

# THE STANDARD

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## MEDITATION

### Let Us Go To Bethlehem

"And there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed.

"And Joseph also went up . . . . unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem . . . . to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife being great with child. . . . but He that came down from heaven.

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour which is Christ the Lord.

"And lo, the Angel of the Lord came upon them . . . . and suddenly there was with the Angel a multitude of the heavenly host.

"The shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem.

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea . . . . behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews?

"And they (scribes) said unto him (Herod), In Bethlehem . . . .

"And lo, the star . . . . stood over where the young child was.

"Then Herod . . . . sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem."

Matth. 2; Luke 2; John 3:13.

In the fulness of time, when Jesus Christ our Saviour was born, Bethlehem was the focal point of the Universe. All things wend their way to the City of David.

First, there is that decree of Caesar Augustus! Yes, I have placed an exclamation point behind that sentence, and well I might. Wonder what the poor man is thinking about all through the ages of his hellish suffering. It was even through his imperial decree that Joseph and Mary and the child to be born took their journey to David's city.

An exclamation point, for it shows us that the world must help to bring the Kingdom of God to its

completion. All through the ages, all things work together to bring the children in the bosom of the Father. All things are united in that one purpose.

But Caesar Augustus, seated on the mighty throne of the Roman empire, did not in the least suspect that he was bringing the Christ-Child to the place where He must be born *according to the Scriptures*.

And, therefore, the Roman mandate, in some way or other, came in the fulness of time to Bethlehem, and the people told one another in the streets of that famous village: Did you hear the news? There went out a decree of the Emperor! We must be taxed.

Oh yes, in spite of himself, not even knowing, perhaps, that there was such a place on the earth which was named Bethlehem: the mighty Caesar comes to Bethlehem!

The focal point in the Universe of God!

\* \* \* \*

And this decree of Augustus, (or shall we rather say: of God?) came in due time also to Nazareth, to the house of a young carpenter, named Joseph. I think that we may safely assume that both Joseph and Mary, his espoused wife, were of the best of God's people. Of Joseph we read that he was a just man (Matth. 2), and of Mary that she was a prophetess.

Mary, the woman chosen by God from all eternity to be the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ! Well may the angel call her, Thou that art highly favored!

And the favor of the Triune God was shown unto her when she was overshadowed by the Holy Ghost, when the power of the Most High operated upon and within her so that she conceived a son, the Son of Man! Great and high was the favor of the Lord toward Mary!

But the child must be born in Bethlehem. For so the Holy Ghost had spoken by the mouth of the prophet. And here the time was drawing near that she would be delivered of the Man Child!?

But never fear! God will take care of His own business! There are the messengers which also came to Nazareth, and in due time Joseph and Mary hasten

to Bethlehem, even though it must have been a wearisome journey for the mother of our Lord.

All things move with Divine, heavenly precision, the precision of perfection. Bethlehem is also highly favored. It is the focal point of the Universe of God.

\* \* \*

And then there is that wonderful text in John 3: ". . . but He that came down from heaven!"

It is difficult and dangerous to write on that text. That is, if you are going to *explain* things. Strict, Reformed theologians do not like the song which is sung so often in the Netherlands: "Daar ruicht langs de wolken een lieflijken Naam!" They do not like it, because of an expression which we find there which runs somewhat like this: He (Jesus), who *left* heaven in order to save us! And these theologians say that Jesus did not *leave* heaven, for He is the Omnipresent God! And I agree that they have an argument there. God is everywhere, and when God the Son came to Bethlehem, He remained in heaven and in Nazareth.

Let me emphasize it then: Jesus Christ, the Lord, the son of God and the Son of Man, came down from heaven into our misery, the misery of damnation, in order to do His enormous part in the scheme of God's salvation: ". . . but He that came down from Heaven!"

And so the God of our salvation conforms to His own counsel, namely, the decree to make Bethlehem the focal point in the Universe in the fulness of time. The God of our salvation came to the city of David in order to be born there for us! Hallelujah!

\* \* \*

And there is the Gospel which was preached unto the church in that glorious night when Jesus was born. A little later we will write a few thoughts of the Gospel heralds, but now I would see that Gospel by itself. The Gospel came to Bethlehem! Listen: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour which is Christ the Lord!"

A Saviour is born!

The impossible has become possible!

We should all go to hell for ever and ever, and there in hell we should weep and gnash our teeth! We should be forsaken of the Fountain of happiness and blessedness for ever and ever! Because we have sinned, and are guilty before the Face of a just and glorious God!

And now, listen: A Saviour is born!

And what a Saviour!

The Christ name tells us that He will do all the work that is necessary before the Face of God in order to liberate us from the shackles of sin and of guilt and of death, so that He may usher us into the presence of a loving Father Who gave us this Saviour. As Saviour He would go to the cross and suffer and suffer eternally. Oh, I cannot fathom that cross! As Lord He will

own me and work for me and reform me so that I will serve Him forever. What wondrous Gospel we have to preach on Christmas day!

And He is born this day in Bethlehem! It is preached first by shepherds in Bethlehem, and it has gone forth to all the earth. And again and again we have remembered this Gospel, also its historical veracity: this day, in the city of David! All according to the Divine plan.

And unto *you*! The Gospel is particular!

Christ the Lord is born for and unto His people only. The Angel of the Lord told Mary even before she conceived Him: . . . for He shall save *His people* from their sins. The Gospel is for the elect only.

But the Gospel also did come to Bethlehem, there to be preached first. For Bethlehem is the focal point of the Universe. Really everything seems to have its representative there.

Let us all go to Bethlehem!

\* \* \*

And now we see the heavenly host come to the city of David. No, they do not go to the city proper. They go to the outskirts of it, toward a field where shepherds watch their flocks by night.

They were elect people; there is no doubt about that. We have already intimated as much when we meditated on the Gospel: *unto you* is born . . .

But you will also note the same thing in their conduct. Who knows? They may have spoken in that night of all nights, in that place of all places, about the hope of Israel, and the terrible darkness which enshrouded the elect people of their day. They say that the darkness is deepest just before dawn. Perhaps they spoke of the darkness in Israel, and the hope of Israel for the Light that was promised.

At any rate, when Triune God made up His counsel from all eternity, He said: And unto whom will We show this wonderful Gospel first of all? Then the same God answered: Unto a company of simple souls, some shepherds that will watch their flocks that night.

The special Angel of the Lord is commissioned when the time was ripe: he received exact instructions. And there he went, down, down, down, toward the focal spot on the globe which is called earth. Of course! To Bethlehem. These angels had been very desirous to look into the details of the salvation of God. And now the fulfillment was come. You can safely assume that this mighty Angel of the Lord rejoiced in the glory of his commission.

He alights in the midst of the cowering shepherds: Fear not, for behold, I bring you glad tidings . . .

I have wondered so often how the sound of an angel's voice might be. It must be most wondrous in sound. It must be a melody in prose. And then what melody. Its source is heavenly perfection. But we

better do not wonder too much. We better wait until we are there. And then our song will be even sweeter than the voice of angels.

And when the Gospel is preached, there appeared the heavenly host. And they sang a song which has been repeated through the ages. It has been changed somewhat in meaning. We care not to argue in this little meditation, but it is not true that the angels sang: goodwill toward men. It is this: toward men of goodwill! The Gospel content is this: Christ's birth is peace on earth unto the men of God's goodpleasure!

