000 gulden. The pope was overtaken and brought to Luis III, of the Palatinate, for safe-keeping. The council ruled to excommunicate any of the delegates who left Constance before the end of the proceedings. On April 6, 1415, it made a momentous statement. The council declared that as "representing the Catholic Church militant, it has its authority immediately from Christ, and that to it the pope and everyone owed obedience in things pertaining to faith and the reformation of the church of God." Essentially identical ideas were expressed by Nieham in a tract that bore the title, "The Union of the Church and its Reformation". The church as headed by Christ is infallible, but the pope and the hierarchy may err. An unworthy pope may be deposed. It is folly to say that he has power in heaven and on earth to bind and to loose

from sin, he being a mere man. As for the council, the pope must submit to it.

Having affirmed its jurisdiction over the pope, the council tried John XXIII. He was charged with many crimes such as unchastity, lying, disobedience to parents in his youth, simony, adultery, sodomy, and other crimes. He was accused of often having denied the resurrection of the dead. On May 29 the council deposed him. In 1419 he was appointed cardinal bishop by Martin V, but died six months thereafter. On July 4, 1415, Gregory XII resigned. One pope remained, Benedict XIII. On December 13 of the same year he was declared deposed by his own cardinals. Nevertheless he continued to assert himself till death as the only legitimate pope. But he was deserted by Scotland and Spain, who had supported him, and on July 26, 1417, he was formally deposed by the council. On November of the same year, the cardinals elected Otto Colonna, who took the name of Martin V. The church was again united under one pope. G. M. O.

Questions on Church Polity

The brother in Sioux Center, Iowa, is addicted to the view that the task of deposing a minister of the Gospel who has committed a gross sin is that of the Classis and not of the Consistory; and he says that he has Dr. Bouwman and Joh. Jansen—two Netherland authorities on Reformed Church Polity—on his side. Before we determine just what is the teaching of these two Netherlanders on the matter in question, it is well that we be very clear on the point at issue.

The issue is not whether the Classis may advise the consistory to depose that minister. It may. For it has this right.

The issue is not whether, in the event the Consistory refuses to adopt and execute the Classical advice, the Classis may sever the denominational tie between it and that Consistory and its flock. It may. That is its right.

The issue is not whether a Consistory may depose its minister without the advice of Classis. It may not. The Church Order forbids this. The issue is not whether the Consistory is obliged to adopt and execute the advice of Classis that it depose its minister if the advice cannot be proved to conflict with the Word of God and with the articles of the Church Order of Dort. If this cannot be proved, the advice must be adopted and executed.

What then is the issue? It is this: In the event the Consistory refuses to take action, may the

Classis then pass sentence of deposition on that minister and thereby divest him of his office?

The brother wrote me that in my previous answers to his questions I failed to see the point and that therefore to quote him "begint u er maar wat om heen te draaien. Neen U moet hier eens klare wijn schenken," he wrote me. I did so. I do so now in this article. I have clearly stated just what is and is not the issue. Let us now turn to the teachings of Dr. Bouwman. I quote him,

"De meerdere vergaderingen hebben dus niet een zelfstandige, eigen kerkrechtelijke macht. Alle kerkrechtelijke macht, door Christus aan zijn kerk gegeven, schuilt in de plaatselijke kerk. De sleutelen des hemelrijks, door Christus aan de apostelen gegeven, en in hen aan de gemeente, werden, toen de apostelen terugtraden, uitgeoefend door ambtsdragers, die onder hunne leiding in de plaatselijke gemeente werden gekozen. Deze kerkelijk macht bestaat in drie dingen: de macht om het woord en de sacramenten te bedienen, de macht om kerkelijke ambtsdragers te kiezen en de macht om de kerkelijke tucht uit te oefenen. Een ander macht is er in het kerkelijk leven niet. En deze kerkelijke macht komt niet toe aan de meerdere vergaderingen, maar aan de ambtsdragers der plaatselijke kerk." Geref. Kerk., d. II, bladz. 21.

I'll translate this:

"The major assemblies have no independent power of their own. All ecclesiastical power given by Christ to His Church resides in the local church. With the decease of the apostles, the keys of the kingdom of heaven given by Christ to the apostles and in them to the congregation were exercised by the officebearers chosen in the local congregation under the apostle's guidance. This ecclesiastical power consists of three things: the power to administer the word and the sacraments, the power to elect officebearers, and the power to exercise church discipline. Another power there is not in the life of the church. And this threefold power belongs not to the major assemblies but to the officebearers of the local church."

And now this also from the pen of the same author:

"Christus schonk aan de plaatselijke kerk de volledige kerkelijke macht, namelijk de bediening des woords en der sacramenten, de regeersmacht, en de oefening der kerkelijk tucht. Het eerste stuk, de bediening des woords en der sacramenten kan niet worden opgedragen op de Classes en Synoden. . . .

Hetzelfde geldt voor de oefening der tucht. Wel geeft onze kerkenordening in bepaalde geval-

len van tuchtoefening aan de meerdere vergaderingen medezeggenschap. Geen lid mag worden afgesneden zonder advies van de classis. Geen ouderling of diaken mag worden geschorst of afgezet zonder het oordeel der classis, en het advies van de deputaten der particuliere synode, doch ook deze macht oefenen de meerdere vergaderingen niet uit krachtens een bevoegdheid, die haar eigen is, maar omdat deze haar is opgedragen." Geref. Kerk., d. II, bladz. 23.

As translated this reads,

"Christ bestowed upon the local congregation full ecclesiastical power, namely, the ministration of the Word and the Sacraments, government, and the exercise of church discipline. The first of these, the ministration of the Word and the Sacraments, cannot be transferred to Classis and Synod The same is true of the exercise of discipline. In definite cases of discipline, our Church Order does give to the major assemblies co-jurisdiction. No member may be cut off without the advice of the Classis. No Elder or Deacon may be suspended or deposed without the judgment of the neighboring church. No Minister of the Gospel may be deposed without the judgment of the Classis and the advice of the deputies of the particular Synod. But also this power the major assemblies exercise not by virtue of a competency that is their own but that is bestowed upon them (by the churches, he means)."

The essence of the doctrine contained in the above-cited sentences is this: All key-power is concentrated in the Consistory. Hence, the Classis cannot rightfully depose office bearers. The only right that the churches can allow the Classis to have and to exercise is the right to give advice regarding definite cases of discipline submitted to its judgment by the churches. And, of course, Dr. Bouwman would have added, should he have rounded out this doctrine, which he does in another part of his work, the Consistory is in duty bound to adopt and execute the advice of the Classis, if it cannot be proved to conflict with the Word of God and with the articles of Dort's Church Order.

Now this is sound, unadulterated doctrine. And it is the only doctrine that can be gotten out of Dort's Church Order and our Confessions. I proved this in my articles on the Five Fundamental Principles of Reformed Church Polity--articles that also the brother in Sioux Center has read.

Now back to the Geref. Kerkrecht of Dr. Bouwman. On page 663 of the second volume of this work one may read,

"De afzetting van bedienaren des woords mag alleen geschieden door de Classis. In de Neder-

landsche Hervormde Kerk kan alleen het provinciaal kerkbestuur, dat iemand beroepbaar verklaart, iemand uit den dienst zetten. De Gereformeerde kerkregering kent geen hoogere besturen, maar meerdere vergaderingen. En nu is het naar behooren, dat dezelfde vergadering, die oordeelt, of iemand in den dienst des woords kan gesteld worden, ook beoordeelt, of iemand van den dienst moet worden afgezet. . . .

"De Classis doet dit niet, omdat zij is een hooger bestuur, maar volgens het kerkverband. Niet zonder den kerkeraad, maar in verband met den kerkeraad geeft zij de eindbeslissing, en zet, indien zij het noodig oordeelt, een predikant af."

As translated this reads,

"The deposition of Ministers of the Gospel may take place by the Classis only. In the Netherlands 'Hervormde' Church the provincial board of directory alone, as it also declares a person eligible for a call, can depose someone from the office. But Reformed Church polity knows of no higher directories but of broader assemblies. And now it is proper that the same assembly that judges whether someone can be inducted in the ministry of the Word, also judges whether someone must be deposed from the ministry. . . .

"The Classis does this not because it is a higher directory, but according to 'het kerkverband (church connection, denominational tie)'. Not without the Consistory, but in connection with the Consistory does it give final decision, deposes, if it deems this necessary, the minister of the Gospel."

We must attend first of all to the statement that heads this citation, "The deposition of a Minister of the Gospel may take place by the Classis only." Does this statement mean exactly what it says—divesting of the office by Classis—or does it have reference to an action whereby Classis merely advises deposition; and did then the author nevertheless speak of deposition because the advice of Classis in all such cases is final and must be adopted and executed by the Consistory, unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God and with the articles of Dordt's Church Order? What favors the latter interpretation of the statement in question is that it is difficult to conceive of the author declaring in one part of his work that the churches cannot possibly transfer the right of deposition of office bearers to the Classis and in another part of his work and just as emphatically that the actual deposition of office bearers, divesting them of their office by an official declaration to that effect, can take place by the Classis only. On the other hand, if the author did not want the statement in question to mean what it says, why did he use it? What is more, his entire

reasoning seems to compel the conclusion that what he had reference to is actual deposition of office bearers by the Classis and not an action whereby Classis advises deposition by the local congregation through its Consistory. For his reasoning in the above-cited excerpts is this: In the Netherlands "Hervormde" church the provincial board of directory deposes the Minister of the Gospel (and the point is that it actually does, G.M.O.); our Classis does likewise not however because of its being a higher board of directory but by virtue of "het Kerkverband". This is indeed the reasoning of the author; and it makes it difficult to believe that he did not have in mind actual deposition of the Minister by the Classis.

The difficulty is increased by the appearance of this view, be it in a less radical form, elsewhere in Dr. Bouwman's "Geref. Kerkrecht". I quote,

"En zooals wij vroeger reeds hebben aange-toond, is het naar de orde, dat de synode wel een beslissing kan nemen om iemand te excommuniceren, maar zij draagt in den regel de uitvoering van het besluit op aan de plaatselijke kerk, die dan naar den regel door de kerkenordening gesteld handelt. Alleen in zeer bijzondere gevallen, wanneer de kerkeraad der betrokkene kerk zich verzet en weigert het besluit der synode uit te voeren, kan de synode zelve tot de uitvoering harer besluiten overgaan. Dit is ook het gevoelen van Voetius. Op de vraag: 'of aan een synode of een Classis de macht van excommunicatie toekomt?' geeft hij dit antwoord: 'Ja, in geval een plaatselijke kerk en haar kerkeraad slecht bestuurd wordt, en in geval van hooger beroep op de synode, of in geval die zaak op de classis of op de synode wordt overgebracht.' And now Dr. Bouwman again, "Wanneer dus een kerkeraad of een groot deel des kerkerads weigert de beslissing van een synode te erkennen en zich daartegen verzet, dan heeft de synode het recht aan den kerkeraad, indien hij in het kerkverband blijft, de uitoefening van het ambt te ontnemen. Alle kerken, en ook de betrokken kerk, hebben haar tuchtmacht in een bepaald geval gebracht in handen van de synode, en daarom kan de synode in het bepaalde geval niet alleen uitspraak doen, maar ook zorgen dat het besluit wordt uitgevoerd. Dit volgt uit het karakter der meerdere vergaderingen. . . . Dat de synode het recht van afzetting bezit, spreekt ook Petrus van Maastricht, hoogleeraar te Utrecht, uit. . . ." Bouwman, Geref. Kerkrecht, D. 11, Bladz. 7, 23, 25, 73.

Now the translation,

"As we have previously shown, it is according to order that Synod make a decision to excommunicate someone, but as a rule it charges the

Consistory to execute the decision, and the Consistory does so according to the rules laid down by the Church Order. Only in exceptional cases, when the Consistory of the church involved rebels and refuses to execute the decision of Synod, can Synod itself proceed to execute its decision. This is also the opinion of Veotius. In reply to the question, 'whether a Synod or a Classis is entitled to the right of excommunication,' he gave this answer, 'Yes, in the event a local church and its Consistory are being misruled, and in the event of higher appeal to Synod, and in the event the case is brought to Classis or Synod.' And now Dr. Bouwman again, "When therefore a Consistory or a large part of the Consistory refuses to acknowledge the decision and opposes it, then, if the Consistory continues its connections with the churches the Synod has the right to take from the Consistory the execution of the office. All the churches, and also the church involved, have transferred in a definite instance their key-power in the hands of the Synod and therefore in the particular instance the Synod can decide not only but see to it that the decision is executed as well. This follows from the character of the major assemblies."

The fact of the matter then is this:

1.) In one part of his work Dr. Bouwman teaches that all key-power is concentrated in the Consistory, that this power cannot be transferred from the Consistory to Classis and that accordingly all that the church can allow Classis (Synod) to do is to give advice regarding definite cases of discipline submitted to its judgment by the Classis. This certainly is equivalent to saying that never under no circumstances can Classis (Synod) depose office bearers. (This by the way is the proposition laid down and vigorously defended by the late Dr. Van Lonkyuyzen in a brochure—a proposition that Bouwman just as vigorously opposes and seeks to disprove not with the Church Order and the Confession—this were impossible—but with opinions of writers on Church Polity. (He mentions Van Lonkhuyzen by name).

2.) In another part of his work the doctor (Bouwman) teaches that key-power can be transferred from Consistory to Classis (Synod) and that therefore Classis can depose office bearers in some instances when they refuse to acknowledge and execute classical and synodical decisions.

3.) In still another part of his work the doctor teaches just as emphatically that the right to depose office bearers can never be that of the Consistory but that of the Classis (Synod) only.

Fact is then that we find in that Geref. Kerkrecht of

Dr. Bouwman three diverse teachings and thus three Bouwmans.

1. Bouwman a) teaching: never and under no circumstances can Classis depose a Minister of the Gospel (office bearers).
2. Bouwman b) teaching: Classis can depose a Minister of the Gospel (office bearers) sometimes.
3. Bouwman c) teaching: Classis always deposes a Minister of the Gospel and the Consistory never.