But the angel world also came to this one point of the earth which has all the emphasis in that day, that great day of the Lord.

The angels came to speak and to sing in Bethlehem!

\* \* \* \*

And the shepherds also go to Bethlehem. The angel of the Lord has told them about the sign of the Lord: the Babe wrapped in swaddlingclothes and lying in the manger! A sermon which tells us from age to age that for our sakes He became poor so that He might make us rich forever and ever!

And they also said one to another: Let us now go even unto Bethlehem! And they did.

And they saw the sign and understood it, for they returned, preaching, singing and praising God for that He had visited Israel in her darkness.

Bethlehem, the center of the earth and of the Universe of God. In thee are happening the most important things of all time.

In that focal point of the Universe all the rays of the virtues of God find a common center, and that pin-point on the map and in the dizzying depths of space, is resplendent of beauty, the beauty of holiness in the womb of God's morning.

\* \* \* \*

There is still more interest in that little town of Bethlehem.

The stars in their courses will send one of their number so that it finally may come and stand above the house where the Child lay.

The star of David would shine. Even a wicked prophet had prophesied of that star which would herald the birth of the King of God.

And in the fulness of time that star appeared in the midst of the heavens. Many theories have been propounded about the mysterious appearance of that star. I care very little for them.

But I can understand the joy of the wise men when they saw that star in its initial appearance as well as when it appeared again unto them on the way to Bethlehem. I think that the Lord God purposely chose that star so that it might be the representative of the great

heavenly creation. And that representative must be there to greet the Saviour, to herald His birth, and to be a help unto some important men who must be led to the place where the Child lay.

But the stars send their representative to Bethlehem. Bethlehem, the center of the earth and of all things at that wondrous time.

\* \* \* \*

And there come the Magi!

They represent you and me!

They are heathendom, elect heathendom, that shall share in the blessings of Shem, yea, they shall dwell in his tents!

They come, they are eager, they ask and say: where is Christ? Where is the King of the Jews? Come, tell us.

And the cold, evil, wicked men tell them.

Presently, they also go to that focal point, and worship! Look strongly on that child, on that Christ of God. He is also the Saviour of the Bataviers, the children of the North. The East and the West, the North and the South, shall come to worship at that crib, at the feet of the King of kings!

Heathendom, elect heathendom came to Bethlehem! In the fulness of time.

\* \* \* \*

And the wicked also came there.

It were better if they had never heard of that blessed name, than to hear it and to go there to mock, and to murder and to hate the Son of God!

In hypocrisy Herod sent the wise men to Bethlehem, with the promise that he would surely follow them.

And he did.

But not to worship. Attend to this: "Then Herod, . . . sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem."

Yes, even the wicked, Herod and his cruel soldiers, they also come to Bethlehem. God's ways are past finding out.

I have it in me to pity them. Hell is so terrible and it lasts so long!

\* \* \* \*

And you?

Hie you to Bethlehem! For the sake of your soul, for the sake of your God, for the sake of heavenly joy such as the first Paradise did not know.

Let us, beloved reader, let us go even now to Bethlehem, and adore the God of our salvation!

Bethlehem still has its unspeakable charms!

Focal point of the brilliancy of Divine Light!

It is the smiling Face of Triune God!

G. Vos.

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## EDITORIALS

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### Correspondence

November 16, 1948

Editor of the Standard Bearer,  
Esteemed Brother:

I should like to make a few remarks about your recent development of the subject of "Preaching as a Means of Grace".

I think I have told you before that there are some truths of Scripture and also some facts of reality in the life of the Church that I cannot harmonize with your teaching concerning the office and its authority.

I have already planned to write at some length on this question, insofar as I would like to lay my objections before those who are interested readers of our papers. But since this question is once more brought in the midst by your series on the Catechism, I shall now, while the question is before the readers, make a few remarks.

1. I believe that the remark of Prof. Bavinck that the Word "derives its power and operation by no means only from the fact that it is being preached by an official person in the gathering of believers. It operates also then when it is being read and studied in the home. . . ." has not at all been proved untrue in your comments on his passage from "Roeping and Wedergeboorte".

2. I believe that the insistent appeal to the passage of Romans 10:14, 15 is faulty. You say: "It is evident that in these words the importance of the preacher and his mission is emphasized". I do not think this is the import of this passage. I believe the context requires that it be seen as a link in the chain to prove that the Israelites indeed, heard the Gospel, and should have believed it. That certainly is the main idea. That gospel was made known to them. God provided preachers. But this says nothing about a supposed "authority" without which it could have no efficacy.

3. I believe that the use of the authority of an ambassador as an illustration is very precarious. We all know that illustrations easily lead to unwarranted conclusions. And I believe that in view of the truth expressed by Dr. Bavinck in the words quoted above, the conclusion drawn from an earthly ambassador is not valid. The efficacy of the Word of God is so deeply ethical that it cannot be compared with the decision of an earthly king.

4. It is of course true that no mere man can speak the creative word of Christ, and it is also true that no man has authority when he says what he has not been told by Christ to say. But these things do not pertain

to the point that must be proved.

5. I hope we may still see a clear conception of this doctrine developed. But then I believe it should be organic and not mechanical or I would almost say, not "magical". I hope we can keep this question open and not have somewhat of a "current opinion" established by which a person's orthodoxy can be judged in our churches.

Your brother in the Lord,  
Rev. A. Petter.

### REPLY TO REV. PETTER

1. I do not recall that the Reverend Petter ever voiced his objections to my "teaching concerning the office and its authority". But he writes: "I think I have told you before." And that leaves room, at least, for the possibility that he did not tell me before.

2. It will be interesting to take note of the Rev. Petter's own development of the truth concerning this question. I hope, however, that he writes not only in the form of objections, but positively, clearly, and unambiguously.

3. As to his criticism under "1":

a. The Rev. Petter must not overlook the fact that I was writing on the subject of "The Preaching of the Word as a Means of Grace". Now, the means of grace are only two, namely: the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. And both are given to the Church as an institute. I hardly think that the Rev. Petter means to deny this; no more than a private individual can administer the sacraments, no more can any man or woman have the authority to preach the Word without being sent by the Church.

b. As to his criticism proper under this point, I already wrote in the *Standard Bearer*, Vol. 25, No. 5, p. 104 (and this was written and at the printer before I ever received the criticism of the Rev. Petter): "This does not mean that I wish to minimize the value of all the means of instruction in the truth which we possess today. Least of all would I underrate the great significance of Bible reading and Bible study in the home, by individual believers, or by societies. We certainly believe the perspicuity of Holy Scripture, and we believe that all believers have the unction of the Holy One. Yet, all these means cannot and may never be separated from the work of Christ through the Church as an institute, especially through the ministry of the Word. Suppose there had been no ministry, no official preaching of the Word through all the ages of the new dispensation; where would be our Bibles, translated in every language? Where would be our confessions, in which the truth is preserved from generation to generation? Where would be your fathers and mothers to instruct you in the truth from childhood? They would not be at all. You can see for

yourself what becomes of the man and woman of the family that separate themselves from the Church, proudly ignoring the Word of God that it is impossible to hear without a preacher, and claiming that they can just as well hear Christ by reading their Bibles at home. It does not take long before they have weaned away from the truth and are lost in the world."

4. As to the Rev. Petter's objection under "2", I do not see how even if his explanation of the context in Romans 10 is correct (which, according to my conviction, it is not), this can possibly change the plain meaning of the words in vss. 14 and 15. The words certainly plainly teach: a) that in order to believe men must hear Christ. b) That to hear Christ a preacher is indispensable. c) That no one can preach without being sent. I will quote that part of the text once more, and ask the Rev. Petter to interpret them in any other way, if he can see a possibility: "And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard (whom they have not heard)? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?" It is easy to say that my appeal to this passage of the Epistle to the Romans is faulty, but it will be very difficult for the Rev. Petter to prove. I must therefore maintain—not that any form of the Word cannot have efficacy—but that *preaching* of the Word is authoritative.

5. I do not understand what objection the Rev. Petter can possibly have against the illustration of an ambassador, especially as it is really taken literally from Holy Writ: for in II Cor. 5:20 we read the well-known words: "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." The conclusion is certainly valid that a preacher is an ambassador of Christ, and therefore sent by Him officially, and, moreover, that the efficacy of the preacher's word depends on the question whether Christ will speak through him.

6. The Rev. Petter writes: ". . . that no man has authority when he says what he has not been told by Christ to say." If he writes this in respect to the *preaching* of the Word, he expresses himself defectively: for then he should not write, "what he has not been told by Christ to say", but, "what he has been called or sent for as an ambassador to say". And thus understood, all this is certainly to the point.

7. Under "5" the Rev. Petter alludes, perhaps, to a recent article of his in the *Beacon Lights*, when he writes: "I hope we can keep this question open and not have somewhat of a 'current opinion' established by which a person's orthodoxy can be judged in our churches." To this I would answer that although I will certainly not judge a person's orthodoxy and although the article in question was rather ambiguous, yet I did not get the impression that it was orthodox

or Reformed to present the matter of the sending of a missionary by the Church as a mere technicality. To me this is a very important principle.

But, as I say, it will certainly be interesting to read the Rev. Petter's own development of his view regarding preaching as a means of grace.

H. H.

## Reply To Rev. Cammenga

1. Thanks for the reference from Calvin's *Institutes*. I have no objections to the quotation in as far as it was given, though I know not which translation was used. But it is interesting to note what was left out of the quotation. I refer to the following: "*Esset autem optima catechizandi ratio, si formula in hunc usum conscripta esset, summam continens et familiariter explicans omnium fere religionis nostrae capitum, in quae universa fidelium ecclesia consentire sine controversia debet.*" Offhand, I might translate this quotation as follows: "But the best form of catechizing would be if a formula were written for this purpose, containing and explaining in a familiar way a summary of almost all the chief heads of our religion, in which the whole church of believers ought to consent without controversy."

I do not know why the Rev. Cammenga omitted this from his quotation. It is rather important because it shows that Calvin must have nothing of individualism in catechetical instruction. He even wants a brief summary of doctrine, a catechism book for the whole church, to which all must agree.

2. As to my letter, I would rather have the Rev. Cammenga prove that he still has it, by quoting it himself. It is very easy to do so without referring to anything familiar. The letter is divided into three parts and numbered 1, 2, and 3. Now, all the Rev. Cammenga has to do is to produce the section under "2", which is subdivided again into a, b. c. and d. There is, therefore, no reason at all why he should not quote it.

3. As to the question of my leadership in the churches, to which the Rev. Cammenga refers, it seems to me that he could at least wait till I am dead, before he refuses to lean a little on me, and to take my advice and counsel. In fact, I am rather surprised at his attitude, because the Rev. Cammenga himself in the past,—and even in the recent past, and even after I was sick,—asked for my advice. But perhaps, about this leadership in our churches I will write a separate editorial in the near future.

4. The question which the Rev. Cammenga asks in his last reply to me I already answered in my former article in the *Standard Bearer*.

H. H.

## THE TRIPLE KNOWLEDGE

### An Exposition Of The Heidelberg Catechism

PART TWO

LORD'S DAY 25

3.

Regeneration Immediate. (cont.)

Even though in this article the gospel is called the "seed of regeneration", it is plain from the description of rebirth in the preceding articles, as well as from this very article in which the quoted expression occurs, that the meaning is not that the preaching of the gospel is the means through which the Holy Spirit effects regeneration in the narrowest, principal sense of the word. For regeneration itself is called a new creation, and is the same as the resurrection from the dead. This implies that even as creation is an immediate work of God, as the resurrection is effected by the almighty power of God without any human means, so also the origin of the new life, which is called regeneration or the rebirth, is accomplished directly by the power of God alone, and not through the preaching of the gospel. And only as the sustenance and the prolongation of our natural life requires means "by which God in His infinite mercy and goodness hath chosen to exert His influence," in the same way the new life, which is immediately created in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, requires the means of the preaching of the gospel as "the seed of regeneration", in order to cause it to flourish into a conscious faith in Christ, to sustain, to strengthen, and to nourish it.

That this is the view of all Reformed theologians and of the Reformed Confessions is shown also by Dr. H. Bavinck in his book "Roeping en Wedergeboorte", although he himself seems to be inclined toward the view that regeneration somehow is connected with the preaching of the Word. He writes on pp. 26, 27 of the aforementioned book: "Although joined with the external call through the gospel, this grace (of regeneration) is nevertheless not shut up in the Word of the gospel, but it penetrates into the heart of man, touches, so to speak, man in his most secret being immediately, and renews him without his knowledge and without his will in principle according to the image of God. It is absolutely independent of any consent of the mind or any act of the free will of man. Nothing intervenes between this operation of grace and man as he is regenerated: no Word, no sacrament,



no church, no priest, no act of the intellect or of the will. The Holy Spirit works in the heart of the elect the grace of regeneration (of faith, of conversion, or however one may call this first moment) directly and immediate, irresistibly.

"To adduce proofs from Reformed theology for this truth may be deemed superfluous. Anyone can find them with every Reformed writer about the internal calling and in every Reformed symbol. It is true that the internal calling, or regeneration, or the gift of faith, is seldom called immediate; almost without exception theologians confine themselves to circumscribe this work as efficacious, irresistible, and nevertheless most delightful. Nevertheless, there is not the least doubt that the grace which works the very first principle of the new life in the heart of the sinner may be called immediate in this sense that, whether joined with the Word or not, it works in man directly, without intervention, and without being dependent upon man's intellectual consent or an act of the free will of man."

And on pp. 33, 34 of the same work he writes: "That is the judgment which the Synod of Dordt placed over against the sentiment of the Remonstrants. A prevenient, moral, persuasive grace is altogether insufficient to bring man to faith and conversion. To the power which is exercised by the Word must be added another, internal, hidden work of the Holy Spirit by which is granted, in the first place, the power of faith and of conversion, and which, in the second place, translates with infallible certainty that power into the act of faith and conversion.

"This operation of the Holy Spirit is being circumscribed in different ways, both by the Synod of Dordt and by the different foreign and native delegates. It is called an internal, hidden, mysterious, powerful, efficacious, supernatural, almighty, unconquerable irresistible gracious, and delightful grace.

"But the term *immediate grace* or *immediate regeneration* was not used. It is, indeed, used, as we shall see later, by some Reformed theologians. And, understood in a good sense, this circumscription is not to be disapproved; but it is probably intentionally avoided by the Synod of Dordt and by many theologians, because it can easily lead to misunderstanding and be used in favor of a certain objection of the Remonstrants, which we will mention later.