The brother in Sioux Center, Iowa, can quote in support of his view according to which Classis *only* may rightfully depose a minister of the Gospel not Dr. Bouwman a), not strictly speaking Dr. Bouwman b), but only Dr. Bouwman c). In a following article we will examine the grounds on which Dr. Bouwman bases the view according to which Classis deposes office bearers and in particular the Minister of the Gospel.

G. M. O.

THE DAY OF SHADOWS

Saul Commanded

As we have seen, Saul received conclusive evidence of Samuel's prophetic calling. Samuel told Saul that the asses had been found and when. He proved that he knew of Saul's coming. He told all that was in Saul's heart. He predicted what would befall Saul on his way home and in his place of residence. As the source of all this knowledge could be none other than the Lord, the possession of it by Samuel was of greatest significance for Saul. It proved to him Samuel's prophetic calling. It told him that in Samuel, in his commands and instructions, he had to do with none other than Jehovah, Israel's invisible King. Saul, as was stated, had to know this in order that in his rebellions and self-will as king he might be without excuse.

As was also explained, Samuel's three predictions, as fulfilled, were so many signs, the unmistakable speech of which was that Saul had been called of Samuel and therefore of God Himself to the office of theocratic king, and that for the duties of this office he had also been qualified by the Spirit of the Lord that had come upon him. Therefore Samuel could say to Saul, "And it will come to pass, when these signs are come unto thee, do for thee what thy hand will find, for the Lord is with thee." The reference is to the impossible task of delivering God's people from the op-

pressions of their enemies. This task was now Saul's he being king. He must not shrink from the performance of it, for the Lord was with him for the sake of the true Israel but not for the sake of Saul as such.

Saul now received the command that occasioned his first rebellion, "And thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal; and behold I will come down to thee, to offer burnt offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace offerings: seven days shalt thou tarry, till I come to thee, and shew thee what thou shalt do." The question is whether, in addressing this word to Saul, the prophet was commanding him or simply telling him what he would do. Whether we deal here with commands or predictions can be known not from the forms of the Hebrew verbs—the verbs are not imperatives or jussives but perfects—but solely from the obvious meaning of the text and from the context. The same is true of the *shall* sentences of the preceding verses. In saying to Saul, "When thou art departed from me this day, then thou *shalt* find two men by Rachel's sepulchre. . . . Then thou *shalt* go forward from thence, and thou *shalt* come to the plain of Tabor, and there shall meet thee men. . . . And they will salute thee, and give thee two loaves of bread; which thou *shalt* receive of their hands. And thou *shalt* come to the hill of God. . . . and thou *shalt* meet a company of prophets. . . . and thou *shalt* prophecy with them." In directing this word to Saul, the prophet was obviously not commanding but predicting what were to be Saul's doings and experiences on his way home and in his place of residence. Especially the statement "And thou shalt find two men by Rachel's sepulchre," and the statement, "And thou shalt prophecy," are obviously not commands but pure predictions. That in the translation the auxiliary *shall* appears instead of *will* is to be explained by the fact that the Hebrew verbs, setting forth, as they do, infallible prophecies, are, without exception, in the perfect tense. (In English, *will* is used with the first Person, and *shall* with the second Person in expressing strong emphasis or determination on the part of the speaker). As predictions, these *shall* clauses have no little significance. In their fulfillment they formed that much more evidence to Saul of Samuel's prophetic calling. Besides, as fulfilled prophecies, they would demonstrate to the unbelieving Saul that in all his doings and experiences he came forth from the womb of a sovereign providence.

Saul was told that on his way home he would come to the hill of God. It is not revealed why he went up thither. The explanation may be simply that the route homeward led over this hill. But others suggest that he went up thither to pray and to sacrifice in the holy place "after his great experiences of divine favor and goodness". But Saul was reprobated, and therefore experienced no divine favor. This hill of God, where

he, as joined to the prosession of prophets, had prophesied, must have been near the place where he dwelt. for the thing next related is the uncle's asking what Samuel had said to him. As the relative must have known that the lost property had been recovered, his question would seem to indicate that for some reason he wanted to know Samuel's exact words. Saul's disposing of his relative with the short answer, "He said that they were found," must be referred to the fact that Samuel had plainly indicated that, for the time being, he wanted the matter of the kingdom kept a secret. The reason of this secrecy has already been noticed. Saul's natural modesty and his apprehension of his uncle's incredulity and envy may also have had something to do with his reticence. The writer states that "all those signs came to pass that day", and then hastens on to narrate the fulfillment of the third sign only as the most important.

Coming back to verse eight, the context seems to indicate that the first part, "And thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal," is not a command but rather a pure prediction. But the second part, "And, behold, I will come down unto thee to offer burnt offerings. . ." has for Saul the force of a command. For it declares what Samuel will do and what Saul must refrain from doing, to wit, offer burnt offerings and sacrifice sacrifices of peace offerings. The third part, "seven days shalt thou tarry, till I come to thee, and shew thee what thou shalt do," is obviously a command, as also the context plainly indicates.

G. M. O.

SION'S ZANGEN

Den Heere Vroolijk Zingen

(Psalm 95; Tweede Deel)

Eenmaal eerder schreven we over dezen psalm; en zijn toegekomen tot aan het zevende vers. In het eerste gedeelte vonden we een lieflijke sprake. Het ging daar over het vroolijke zingen tot God; over het juichen tot den Rotssteen van Israel's heil. We zagen daar schoone visioenen.

It dit laatste gedeelte zullen we eerst zien de reden voor het jubelen den Heere; om dan eindelijk ons oor te geven aan een ernstige waarschuwing: we zullen ons hart niet verharden, gelijk geschiedde te Massa en te Meriba! Een vreeselijke geschiedenis.

Eerst dan die reden voor de opwekking om den Heere vroolijk te zingen. We vinden haar in het eerste gedeelte van vers zeven: "Want Hij is onze God, en

wij zijn het volk Zijner weide en de schapen Zijner hand!"

Hij is onze God!

Wat zit daar ontzaglijk veel in!

Eerst, er zit bezitting in. God eigent U. Gij zijt een Goddelijke gedachte van eeuwigheid af aan. Of gij Hem vreest, dan wel of ge Hem haat: Hij is Uw God! Hij eigent alle duivelen, alle menschen, engelen, beesten, vogels en visschen. Alles, letterlijk alles, is van God. De diepe plaatsen, de hoogten der bergen zijn Zijne! Daar kunt ge nu eenmaal geen verandering aan toebrengen, al zijt ge nog zoo goddeloos. Ge moogt denken in 't diepste hart: er is geen God! Hij is er toch. Ja, ge denkt die gedachte door middel van Zijn alomtegenwoordige kracht. Juist omdat er een God is die Uw God is kunt ge denken. Was er geen God dan zoudt ge er eenvoudig niet zijn.

Evenwel, de gedachte van bezitting staat hier niet op den voorgrond. Dat blijkt wel uit de volgende clausulen. Daar gaat het over de schaapjes onder Jezus' hoede; met de kruisvlag hoog in top!

Daarom, tweedens, gaat het hier over de liefde Gods waarmede Hij ons liefheeft en eeuwiglijk liefhebben zal. Het bezittelijke voornaamwoord *onze* ziet op de omarming Godes in Zijn verbondsliefde. Hij is onze God. God en de spreker, zinger van dit lied, tezamen met allen die eensgeestes met hem zijn, zijn onlosmakelijk aan elkander verbonden. Dat is de hoofdgedachte van het woordje *onze* in den tekst. Dat zal nader be-
wezen worden. Luistert maar!

"... en wij zijn het volk Zijner weide en de schapen Zijner hand!"

Is het dan ook niet vreeselijk om zich tegen dien God te verharden? Want die laatste gedachte wordt verder uitgewerkt in het slot van dezen psalm.

De weide Gods en de hand Gods, waarin we veilig zijn, eten en drinken; en waardoor wij het aanzijn ontvingen is vervuld in den Heere Jezus Christus. Deze teksten hebben een Nieuw-Testamentische smaak. Zou het daarom zijn, dat Paulus die woorden aanhaalt in Hebreë 3:7-11; en later weer in hoofdstuk 4:7?

Wat een Gode-verheerlijkende leer wordt hier geleerd. Wij zijn het volk Zijner weide. Het woordje *weide* is rijk. Later zullen we hooren, dat Jezus Zijn schaapkens zal weiden gelijk een herder. Jesaja zal daarvan jubelen. En nog later zal Jezus het zelf zeggen: Ik ben de goede Herder.

Het woordje *weide* houdt alles in wat tot vergenoeving, verzadiging en veiligheid van de schapen dienen moet. Alles wat een herder doet voor de kudde schapen wordt uitgedrukt in dit woord *weide*.

Toegepast op het volk, wil het zeker zeggen, dat Uw alles in God gevonden wordt. Ook moogt ge dit *alles* absoluut nemen: het omsluit alle dingen, alle wederwaardigheden die U overkomen en in welks midden oii wandelt. Uw weide is Uw gansche leven. Het

omsluit de invloeden die op U inwerken, vanuit den hemel en vanuit de hel. Paulus heeft deze leer uitgedrukt in de troostrijke woorden, dat "alle dingen werken mede ten goede dengenen die God liefhebben!" Soms staat er op wandteksten: God zorgt voor U! En dat is absoluut en correct. Hij vaart op de wolken ter Uwer hulpe en van anderen zijn altoos de eeuwige armen.

En wij zijn de schapen Zijner hand!

Daar hebt ge dezelfde leer in andere woorden. Ik vraag U: wat blijft er over van den palegiaan? Wie vond het leven in zijn eigen hand? Let er op dat woord *hand*! Alles wat verband houdt met het *schaap-zijn* van Jezus' kudde is product van Gods hand. Hij greep U beet in het diepst van Uw wezen en transformeerde U daar naar het Beeld van Zijn eeuwigen Zoon. Gij moest het Beeld van dien Zoon gelijkvormig worden. Welnu, Hij wederbaarde U en leidde U voorts op het pad der heiligmaking. Hij gaf geloof in den nacht; Hij riep en orgelde in Uw ooren van 't eeuwig welbehagen. Gij geloofde en zag; gij weende en Hij veegde Uw tranen af. Hij begeleidde U op Uw weg van den morgen tot den avond; Hij waakte bij Uw bed in de nachtwaken. Zijn hand nam U op en Hij droeg U en draagt U van moment tot moment. En die hand zal U straks leiden door het doodsdal. O, schapen van de hand Gods, hoe onuitsprekelijk zalig zijt ge!

Verbaast ge U er over, dat David hier gedachte heeft aan het type van die leiding van des Heeren hand? In 't geheel niet, want die typen waren er nog. Maar die typen spraken het luidste toen God Zijn volk bij de hand nam en hen veilig leidde vanuit het diensthuis der zonde tot het Kanaan der ruste. Daar heeft David aan gedacht. Het blijkt duidelijk uit het volgende.

"Heden, zoo gij Zijn stem hoort, verhardt Uw hart niet!" Vreeselijke dingen zullen we nu hooren.

We spreken wel eens van ondankbaarheid onder de menschen. Och arme, wat is er van ondankbaarheid onder ons, dat vergeleken kan worden bij het monster der zonde waarvan hier sprake is?

Laat ons eens zien: God nam Zijn volk bij de hand en al troostrijk sprekende tot hen, leidde Hij hen veilig uit. Hij zag van ver met gramschap aan den trotschen waan van geheel Egypte! Hij plaagde hen en verwoestte hen. Hij vertrapte dat volk om Israel's wille. Hij doodde al hun eerstgeborenen. Hij kliefde de baren van de roode zee. Hij zette hun aangezicht naar Kanaan henen, het land der ruste. Hij zou hun spijzigen met hemelsch brood en zelfs de rotsen zullen water geven. Want Zijn volk moest drinken naar hartelust.

Toen is er iets vreeselijkst gebeurd. Op het bevel des Heeren waren zij toegekomen tot Rafidim. Daar nu was geen water voor het volk. En toch wat zou dat? Zij waren immers te Rafidim op het bevel des Heeren?

Hij zal toch wel voor Zijn Eigen zaak kunnen zorgen? Doch het volk verzocht God en zeide: Is de Heere in het midden van ons of niet? Daar verzochten zij God en verbitterden zich tegen Hem. Daarom noemde Mozes die plaatsen Massa en Meriba. Er was in het geheel geen reden om zoo tegenover God te handelen. Het was eenvoudig een verharden van het hart. In dat hart wisten ze heel goed, dat God in den hemel voor hen gezorgd had en dat Hij de Almachtige was die slechts te spreken heeft en het is er; te gebieden en het staat er. En tegen zulk een God zeiden ze: Zijt Gij of niet? Let wel, ze hadden het werk Gods gezien! Dat was duidelijk genoeg. Daarom is zulk spreken en zulk handelen niet van de vrucht van de verharding des harten.

Dit nu wordt ons voorgehouden tot waarschuwing.

Ge zult mij vragen: is er dan ook kans dat Gods ware volk zich verharden zou? Kunnen de uitverkorenen zich verharden tegen God? Zouden de schapen van Jezus' kudde ooit er aan denken om den Heere te verzoeken en zich tegen Hem te verbitteren? Er staat toch immers van dit volk in de woestijn, dat zij in Zijn rust niet zijn ingegaan? En zegt God niet: Daarom heb Ik gezworen in Mijn toorn: Zoo zij in Mijne rust zullen ingaan!

Hier tegen over zou ik willen zeggen, dat de bolster die Israel altijd omringt, steeds zich tegen God verhardt. Dat is al wat die bolster doen kan. Het vleesch is vijandschap tegen God. Het onderwerpt zich der wille Gods niet, want het kan ook niet. En die bolster bestaat uit drieërlei. Eerst, de kinderen Israels die door God verworpen zijn. Het arme volk, dat nimmer zich bekeert, en ook niet bekeeren kan. Zij zijn puur vleesch en zij kunnen Gode nimmer behagen. Tweedens, de uitverkorenen die nog niet wedergeboren en bekeerd zijn. Die zijn er ook altijd onder Israel. Die verharden zich ook, en behagen alleen zichzelf. En, derdens, het vleesch van Gods Eigen volk. Dat behoort ook tot dien bolster die ten verderve gaat. Naar het vleesch kunnen wij Gode ook niet behagen. Daarom kan een waar kind van God zingen: Wij vergaan door Uwe toorn en door Uwe grimmigheid worden wij verschrikt. God toornt tegen Zijn Eigen volk ook, als zij naar het vleesch wandelen. Nu dan, omdat Gods volk altijd door dien bolster omgeven wordt, worden wij door God gewaarschuwd om ons hart niet te verharden. De puur goddeloozen zien Gods werk, hooren Zijn stem, ontvangen zelfs zekere openbaringen (Rom. 1:19), doch kunnen in antwoord niet anders doen dan zich tegen God verharden en verloren gaan. Doch het ware volk Gods bekeert zich. Als zij zich voor tijd en wijle verharden en daarvoor vermaand worden, zooals in dezen psalm, dan bekeeren zij zich en keeren weder tot den Heere met geweene en berouw.