"It is nevertheless established that according to Reformed doctrine the Holy Spirit does not work faith and regeneration in man in such a way that he remains bound to the means of grace, or works through them. On the contrary, He penetrates into the most secret recesses of the heart of man. He opens the closed heart; He works the quickening within us without us; He comes to dwell in man with His divine power, and infuses into the mind, the will, and the inclinations

new properties, so that the darkness, the unwillingness, and unrighteousness is removed and replaced by enlightenment, willingness, and uprightness."

And he concludes as follows: "There may be difference of opinion about the question whether this operation of the Spirit can be called *immediate* without misunderstanding. But about the matter itself all difference is excluded. It touches the heart of Reformed theology, the very marrow of Holy Scripture in respect to the doctrine of the application of salvation."

That regeneration, in this sense of the word, is immediate and logically precedes all other work of grace in the heart of the elect is clearly taught by the Word of God. A few passages may be sufficient to substantiate this statement.

First of all, we would call your attention to John 3:3-8: "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

The term "born again" in the original does not only mean born over again, but also refers to a being born from above. One who is born again does not differ from the natural man merely in a spiritual, ethical sense of the word, so that he is changed from sin into righteousness, from corruption unto holiness, from enmity against God unto the love of God. But he also differs from the natural man in this respect, that while the latter is earthly and seeks earthly things, the regenerated man is heavenly and sets his heart upon the things that are above. But now notice in regard to the question we are discussing, that of efficacious and immediate regeneration, that there are a few things in the text that are especially worthy of our attention. In the first place, note that the Lord says to Nicodemus: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." This implies without a doubt that the grace of regeneration is first and must necessarily have the precedence over any other work of grace wrought by the Holy Spirit in the heart of man. Without it he cannot even see the kingdom of God. He therefore has no contact whatsoever with spiritual things. Secondly, notice that in answer to the question of Nicodemus, "How can a man be born when he is old?" Jesus answered: "Except a man be

born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." The expression "born of water" can only refer to the water of baptism, for the baptism of John must have been well-known to Nicodemus. To be born of water, therefore, refers to the forgiveness of sins and to justification. A man must be objectively justified before God before he even has a right to regeneration. And to be born of the Spirit refers to the new birth itself, without which a man cannot even see the kingdom of God. But what we must especially note here is that this rebirth by the Holy Spirit is presented as immediate. A man that is reborn is born not through the gospel, but simply of the Spirit. Thirdly, the same truth is also evident from verse 6, where the Lord says: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Also here the mediacy of the preaching of the gospel is completely left out of consideration. And finally, this is expressed once more in verse 8, where the Lord compares him that is born of the Spirit with the wind, which bloweth where it listeth, but of which one cannot tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth. The second birth, or the birth from above, is mysterious in its origin. One who is conscious of the operation of the Spirit and the workings of the new birth in his heart begins to see indeed the kingdom of God, begins to hear, without a doubt, the preaching of the gospel, begins to seek the things which are above; but why he is thus spiritually affected he cannot explain. It is simply the mystery of being born of the Spirit. All these elements in the text plainly emphasize that regeneration in its deepest sense is immediate, that it is not wrought through the preaching of the gospel.

The same truth is clearly taught in John 5:24, 25: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live." Notice, in the first place, that the Lord here teaches that he that hears His Word already *has* eternal life. The latter precedes the former. Now to have eternal life in principle is the same as to be regenerated. Regeneration, therefore, precedes the hearing of the Word of Christ. This is corroborated by the latter part of verse 24, where it is said that he that heareth the Word of Christ *is passed* from death unto life. This hearing of the Word of the Saviour evidently refers to the Word of the gospel, and therefore the true, spiritual hearing of the gospel is here presented as proof that one has eternal life, or that he is regenerated. One must be reborn before he can even hear the Word of the gospel. This is quite in accord with the text in

John 3:3, where it is said that one cannot *see* the kingdom of God, except he is born again. Just as there the seeing of the kingdom presupposes regeneration, so here the hearing of the Word of the gospel presupposes the rebirth.

And this is emphasized in verse 25, where regeneration is presented as resurrection from the dead, which, of course, is immediate. And that this rebirth, which is here called the resurrection from the dead, does not take place through the Word of the gospel is also evident from the rest of the text, which speaks of hearing the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live. This voice of the Son of God is evidently not the preaching of the gospel, but the causal, creative Word of God. And it is by this that regeneration is immediately effected.

Again, also the text from I Peter 1:23-25 teaches us the same truth, namely: that regeneration in its first beginning is an immediate work of the Holy Spirit. The text reads as follows: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."

This passage has often been quoted as favoring mediate regeneration. Does not the apostle plainly refer to the Word of God (vs. 23) through which we are reborn as "the word which by the gospel is preached unto you?" From this it is plain, so it is argued, that regeneration is wrought through the means of the preaching of the gospel.

However, such an interpretation fails to distinguish properly and sharply between the different concepts of the text. Especially important are the two prepositions: "of" and "by". These two prepositions are better literally translated by "out of" (*ek*) and "through" (*dia*). We are regenerated out of incorruptible seed and through the word of God which liveth and abideth forever. Regeneration, therefore, is here presented as developing out of a seed. This seed is evidently the new principle of life, implanted immediately in the heart by the Holy Spirit. It is wrought in our hearts not only without our will or effort, but even without our consciousness. It takes place in what is often called the subconscious. And the development of the new birth out of this incorruptible seed takes place *through* the Word of God. The question is, what is meant here? It must be evident that not the preaching of the gospel is meant, for this Word of God is described as the Word that "liveth and abideth forever", and again, as "the word of the Lord that endureth forever." And this certainly cannot



be said of Scripture or of the preaching of the gospel as such. For as such the written Word of God or even the preaching of the gospel does not live, nor does it endure forever. It is therefore the causal, creative Word of God that is wrought efficaciously in the heart, opening the same, as in the case of Lydia, to hear the Word of truth. And finally, the apostle writes that this living and abiding and ever-enduring Word of God is preached unto men. Conceiving, therefore, of the work of regeneration as a whole, we may distinguish three stages. In the first place, there is the seed that is implanted in the heart immediately by the Holy Spirit. In the second place, there is the Word of God, living and abiding forever, by which the seed of regeneration is developed into the new birth. Finally, there is the preaching of the gospel, through which men are externally called, and in connection with which they are brought to consciousness through the power of the same living and abiding Word of God.

Again, the same truth is taught in the well-known parable of the Sower. Also this passage has been frequently adduced as a proof in favor of mediate regeneration. The seed, so it is said, is the Word preached. For in His own explanation of the parable, as it is given in Luke 8, the Lord tells us: "The seed is the word of God." Luke 8:11. Hence, it is said that the Word as preached is the seed of regeneration.

But again careful distinction is necessary in order to understand the true meaning of the parable in this respect. If by regeneration is meant the first development of the new life into conscious activity, we have no objection to explain that this is meant by the seed as the Word of God. But that this is not the whole of regeneration is plainly taught by the parable of the Sower. For this seed of the Word of God falls at least on three different kinds of spiritual soil without bringing forth proper fruit: the soil that is represented by those that have the seed fallen by the wayside; secondly, the soil that is represented by the ground that is full of thorns and thistles. And only those that are represented by the good ground "are they which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience." Now, it ought to be very plain that the soil in nature is not prepared by the seed, but rather for the seed. The preparation of the soil is entirely independent of the action of the sowing. But this is no less true in the spiritual sense of the word. The heart is not prepared by the gospel, but for the gospel, and independently of its preaching, that is, by the direct and immediate work of the Holy Spirit in that heart. And thus conceived, it ought to be very plain that also the parable of the Sower teaches not mediate, but immediate regeneration.