En wat is daar nu de reden voor? Hoe zit dat? Dat zit zoo, en Paulus zal U het antwoord geven. "Want

ook ons is het Evangelie verkondigd, gelijk als hun; maar het Woord der prediking deed hun geen nut, *dewijl het met het geloof niet gemengd was in degenen die het gehoord hebben!*" Hebr. 4:2. Het gaat daar in Hebreëen over dezelfde historie, dus het is een goed bewijs. De goddeloozen die het Evangelie hooren verharden hun hart en kunnen niet ingaan in de rust Gods, doch het ware volk Gods bekeeren zich, *omdat zij geloof hebben*. En dat het eene volk dat geloof heeft en het andere niet, *dat komt van God*, die het eene volk geloof geeft en het andere niet! Op die harde waarheid hebben de goddeloozen hunne tanden stomp gebeten, maar voor Gods volk is het een ware troost. Als dat volk zijn hardigheid des harten ziet en ervaart, bidden zij: Heere, bekeer mij en ik zal bekeerd zijn. God hoort, en zij worden bekeerd. Want Hij werkt het geloof in hun hart. Zoo krijgt God de eer. Al de eer. Het is niet desgenen die loopt, doch des ontfermenden Gods.

En die anderen?

Luistert naar God: "Veertig jaren heb Ik verdriet gehad aan dit geslacht, en heb gezegd: zij zijn een volk dwalende van hart, en zij kennen Mijne wegen niet!" En dan volgt er: "Daarom heb Ik in Mijn toorn gezworen: Zoo zij in Mijne rust zullen ingaan!" En die laatste uitdrukking beteekent natuurlijk: Zij zullen in Mijn rust niet ingaan!

Kan God verdriet hebben?

Ja, geliefde lezer. Het staat er. Eerder stond er: En het smartte God aan Zijn hart. Dat was in die geschiedenis van Noach. God zag al de goddeloosheid in de wereld vóór den zondvloed en toen berouwde het Hem, dat Hij menschen gemaakt had. En het smartte Hem in Zijn hart.

Maar hoe kan dat? God is toch de Volzalige? Hoe kan een volzalig Wezen smart hebben en verdriet hebben? Strijdt dat niet met de leer van de volmaaktheid Gods?

Wel, geliefde lezer, als gij die woorden eigenlijk zoudt opvatten, dan wel. Doch dat kunnen we niet doen. Ge hebt hier, eerst, een menschvormige openbaring van God. Dat doet God meer. Zoo vindt ge ook veel teksten die spreken van de voeten, de armen, de handen, de oogen en de ooren Gods. Terwijl we weten, dat God die lichaamsdeelen toch niet heeft. Tweedens, hebt ge hier een van die teksten die ons duidelijk leeren, dat God ook dingen en gebeurtenissen van eeuwigheid besloten heeft te scheppen, die Hij haat. Uit de tekst in onzen psalm leeren we hoe God tegenover de goddeloosheid en de goddeloozen staat. Hij wilde het in Zijn raad dat al deze gebeurtenissen er zouden zijn, doch wanneer ze voor Zijn heilig aangezicht staan, dan reageert het Heilige en Heerlijke Wezen tegen al die gruwelen. En, derdens, wordt straks al dat verdriet en al die smart door God straks vertolkt in de hel en in alle helesmart. Vraagt ge mij wat de smart en het verdriet Gods uiteindelijk zijn, dan wijs ik U bevende

en sidderende op de poel die brandt van vuur en sulfer. Dat kunt ge zelf zien in de geschiedenis van de eerste wereld, de wereld van Noach. Eerst lezen we van de smart aan Gods hart. En straks lezen we van de verschrikkelijke stroomen van verdervend water die de gansche toenmalige wereld verzwolg, uit genomen zij met z'n achten in de ark.

Veertig jaar verdriet aan God!

Het einde van dat verdriet is het versmelten der elementen in den dag van Jezus.

Het besluit van den toorn, waarvan deze psalm óók spreekt is de poel waar arme menschen en duivelen zich wentelen in ongekende en vlijmende pijn en smart.

Wacht U! Er is een waarschuwing in voor Gods ware volk. Verhardt U niet! Luistert naar Gods lieflijke stemme. Zegt niet: Is God in ons midden of niet! Ge weet, dat Hij in ons midden is. Hij laat Zich niet onbetuigd. Beoefen het U van God gegeven geloof. Dat geloof, gemengd met het zielsverrukkende Woord des Evangelies, doet ons zingen, zingen!

G. V.

IN HIS FEAR

Searching The Scriptures

A statement is made in the word of God of those in the city of Berea where Paul preached on his second missionary journey which ought also to be said of us. It is stated that they searched the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul claimed the Old Testament Scriptures declared of Christ was really recorded there. When we say that this ought also to be said of us, we do not mean that we must critically listen to the Word of God upon the Sabbath and then daily search to see whether we have not been deceived or whether an attempt has been made to deceive us by a false presentation of the Word of God. We must come to church to be edified, instructed, comforted and admonished and not to look for heresies and false teachings. Rather do we mean when we say that it ought also to be said of us that we search the Scriptures daily that we too have that zeal and interest in the truth that having heard it, we look and turn to the Word of God for a richer and deeper insight.

Little is seen of this today.

Sad to say, yet undeniably true, there is not the interest in the things spiritual that there ought to be. To begin with there is the clamor for shorter and still shorter sermons on the Sabbath. And for many a con-

fessing church member the Bible is left alone all the rest of the week except for a little hasty reading at the table in the evening. In the morning there is not time. We overslept, and the time to be at work is almost here. At noon in the shop or place of work it is dispensed with entirely, and at the evening meal a little time is left and the Bible is opened and read. But then there is no searching of the Scriptures. It is at best, as a rule and there surely are exceptions, superficially read and set aside, as another chore that is finished. Indeed we do not live like the world of Paul's day. We have our fast-moving life. We are far more the victims of time than were the saints in the first century after Christ's birth. In those days there were no clocks to punch. Men had more time to themselves and did not need to search the Scriptures after putting in eight hours of work in the shop. Even as in the days of Abraham and David there was abundant time for quiet meditation in the field while performing their daily work, so to a far greater degree than today the saints in Paul's time could devote hours to such searching of the Scriptures without laying off their job to do so.

However, today it is not simply a case of not having the time and of being swept from this noble activity by time. There is today also that undercurrent of indifference to or at least lessening of interest in the things that are spiritual. The abundant life we live and which the devil uses to that end brings the things of the world so close to us and so easy to grasp that we become filled with them and are loath to let them go in order to search the Scriptures. Our life becomes so full of banquets and programs and what not which we eagerly attend no matter how weary of flesh we may be that every moment that could otherwise be devoted to spiritual things is taken up by things which keep us from personal searching of the Scriptures. Not that banquets and programs themselves are of the devil and that the child of God may not enjoy these. He certainly may. The point we wish to make here is that we are so ready for these things which to a great degree satisfy the flesh rather than the spirit and so ready to find excuse when it comes to searching the Scriptures and being busy with spiritual things. And besides there are so many things which we can find to do instead. What with automobiles and other means of transportation, our radios for entertainment, to mention only two groups of things which are there to attract us away from quiet moments of meditation and searching of the Scriptures, we easily drift along and time for spiritual things is not even sought. Rather do we seek ways and means to avoid it.

To verify the statement that there is a growing indifference and lessening of interest in the searching of the Scriptures we need simply take a look at the

membership and attendance of the societies in our churches which were organized for such searching of the Scriptures. The membership lists are growing smaller and smaller; attendance is becoming poorer and poorer. Some congregations and denominations which formerly had flourishing societies now cannot even boast of a society at all. Large congregations very often have no more members than medium sized and even small congregations. There are exceptions here likewise and local conditions such as a scattered congregation in a region where the weather makes attendance impossible also have to be taken into consideration. But here again the zeal wherewith we seek excuses and grounds for maintaining that we cannot attend is not to be praised. Or let us make it even more to the point. When we are snowbound or prevented by the things God has brought our way (and not by the impossibilities we managed to prepare by our own seeking of the world) what do we do when we cannot attend services for divine worship? Do we sleep the time away or do we then search the Scriptures? For what do we have enthusiasm or lack of enthusiasm in such an instance? Or to approach the matter from a different angle, how much of God's Word would we study if we were not (or are not) a member of Men's Society, Ladies Society or Young People's Society? It may perhaps be said in all safety and without fear of contradiction that for most of us the only searching of the Scriptures that we perform is performed in our society or else in the course of preparing for Society.

Our Societies a Valuable Means to This End.

One of the nicest and most profitable ways to search the Scriptures is just exactly in these Societies. Here again as was the case with the Sunday School, as we have seen, the argument is raised that this is not official instruction in the truth and for that reason it has little value or at least to remain outside its membership and activity is not a serious thing simply because it is unofficial. Yet we would have you consider with us that our societies are of great value and are not to be taken lightly or despised.

When you ask, "What is the value of these societies which are organized for the study of God's Word?" it must be borne in mind that things have value according to their ability to serve us. The value of a thing is not to be determined by the price a man places upon it. Not infrequently do we say that we do not want to purchase a thing at a certain price because it is not worth that much to us. On the other hand, when we need a thing desperately or desire it intensely, we will pay almost any price if we only have the money for it. When your child is in need of a blood transfusion, you do not ask the cost, nor if he needs a costly and rare drug such as penicillin or

the like. The value of these things are way beyond the price man places upon them. Their value lies in their ability to serve us by healing and restoring to health. Similarly the price of a pound of butter today is far greater than it was before the war, but the nutritional value of that butter is the same. It has the same nourishment and food value at forty cents a pound as it has at ninety cents a pound.

When now we ask ourselves what the value is of our societies wherein God's Word is studied, then our answer must be that they serve us in a special way. That special service they render to us is that they serve the increase of our spiritual knowledge. Their value does not lie in the fact that they give us something to do that night, or in the case of the Young People's Societies that they keep them off the streets, the dance floor and the movies. Their value lies in the fact that through them we increase in the knowledge of the truth.

That knowledge in turn serves the strengthening of our faith and the increase of our hope for the realization of all God's promises to us. And in this way it also helps us to grow in the fear of the Lord. As we search the Word of God and behold the marvelous works that He has performed for us in Christ, our faith and confidence in Him as the God of our salvation grows. As we search the Scriptures and behold the unwavering faithfulness of God to His covenant and all His promises to us, by His grace and the work of His Spirit as He blesses that search to our hearts, we grow in the confidence of a complete realization of all these promises in the Day of Christ. And we begin also to look, to long and hope for that day when all shall be realized. The more we search the Scriptures and come in contact with these promises in Christ and we delve a little more deeply into the meaning and significance of these things which are promised, the new man who is heir of all things begins to long and yearn more intensely for the full realization of all that has been promised him.

This all, of course, is not simply due to our searching of the Scriptures. Unless God blesses the search to our hearts we remain spiritually cold to the truth and we harden ourselves against it. But God does bless such efforts on our part. He blesses it to us as well as the preaching of the Word on the Sabbath. Find a text in Scripture if you can that teaches that only the preaching of the Word is blessed to the hearts of God's people. You cannot. Does Jude not exhort the church members to build themselves up in the most holy faith? And what of your reading of God's Word at the table, is it not blessed when properly done? Indeed it is God who blesses it unto our hearts and not simply our work of searching the Scriptures that is the reason why through it we are strengthened in our faith. But the fact also remains that God uses His

Word thus only when it is read and studied. He who attends his society faithfully, studying his lesson carefully does receive a blessing beyond that which he receives in the Ministry of the Word on the Sabbath and beyond that of those who only attend divine services of worship and are not active in such society life.

In the times wherein we are living there is an abundant room, as far as the need is concerned, for searching the Scriptures together in a society organized for this activity. The need is not less great today than it was in Paul's or David's time. The need is greater, for today there is more distortion and false presentation of the truth of God's Word than ever before. It is well for us, even as the church of Berea, that we search diligently the Scriptures that we may not be found embracing the lie or even be inclined to leave the truth as we have it for the lie which we have heard and which appeals to the flesh.

Societies are a wonderful means to this end and serve this end in a very unique and profitable way. This we hope to discuss in a following issue. One misses something important when he ignores temporarily or permanently this means of searching the Scriptures.

J. A. H.

FROM HOLY WRIT

James 1:14-16: — "But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed."

Then, when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

"Do not err, by beloved brethren".

The holiness of God, Who tempteth no man because He Himself cannot be tempted with evil, receiveth all the emphasis in verse 13. This same truth is also the underlying thought in verses 14-16. On the one hand, James declares that every man is tempted, when he is drawn away and enticed of *his own* lust. And, on the other hand, we are told in scripture that sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Sin, because of the holiness of the Lord, invariably produces death. How urgent, therefore, comes to us the admonition: Do not err, my beloved brethren. This also explains the contrast between verses 14-16 and verse 13, expressed by the word "but" which introduces these verses.

Every man is tempted, we read, when he is drawn away and enticed. The meaning of "tempted" in this

text is plain. The implication is not merely that I am in the midst of temptations (verse 2), but also that I experience within me the actual desire to succumb to the forces of sin and evil. James literally declares here that a man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. The translation reads: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. But the original reads: But every man is tempted, by his own lust being drawn away and enticed. It is evident, therefore, that the words "of his own lust", because of their position in the text, received emphasis. And we must remember that James speaks of one's *own* lust. This lust is *man's*, his own, in sharp contrast with what James had stated in verse 13.