We could adduce other proof from Scripture, but let this be sufficient.

Of course, we must remember that when we distinguish regeneration as a seed and its development, as generation and birth of the new life, we use rather a logical than a temporal distinction. At least we cannot agree with the view of some, who maintain that the seed of regeneration can lie dormant in the heart for many years before it sprouts into conscious and active life. They claim that it is possible for a man to live in sin and iniquity, that although all his life he has been under the influence of the gospel he does not have any living part with it and is not able to see the things of the kingdom of God, and that he continue in this state for forty, fifty, or sixty years, while all this time he has the seed of regeneration within his heart. Thus, a person may probably be converted when he is seventy or eighty years of age, although he is regenerated from infancy. We do not believe that this is possible. It may very well be that a seed in nature can continue to live if it has no contact with the soil whatever for many years. But it is quite inconceivable that a seed can be implanted in the soil and be under the influence of rain and sunshine without sprouting into life and bringing forth fruit. And the same may be said of the seed of regeneration that is implanted in the heart and that comes under the influence of the preaching of the gospel. It will certainly reveal itself in faith and conversion, and that, too, without delay. The work of God is throughout characterized by perfect wisdom; and it would be foolish to suppose that the seed of regeneration could lie dormant and inactive for many years, without ever showing any signs of life. And therefore, we repeat, that although we make a logical distinction between the seed of regeneration and its development into the new life, or between regeneration and birth of the new life, this distinction never means separation between regeneration and the Word of God.

H. H.

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## NOTICE

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The Board of the R. F. P. A.

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## OUR DOCTRINE

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### The Attributes Of God

In our previous article we began our discussion of the attributes of God. We concluded the article by calling attention to the distinction between the incommunicable and communicable attributes of the Lord. The incommunicable attributes are the virtues of God which can be ascribed to the Lord alone. The communicable attributes of God are the virtues of the Lord which are reflected in man; there is a creaturely likeness, reflection of them in man. Strictly speaking, we understand, all the attributes of God are incommunicable. God is His attributes. God, of course, cannot be imparted to the creature. He alone is and always remains God. Hence, also His attributes are necessarily incommunicable. As God is wise, righteous, holy, good, etc., He alone is wise righteous, holy, good, etc. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that when we speak of the communicable attributes of the Lord, we emphasize that they are *creaturely* reflected in the creature. These incommunicable attributes of God, to which we first call attention, are: Independence, Immutability, Simplicity, Oneness, Infinity (Eternal Perfection, Eternity, Omnipresence).

#### *God's Independency.*

The Independency of God we define as that attribute of God, whereby He has the ground and cause (or source) of His Being in Himself, and not in any being or essence outside Him.

This attribute, synonymous with the Name, Jehovah, is commonly and properly treated as the first incommunicable attribute. The first truth which the Scriptures reveal of the Lord is surely that He has His own existence, is wholly Self-sufficient, and completely independent of all that moves, lives, and has being. His Being and life is wholly unique; the Lord cannot be defined for the simple reason that He cannot be classified (to define anything implies that that thing be placed in a certain genus, and then that it be distinguished from other species in that particular genus—e.g., a horse is an animal but then it must also be distinguished from other animals). The Lord is the alone absolute God. Also His Names are unique; and of all the Names of God, Jehovah is preeminent—this Name declares of the Lord that He is the I Am, Who is what He was and shall be what He is, Who is the Rock, unchangeable within Himself and in all His dealings with His people.

The Lord is independent, Self-sufficient and Self-

existing, first of all within Himself. He is God Who is before all things and all things exist through Him—Ps. 90:2: “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting Thou art God”; see also I Cor. 8:6; Rev. 4:11. He is in the absolute sense of the word the Lord of the whole earth—Deut. 10:17: “For the Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, Which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward”; see also Joshua 3:13. He owes His existence to nothing, and all things are dependent upon Him—“For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to Whom be glory for ever. Amen.”, Romans 11:36. He is the living God Who possesses His life within Himself (“For as the Father hath life in Himself; so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself”, John 5:26), and the Lord is the all-sufficient One Who is not worshipped with men’s hands, as though He needed any thing—“Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though He needed any thing, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things,” Acts 17:25.

However, the Independency of God also implies that He is the Independent One with respect to and in connection with all things. He is not an arminian God who is dependent upon a creature, a god who must rely upon the will of a man, a god who is willing and eager to save all, but is frustrated by the refusal of countless thousands whom he would save but who refuse to be saved. He is not a god, who merely offers His salvation to all men who come within the range of the gospel, who must wait until man either accepts or rejects this offer of salvation. God is the Independent God, wholly Self-sufficient and sovereign, the God Who is always first, also in all His dealings with the children of men. He killeth and maketh alive, creates the light and the darkness, peace and evil—“I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside Me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside Me. I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things”, Is. 45:5-7; see also Deut. 32:39, Isaiah 54:16. The Lord does with the host of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth according to His will (“And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?”—Daniel 4:35), so that the children of men are in His hand as clay in the hand of a potter—“Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it. Why hast thou made me

thus: Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?", Romans 9:20-21; see also Isaiah 64:8; Jeremiah 18:1ff. His counsel, His good pleasure is the ground, the basis for all that is and for all that occurs—"Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure", Isaiah 46:10; "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will. . . . Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself: . . . . In Whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him Who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will:", Eph. 1:5, 9, 11; see also Ps. 33:11; Prov. 19:21; Matt. 11:26; Acts 2:23, 4:28. The Lord does all things for His own sake, His Name's sake, His glory's sake—"For the Lord will not forsake His people for His great Name's sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you His people.", I Sam. 12:22; "Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Thy Name: and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for Thy Name's sake.", Psalm 79:9; see also Deut. 32:27, Joshua 7:9, Ps. 25:11, 31:4, 106:8, 109:21, 143:11, Prov. 16:4, Is. 48:9, Jer. 14:7, 21, Ezek. 20:9, 14, 22, 44. The Lord needs nothing, is all-sufficient—"Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed any thing, seeing He giveth to all life and breath, and all things." Acts 17:25. And thus He is the First and the Last, the Alpha and the Omega, Who is and Who was and Who shall come—"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, Which is, and Which was, and Which is to come, the Almighty." Rev. 1:8, see also Is. 41:4, 44:6 48:12. This God is therefore also independent in all His attributes and perfections, in all His decrees and actions. This applies to His will, as in Rom. 11:34, 35: "For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor? Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?" Also His will is independent, as in Romans 9:19: "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth He yet find fault? For who hath resisted His will?"; see also Daniel 4:35, Eph. 1:5, Rev. 4:11. His counsel, too, is independent, according to Is. 46:10 and Ps. 33:11. Of the love of God we read that it is first and therefore independent and not dependent upon the will of a man, as in I John 4:10: "Herein is love, not that we love God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." And we would conclude with the words of the psalmist in Ps. 115:3: "But our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased." The Lord our God is truly the independent Jehovah.

### *God's Simplicity.*

The Simplicity of God we define as that perfection of the Lord whereby He is indivisible and not composed and that all His attributes are one in Him. The word, simplicity, as used in the discussion of the perfections of God, is the state of being simple, of being free from division into parts, and therefore from compositeness.

That God is simple implies, therefore, that He is eternally One within Himself, is not divided into various parts, so that the one part of His Being is e.g., grace and another part a different virtue; God's essence and His virtues or perfections are not distinct so that, instead of saying that He *is* His attributes, we would then confess that He *possesses* attributes; God and His attributes are eternally one; the Lord *is* His perfections. Simplicity we understand, is the contrast, the opposite of being composed, "made-up" into various parts.

The attribute of God's Simplicity implies, of course, that He is a spiritual Being, even as we are taught in the well-known words of Christ in John 4:24 where we read that God is Spirit (not a Spirit, but Spirit). Whatever is physical is composed, constituted of parts. It is true that the Scriptures speak of God in human fashion, but even then the Word of God is characterized by definite liminations. Of the internal organs of our body only the heart and the bowels are attributed to the Lord; nowhere does Scripture ascribe to God such organs with which nourishment, consumption, and development are associated. We read of the Lord, to be sure, that He sees, hears, smells, but never that He tastes or handles. A body is never attributed to Him; and although we read often that the Lord reveals Himself unto His people in a human appearance, yet, throughout the Scriptures, He is Elohim, the God that is to be feared, and Who is far exalted above all that is creature. We read of Him that *He exists of Himself* (Ex. 3:13-14: "And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and He said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you."), *is eternal* Ps. 90 and Deut. 32:40: "For I lift up My hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever."), *is omnipresent* (Jer. 23:23, 24: "Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord."; Deut. 10:14, Psalm 139), *is incomparable* (Ps. 89:6, 8: "For who in the heaven can be compared unto the Lord: who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the Lord? O Lord God of

hosts, who is a strong Lord like unto Thee? or to Thy faithfulness round about Thee?"; Is. 40:18, 25: "To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto Him? To whom then will ye liken Me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One."; see also Is. 46:5), *is invisible* (Ex. 33:20, 23: "And He said, Thou canst not see My face: for there shall no man see Me, and live. And I will take away Mine hand, and thou shalt see My back parts: but My face shall not be seen."), *is God of Whom no image or likeness can and therefore may not be made* (Ex. 20:4: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.") And although He repeatedly reveals Himself in appearances, dreams, visions, yet He is omnipresent, the Lord Who created and sustains all things.

The incommunicable attribute of Simplicity is taught in the Word of God. Having emphasized the utter vanity and foolishness of idols in verses 1-9, which idols are hewn out of the trees of the forest and bedecked with gold and silver and cannot speak or go, the holy writer in Jer. 10:10 writes: "But the Lord *is* the true God, He *is* the living God, and an everlasting King: at His wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide His indignation." Literally we read in this passage that "the Lord *is* the God of truth." Substantives as well as adjectives are ascribed to the Lord. God is not only truthful, does not merely speak the truth; God *is* truth. And the same thought is expressed in the Word of God in I John 1:5 and 4:8: "This then 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 . . . He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God *is* love." Hence, we confess the Simplicity of God, also according to Article I of our Confession of Faith, and thereby declare that the Lord is indivisible, not constituted of any parts, or composed, and that all His attributes are one In Him. God *is*, with His entire Being, all His virtues, the Highest and Absolute Good, and therefore the God of infinite, sovereign, and unchangeable perfection.

#### *God's Infinity.*

We define God's Infinity as that virtue or attribute of God whereby He is free from all limitations in all His perfections. This attribute, therefore, denies that there are or can be any limitations to the Divine Being or perfections.

Two scriptural passages which are commonly quoted to confirm this virtue of the Lord are Job 11:7-9 and Psalm 145:3. In the first of these passages we read: "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst

thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea." And the latter passage reads: "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable."

God's Infinity is commonly distinguished as: His Absolute Perfection, Eternity, and Omnipresence. The latter virtue is again subdivided into: Transcendancy and Immanency. Let us look into these attributes of the Lord a little more closely.

#### *God's Absolute Perfection.*

We have already quoted Job 11:7-9 and Ps. 145:3. To these Scriptural passages may be added Matt. 5:48: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father Which is in heaven is perfect." If one looks at God's perfection in the light of His Infinity, bears in mind that the perfect God is also the infinite God, the emphasis must necessarily fall upon the truth that the Lord's perfection is absolute. God is infinite. The creature, man, is finite. The word "finite" means literally: that which is bounded, limited. We are finite because we are limited, are characterized by boundaries, have an end. That applies to our entire existence, the physical but also the psychical. We have a beginning and, as far as our present existence is concerned, also an end. We were born and must die. But we are also limited as far as our thinking and willing, etc., are concerned. We can think only of finite things. It is impossible for us to conceive of anything, understand anything that is infinite, without beginning or end, limitless. Does this, then, necessarily imply that therefore the infinite, the limitless does not exist? That would be absurd. Am I not the creature and is not the Lord the Creator? Is it strange that the creature does not understand the Creator, that the finite does not fathom the Infinite? The Creator is surely exalted above the creature, also above that which is finite. The Lord is the infinite God. He is without boundaries, is limitless, boundless.

This implies, of course, that Jehovah is infinite in His perfections, is the God of absolute perfection. Fact is, the Infinity of the Lord reveals Him unto us as free from all limitations, as in no sense of the word limited by the universe or confined to the universe. The infinite God is surely the absolute God, Who is never limited or determined by anything outside Him, Who has no bounds, beginning or end of any nature, Who owes His existence eternally unto Himself, and Who is therefore the Absolute, Infinite, Non-Related, not related to or bound by any creature, and therefore the God of absolute perfection. Indeed, the Lord is great and His greatness is unsearchable.

*God's Eternity.*

God's Eternity we define as that virtue or perfection of God whereby He, negatively, is not limited to or by time, and, positively, continuously lives His infinite and perfect life with perfect and complete consciousness.

The Word of God teaches us throughout that God is eternal. We read in Ps. 90:1-2: "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God." In Ps. 102:11-12 we read: "My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass. But thou, O Lord, shalt endure for ever; and Thy remembrance unto all generations." In Eph. 3:21 we read: "Unto Him (God) be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." And in II Peter 3:8 we read these well known words: "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." We conclude with the words of the Lord Jesus in John 8:58: "Jesus saith unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am."

In the light of these passages from the Word of God we are able to make a few observations. On the one hand, the Scriptures seem to leave the impression that "Eternity" is endless time. The word itself means a long, long time. We often think of "eternity" as a period of time which is indefinitely prolonged, forwards and backwards; that God is eternal means then that He is without beginning and without end. Besides, could we conceive of "eternity" any differently? This also applies to the other virtues of the Lord. We speak of His Infinity. This means literally that He is not finite. However, it must be perfectly clear to us that God is not merely negative, is not merely different from us. God's Infinity must mean more than that He is not finite. This also applies to the Lord's Eternity. But, we cannot think of this virtue of the Lord except in contrast with our own existence. Moreover, do not the Scriptures which we have quoted speak the same language? Do we not read in Ps. 90 these words: "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting. . . ." And in the words of Ps. 102 these words occur: "My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass. But Thou, O Lord, *shalt endure for ever*; and Thy remembrance *unto all generations*." In Eph. 3:21 the apostle speaks of the endless life of the church, and we quote: "Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus *throughout all ages, world without end*."