A man is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed. The meaning of, the difference between "drawn away" and "enticed" is clear. The two are inseparable. The first word reflects upon the operation of sin as it draws one away from the path of God's covenant. This, we understand, does not necessarily mean that we, to reject God's covenant, must first have been a partaker of it. Sin always rejects the things of God. The second word refers to sin as it embraces the things which are below. A person that is tempted is always drawn away from God's covenant and attracted to the things of sin. The two are inseparable. We must love the one and hate the other, cleave to the one and despise the other.

We must notice that "every man is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed of *his own* lust." These words imply, in the first place, that James views temptation here in its beginning, as a matter of the lust. The word "lust" is a strong word, is derived from a word which means "to breathe violently." The word, therefore, refers to our desire, craving, signifies that we set our heart upon something, long and pant for it. It is therefore by our own lust that we are drawn away and enticed. To fall into temptation is brought about by an inner craving for the same. Secondly, this word of James implies that sin is indeed the fruit of man's own lust. Thus we are tempted. God does not tempt him. The Lord does not tempt because to tempt means to incite unto sin as having a craving for it. Man is tempted, not of God, but of his own lust; the craving for sin is from our own inner passion; and although the Lord sovereignly works all things, also the phenomenon of light and darkness, yet this sovereign operation of God is always such that He sovereignly willed a creature who would experience the passion for sin, to do iniquity for iniquity's sake. Such evil is surely far from Jehovah Who is too pure of eyes to behold iniquity. And so James emphasizes the thought that iniquity remains the object of man's own evil mind and will—he sins because he craves it. Thus it happens that "lust hath conceived". These words

appear in verse 15. Literally we read: Then, lust having conceived. Hence, these words evidently refer to verse 14. The word, translated "conceived" means literally: to seize, take hold. We would interpret this word here in the literal sense of the word. This lust for sin has taken hold of man's inner, personal life. Lust has conceived, *the* lust, we read, i.e., the definite lust to evil, so that instead of his controlling it and overpowering it by almighty grace, it has overpowered him, taken hold of him, become the prompting force in his spiritual life. Some would limit this evil lust merely to the will. However, it is surely impossible to separate the mind and the will. The mind is that faculty of the soul which advises man what to do, the mind evaluates, places man before the things which he must choose and advises him to do either or. The will is that faculty of the soul which decides to follow a certain course of action. This lust here now takes hold of the mind and of the will and of all our desires. The lust having conceived, the way of sin appeals to us, and we are aware of an inner desire to walk therein. And, the lust having taken hold, we also will to seek the things of darkness, and have therefore also decided to walk accordingly. Temptation captivates both, the mind and the will. And iniquity is the object of man's evil lust. God is untemptable. It is of our own lust that we are drawn away and enticed.

This lust, we read, brings forth sin. The word for "sin" in this text means literally "to miss the mark or purpose". This does not imply that we actually aim at the glory of God but miss that mark. Some would thus interpret the activity of the heathens. We read, however, that our lust bringeth forth sin. It is evident, therefore, that we sin, "miss the mark", wilfully, inasmuch as we do so as the object of our lust and desire. Man's purpose is to glorify God; the essence of evil is the wilful refusal of man to serve this purpose. Man wilfully refuses to acknowledge the living God, misses the mark, not as it were by the eyelash, but with all that is in him.

When we read that "lust bringeth forth sin" we must not divorce the one from the other, as if lust in itself were not sin, but merely brings it forth. Roman Catholicism does not regard lust as sin, teaches that we are not held responsible for our inner desires but only when we acquiesce and permit our desires to develop into sinful activity. This is clearly not the meaning of James. The relation between lust and sin is not temporal as if the one follows upon the other temporally, but causal. The lust to sin is surely itself sin. But the holy writer would emphasize the thought that sin is at all times the object of man's own desire—we sin because we lust after it.

We understand that sin reveals itself in various forms. The manifestation of evil among the heathens differs from that among the so-called "civilized". The

one may simply give himself over unreservedly unto iniquity and crime. Another, who also loves sin, desires to remain within the confines of the external law, in order that he may continue uninterruptedly his pursuit of the things of the world. But, whatever form a man's sin may assume, all men by nature walk in paths of sin, hating God and refusing to serve Him, and seeking the things of the world and of darkness.

And we must bear in mind that sin is the fruit of one's own lust. Of course, the Lord is sovereign over all. Sin does not develop apart from Him. This is evident from Romans 1. In fact, the development of man in corruption is the result of the wrath of God revealed down from heaven, whereby the sinner commits things unheard of even in the animal world in order that the utter foolishness of sin may be fully revealed and that he who forsakes the living God heaps up misery for himself in this world and in the world to come. But this development of sin under the wrath of God always occurs through man's own lust. His corrupt heart becomes ever larger. The more he sins the more he craves sin. The more he lives in the world, seeks the things of time, feeds his desire for evil, the more he will walk in paths of evil, the stronger becomes his lust, and the greater his desire and craving for the things of shame and of darkness. And it is our own lust which brings forth sin. This desire is not in God. Man lusts after evil.

"And sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." The meaning of "death" in this text is evident. Verse 12 had spoken of the crown of life, eternal life. Death is eternal death, the death of hell. Besides, do we not read of sin here as "being finished"? Death is principally the separation from God, not in the local sense, but in His covenant-fellowship. Hell will be the ultimate and exclusive manifestation of this horrible reality. The implication is not that God, in this life, loves the sinner somewhat but that in hell He will hate him completely. But hell will be the exclusive manifestation of the eternal and unchangeable wrath of God.

"And sin when it is finished." The word "finished" means originally "to be brought quite to an end." The expression does not mean, on the one hand, that sin will finally reign completely within the sinner. Sin does reign completely within him. I am by nature dead in sins and trespasses. Neither does this expression imply, on the other hand, that I will have performed all sin and evil. The complete manifestation of evil is impossible by one individual. The writer of these words, "And sin when it is finished", refers to the sinner who, ever developing in sin, walks uninterruptedly in the way of iniquity. Grace does not take hold upon him. Dead in sin, as I am by nature, I walk upon the way of iniquity unto the very end, according to my name and place in the midst of the world. Re-

deeming grace alone checks sin, and not only checks it but also conquers it.

This sin, being finished, brings forth death. God is good, loves and seeks and maintains Himself. Consequently, sin must bring forth death. It is true, of course, that God's people oftentimes sin. But it is the reprobate sinner, who, having sought life and peace without God in his life, shall indeed harvest what he has sown. God delighteth not in iniquity. To the contrary, He is terribly angry with the workers of sin. Hence, the wages of sin is death, for sin is the denial of God and God's justice requires the maintenance of Himself.

"Do not err, by beloved brethren." We understand that James here does not refer exclusively to erring in the logical sense. We are not merely warned here to make no mistake, although, of course, this thought is not wholly excluded. But the primary meaning is that we must not err spiritually. We must not wander spiritually, go astray, walk in darkness, walk uninterruptedly in sin. To the contrary, we must put off the old man and put on the new. And the basis for the admonition is expressed in the words, "beloved brethren." We are brethren, among one another, and the people of the living God. Hence, let us walk as such.

H. V.

PERISCOPE

Reformed!! ??