Obviously, therefore, the Scriptures do speak of

the "eternity" of God in the sense of "endless time". Does this necessarily mean that Eternity is therefore to be identified with time, only time as indefinitely prolonged, without beginning or end? Not at all. The Word of God also employs other language, as we shall presently see. In fact, this is even true of the passages we have already quoted. Negatively, however, the Eternity of God signifies that He is not limited by the laws of time, and this truth is emphasized in these passages from Holy Writ.

H. Veldman.

## Essentials

The undersigned desires to express his candid opinion in regard to the catechism book, "Essentials", which has seen considerable service in our Protestant Reformed Churches. This article purposes to reflect upon a statement by the Reverend A. Cammenga in the Concordia of October 28, 1948, page 7, and I quote: "For example, the book by Rev. Hoeksema, "Essentials of Reformed Doctrine", has never proved successful in this community because its composition is often too complexed and the written work beyond the scope of the catechumen; this is the testimony of several of our ministers".

We have, of course, no intention to reflect upon the article of the Reverend Cammenga as it concerns Rev. Hoeksema's charge of a trend toward individualism in our churches. Neither must this article, or anything in this article, be viewed as an attack upon anyone of our ministers. The undersigned, however, is at a loss to understand this attitude of the "West" toward "Essentials", also as it is shared by "several of our ministers".

First of all, we are mystified by this attitude because we have always regarded "Essentials" as an outstanding catechism book. I am at a loss to understand what catechism book can possibly be an improvement upon it. The undersigned has repeatedly declared in private discussions that he regards this book of catechetical instruction as standing head and shoulders above any catechism book now in existence. And although "Essentials" bears the official sanction of our churches we now hear that it is a failure in the "West".

Secondly, the attitude of the "West" toward "Essentials" puzzles us because of the emphasis there (which we do not wish to minimize) upon the doctrinal aspect of catechetical instruction. If we begin to indoctrinate our children at the age of ten years (and the undersigned does not desire to criticize this either),

should they, then, not be ready for "Essentials" at a later age? And if we wish to emphasize the importance of doctrinal instruction what better means do we have at our disposal than "Essentials"?

The undersigned writes this article because he is convinced that in the book of "Essentials" we have a goldmine of Reformed doctrine. I do not understand why this book should be successful in one community and a failure in another. I do not comprehend the intellectual or psychological, etc., differences between the "East" and the "West". And I am at a loss to understand why this book is not successful in the "West". To be sure, many questions for written work transcend the ability of the catechumens; in fact, they transcend, I am sure, many ministers outside the pale of our churches. But, does this reflect upon the catechism book? I think not. Is it not the spirit of our day and age that the young people indulge very little in study and research? Is there any sound reason why young people of sixteen and seventeen years of age should not be able to study "Essentials" and become founded in the blessed truths of the Word of God? There is none.

Hence, if we really wish to absorb instruction "Essentials" can serve as an admirable guide. I repeat: it is a treasure of Reformed training, a goldmine of truly Reformed knowledge. I propose that we, as ministers, teach this book slowly and painstakingly. Let us cover it in two years rather than in one. Let us ask the catechumens to study these questions, also the questions at the bottom of the page, to make a serious effort to find the answer. Let us urge the catechumens to go to various sources to learn the answers, consult their parents, discuss with them these vital truths. Let us, as ministers, come to our catechism classes fully prepared, and have the catechumens take down notes on the explanation of the lesson and the answers to the questions at the end of each lesson. This book covers the field of doctrine, of truly Reformed doctrine, as a blanket. It serves admirably to refute outstanding heresies, including the "Three Points". If only our catechumens have a desire to learn, "Essentials" gives them a wonderful opportunity to orientate themselves in the truths which are treasured so highly in our churches.

H. Veldman.

P.S.—The undersigned wrote this article before he received the December 1 issue of the Standard Bearer. There is, therefore, no connection between this article and that of Rev. Hoeksema in the Dec. 1 Standard Bearer.

H.V.

## THE DAY OF SHADOWS

### Abner And His Opposition To David

As we saw, in addressing himself to the task of establishing his throne in all Israel, David took no recourse to violence in dealing with his brethren. For he made God his expectation as he had been doing all along. Accordingly, the means which he employed in gathering them under his wing was a benediction evoked over the men of Jabesh and over his brethren in the north country.

But, as was stated, David's overture of peace to his brethren in the north was ill-received. It was ill-received by Abner, the son of Ner, captain of Saul's routed and dispersed host that with Abner and Ishbosheth had fled over the Jordan to escape the sword of the Philistines. Taking Ishbosheth, he brought him over to Nahanaïm and made him king over all the tribes with the exception of Judah. This tribe had anointed David king and was following him.

Ishbosheth reigned but two years when he was slain by two of his servants—chapter 2:10; 4:7. The time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months—chapter 2:11. Ishbosheth's assassination preceded the expiration of David's seven and a half years reign in Hebron. There is then, this question: In which two of these seven and a half years did Ishbosheth's reign fall. The narrative does not make this clear. But there are three possibilities to be considered.

1. If Ishbosheth's elevation to the throne and David's anointment as king of Judah took place at the same time (2:7, 8, 9), Ishbosheth's reign of two years ran parallel with the first two years of David's reign in Hebron. And then David did not remove to Jerusalem until four and a half years after Ishbosheth's death. This view raises the question why David should have waited so long a time before undertaking the capture of Jerusalem.

2. If David's capture of Jerusalem and his removal to that city took place shortly after Ishbosheth's assassination, Ishbosheth's reign coincided with the last two years of David's reign in Hebron. But in this case Abner did not make Ishbosheth king until four years and a half after David's elevation to the throne in Judah.

3. Some maintain that the narrative binds us to the view that Ishbosheth was king over Israel during all the time that David reigned in Hebron. And they account for the notice that Ishbosheth reigned two years by supposing that after making him king in Mahanaïm Abner only gradually extended his jurisdic-



tion over all Israel by expelling the Philistines from the rest of Canaan. This conquering process must have taken five and a half years, so that Ishbosheth reigned over *all Israel* only two of his years as king. This, it is said, accounts for the statement that he reigned two years. As was pointed out, the weakness here is that the narrative makes no mention of wars with the Philistines carried out by Abner. The sequel reveals that the Philistines were subdued by David after his removal to Jerusalem.

Perhaps it is best to suppose that for reasons not revealed David did allow some five and a half years to go by after the assassination of Ishbosheth before undertaking the capture of Jerusalem. If this supposition is correct, Ishbosheth was made king shortly after the commencement of David's reign in Hebron and in this case Ishbosheth's brief reign ran parallel with the first two years of David's reign in that city.

The narrative continues, "And Abner the son of Ner, and the servants of Ishbosheth the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon." Mahanaim, as was explained, was situate in Gilead east of the Jordan. Here Abner had established Ishbosheth as king. From Mahanaim Abner advanced with an army to Gibeon in the western part of Benjamin about forty miles northeast of Hebron, where dwelt David as king of Judah. The sequel of the narrative leaves no doubt that Abner's purpose was warlike. He wanted to begin the conflict against David in order to subject Judah also to Ishbosheth. Doubtless his plan was to march southward from Gibeon on Hebron to attack David. This exonerated David. At no time and in no way had he planned to begin hostilities against Ishbosheth. He was forced into the war by Ishbosheth through Abner.