In *The Banner* of January 17, 1947, official organ of the Christian Reformed Churches, the Rev. J. M. Ghysels, in his "Meditation" department, writes as follows:

"Once I read of a rich man whose wife died, and not long afterwards their only child, a little boy, followed the mother to the grave. The father never recovered from the shock of the double bereavement. After his death search was made for a will, but none could be found. At the sale of the household furniture, a maid, who had worked for the family, was present for the purpose of buying a portrait of the little boy, which had been hanging all the time on the wall. She had dearly loved the child when alive, and now desired to have his picture. It was sold to her where it hung, and when a little later it was taken down, the will was found fastened to the back of it, and when read it was discovered that one of its main stipu-

lations was that the person who should purchase the portrait of this much loved son would have all the property.

"Now this is a *good* illustration of what God has said to us in the gospel. If we accept, honor, and *love His Son, He will make us heirs of all things.*" (Italics mine, W.H.)

Whenever we read statements of this nature in *The Banner*, and this is not an isolated instance, it causes mixed emotions to rise in our soul. The first feeling is that of sadness, for it is a sad plight when these Arminian stones are fed as Reformed bread to attempt nourishment in the way of Meditation. Our sadness, however, does not primarily concern itself with the leaders who produce such stones but rather goes out for the thousands of simple sheep given to their care; who unwittingly and unthinkingly are the recipients of such fare. They are being deceived and poisoned by their own trusted shepherds; that's a cause of deep sorrow.

Our second emotion is that of surprise. Surprise that though time and again such "food" is served in *The Banner* to its constituency, there is seldom, very seldom, a voice of protest and rebellion. How is it possible that all the 23,000 readers of *The Banner*, both of clergy and lay-men, can stomach this fare. Is there no man, in whose soul, such utterances cause the pangs and pains of indigestion to arise? Is it possible that in the historically sound and *Christian Reformed Churches* there has been accomplished an almost complete lethargy and lack of discernment?

Our third reaction is that of amazement! Isn't it amazing that in a denomination which professes and prides itself in being a Reformed stronghold, a truly Reformed note is no more sounded in a leading department of its official organ? Certainly there must be a man somewhere amongst the vast resources of the Christian Reformed clergy who could write a Reformed meditation. We cannot believe that this is the best they have to offer. Or is it, perhaps, indicative of a trend and purposeful writing; a definite and deliberate movement from the professed Truth and adopted standards to popular untruth and Arminianism? If it is, it is even more amazing!

Finally, it fills one with righteous anger. *The Banner* and the Churches for which it speaks, claim to be the spokesmen and defenders of the historic Truth of the Calvinistic Reformation. Yet, in such instances, they reveal that they have lost, or cast out, the very fundamentals and heart of that Truth. When a group of Churches loudly flaunt themselves to be the last stronghold of the Reformed Truth, yet deny it in their very official expression, it arouses the indignation of anyone with a sense of propriety and understanding of that Truth.

The Catholic Hour

According to a report in *Time* magazine of Feb. 3, 1947, Msgr. Fulton J. Sheen of the Roman Catholic Church, has begun his 17th series of Radio talks. His first address of this new series sounded a note of warning as they contained a prophecy to be read in the signs of the times. Msgr. Sheen declared that "the signs of our times point to two inescapable truths". The first of these is "that we have come to the end of the . . . chapter of history which made man the measure of all things. . . the death of historical liberalism." It has died because it attempted to build on the basis of a-moral man, according to the Msgr.

"The second great truth to which the signs of the times portend is that we are definitely at the end of a non-religious era of civilization, which regarded religion as an addendum to life, a pious extra, a morale-builder for the individual, but of no social relevance."

The speaker went on to prophecy that we are entering a new era which "might be called the religious phase of human history." He hastens to add to this that he does not mean "that men will turn to God, but that indifference. . . will be succeeded for a passion for an absolute. . . . Men will divide themselves into two religions. The conflict of the future is between the absolute which is the God-man and the absolute which is the man-God; the God Who became man and the man who makes himself God; between brothers in Christ and comrades in anti-Christ."

Following this he goes on to ridicule and deny the popular and mythical picture of the devil. He declared: "Nowhere in Sacred Scripture do we find warrant for the popular myth of the devil as a buffoon who is dressed like the first 'red'. Rather is he described as an angel fallen from heaven, and as 'the Prince of this world' whose business it is to tell us that there is no other world. His logic is simple: if there is no heaven, there is no hell; if there is no hell, then there is no sin; if there is no sin, then there is no judge; and if there is no judgment, then evil is good and good is evil.

"But above all these descriptions, our Lord tells us that he will be so much like Himself, that he would deceive even the elect". Here Msgr. Sheen does not mean that he will attempt or purpose to deceive the elect but that his desire will succeed, for as he states a bit later: "Because his religion will be brotherhood without the fatherhood of God, he will deceive even the elect."

His conclusion is as follows: "Jews, Protestants, and Catholics should unite against a common foe. It is not a unity of religion we plead for that is impossible when purchased at the cost of the unity of truth, but a unity of religious peoples. . . . In a word, if anti-Christ has his fellow-travellers, then why should not God and His Divine Son? We may not be able

to meet in the same pew—would to God we did—but we can meet on our *knees*."

There is much of truth and discernment in what this spokesman of Romanism had to say, but there is also much that is misleading, not only, but erroneous and not in harmony with the Word of God. What he predicts of an "end of a man-made measure" of all things he denies when he declares, correctly, that the coming conflict will be with "the *man* who makes himself God". And this man, the anti-Christ, Scripture teaches, will not only be a-moral but positively immoral as well. The present course of history and all the Word of God emphasizes that the trend of things will be, just exactly, to elevate and glorify man and to depart more and more from the Absolute God. Further, that relative human standards shall be the measure and basis of development out of which the anti-Christ shall rise. Cf. 2 Thess. 2.

It is hardly necessary to refute and deny the statement that "he (anti-Christ) will deceive even the elect". This is certainly without Scriptural basis. On the other hand all of Scripture teaches most clearly the preservation of the saints, by the grace of God, through the end of time.

Finally, his conclusion and remedy leads us in just the wrong direction. His plea for a "unity of religious peoples", which he conceives as a possibility without unity of truth, must necessarily promote the cause of anti-Christ. Msgr. Sheen and, perhaps, too much of nominal Christendom, lose sight of an important Scriptural truth. The Word of God teaches that anti-Christ does not arise out of the known heathen world nor from an evident godless community, but rather shall arise from a united "Church" which has forsaken the principles of scriptural truth and is federated on the basis of compromise and utility. The only Church that shall maintain itself and be preserved unto the end is that which is "joined and united with heart and will, by the power of faith, *in one and the same spirit*", i.e., upon the basis of the basis of the Truth of God's Word, without compromise or equivocation. When the time comes that Church shall be united not only in its prayers, but in faith and practise as well—and be small, very small!

W. H.

CLASSIS WEST

will meet, the Lord willing, on the first Wednesday of March, March 5, 1947, in the Rock Valley Protestant Reformed Church. Delegates desiring lodging can contact Rev. P. Vis. All delegates are urged to have with them the Acts of Synod 1945.

Rev. C. Hanko, S. C.