Abner's whole doing raises a question concerning him. What kind of man was he in a spiritual-moral point of view? Is he to be numbered among the saints? or must he be classified with the unprincipled, godless men in Israel? What did David think of him? The question is pertinent in view of David's reaction to Abner's assassination by Joab. That was a foul deed. It was unadulterated murder. David did all he could to convince the people that he had no part in that crime and that all the guilt rested on Joab. He made a statement to that effect. He cursed Joab and his house. He commanded Joab and all the people to rend their clothes and gird them with sack cloth and mourn after Abner. He followed Abner's bier and wept at his grave. And when the people came to cause him to eat meat while it was yet day, he binded himself by an oath to taste no bread or ought else til the sun be down, and he lamented over Abner and said, "Died Abner as a fool dieth? Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters: as a man fall-

eth before wicked men so fellest thou." And unto his servant he said, "Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?"

Did David here mean to bewail the fall of a man of true goodness? It would seem so, judging from the language of the lamentation. Especially significant is the lament, "Died Abner as a fool dieth," and the question put to the servants, "Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen in Israel?" Yet all that it may mean is that Abner was a mighty man of valor like Saul before his rejection. Also Saul's fall drew forth from David the lament, "How are the mighty fallen!" Of Jonathan he said, "The lovely and the pleasant." But he said this not of Saul.

But are we not driven to the conclusion that Abner was a godless rebel by his initial opposition to David? Already as general in Saul's army he was always co-operating with his master in the attempt to capture David that he might be put to death. And when Saul was dead, he made Ishbosheth king over all Israel and, as we have just seen, took active steps to subject also Judah to his new master. Is not Abner in all these doings revealed as a godless upstart? Not necessarily. In passing judgment on the man and his doings the following must be taken into consideration. Saul in addition to being privately anointed by Samuel had been publicly chosen by lot at Mizpah. After the election Samuel, pointing to Saul who stood among the people higher than any of them from his shoulders and upward, said to the people, "See ye him whom the Lord has chosen." David's private anointing had not been followed by public election by lot in the presence of the tribes. And nowhere do we read of the seer making a public statement to the effect that the Lord had appointed David to rule in Saul's stead.

No statement of the kind was ever made by the seer. Neither he nor the Lord wanted the people to know. This is plain. First, in communicating to Saul his sentence of rejection, the Lord refrained from naming the neighbor to whom he had given the kingdom. These were Samuel's words, "The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine better than thou." Second, having provided Him a king among Jesse's sons, the Lord instructed the seer to go to Bethlehem that David might be anointed. But the seer was persuaded that, hearing of it, Saul would kill him. Saul would do just that. Accordingly, the Lord ordered His servant to shroud his mission in secrecy by taking a heifer and by saying to the Bethlehemites including Jesse and his sons, that he came to sacrifice to the Lord. Doubtless Jesse was the only one who witnessed the anointing. True, the statement does occur that "Samuel took a horn and anointed him in the midst of his brethren." However, the expression *in the midst of* is not equivalent to *in the presence of*.

But though David's private anointing was not followed by a public election by lot, though Samuel gave no publicity to the transaction in Bethlehem and to Saul's previous rejection, it soon became plain to all who had eyes to see and hearts to understand that Saul was rejected of God and that the Lord had chosen David for the royal authority. The evidence was there right before the people's eyes. The Spirit of God departed from Saul, ceased to qualify him for rule and theocratic warfare. An evil spirit of God troubled him and the result was that he lived out his days persecuting David; and he finally died a suicide in a war with the Philistines in which his whole army was routed and dispersed. As to David, having in private appointed him to the kingship, the Lord also immediately anointed him with His Spirit; the Lord raised him up by His Spirit. He endowed him with great courage by stirring up the gift of living faith that was in him. The Lord's work in David soon bore the astonishing fruit of his slaying the Philistine Goliath. God's work in David continued to bear fruit. While the decapitated, troubled and impenitent Saul sat in his house, hardening his heart, nursing his imaginary grievances, and devising always new ways and means for capturing David, whom he falsely accused of wanting to hurl him from his throne David as captain in Saul's army was fighting Philistines with remarkable success. For the Lord worked for him. Later, to escape Saul's wrath he fled to the wildernesses of Judah where with his band of four hundred he was a wall of defence to the shepherds of his fellow tribesmen who pastured their flocks in those regions. In this period he rescued Keilah against whom the Philistines were fighting and whose threshing floors they were robbing. His last great deed of valor prior to Saul's suicide was his routing the Amalekite hordes who were plundering southern Judah.

What remarkable evidence that the Lord had chosen David and had rejected Saul! Who could do those works except the Lord be with him? Seeing, Jonathan believed. Renouncing his claims to Saul's throne, he embraced David as his lord. Seeing, Abigail believed. For, in her own words, "My lord fighteth the battles of the Lord, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days." When Saul was dead, the belief that David must reign was general among David's own tribesmen. Coming to Hebron, they anointed him king.

As appears from the sequel, the belief that David must reign was general among the other tribes. But Abner did not believe. Contrary to his better convictions, certainly, he clave to the house of Saul and made Ishbosheth king, using as his argument it must be that Saul and not David was chosen king by lot and that therefore the report of Saul's rejection and of David's anointing in Bethlehem must be a rumor without any basis in fact. His making Ishbosheth

king was a high-handed act. It was his doing and not the people's. Their wishes were ignored.

It must be assumed that at the time of Saul's death and even before that time it was generally known that Saul had been rejected of God and that David had been anointed in Bethlehem. For Samuel would not fail to fully inform all those who came to him to hear the word of God. Abigail spake of the Lord's doing to David in the near future according to all the good that he spake unto him, such as establishing him on the throne and building him a sure house. From where her knowledge of the things of God, if not directly or indirectly from Samuel? David's success in arms in his wars with the heathen together with his integrity only and fully confirmed what she had heard of him.

Abner in his unbelief preindicated the unbelieving Jews of Christ's day. No man had witnessed Christ's anointing, His appointment to the office of Mediator of God's covenant. For it was an event of eternity; it had taken place in the sacred counsels of the Most High. Yet, how evident from His works that He came from God. But the Jews were unbelieving. Accordingly they demanded signs and more signs of His sending. "By what authority doest thou these things", they demanded to know over and over. And in their unbelief they ended with affixing Him to a cross.

Yet, however sinful, Abner's opposition to David could not be held against him as a crime, as rebellion against duly instituted theocratic authority. No prophet of God in God's name had publicly pronounced David king and commanded the nation to subject itself to his rule. David was not chosen by lot in the presence of the people. The tribe of Judah anointed him king but his authority still had to be established in the other tribes. Abner therefore was not a seditionist as was Absalom. He committed no treason in opposing David. If such had been his offence, David would have done wrong in covenanting with him; he would have been obliged to put him to death. In a word, Abner's opposition to David was not immoral in the sense of its being criminal; but it was thoroughly unspiritual, yet essentially not more unspiritual than Isaac's opposition to Jacob in the latter's capacity of God-ordained heir to the covenant promise. Eating of Esau's venison, Isaac loved Esau and would have bestowed upon him the blessing had the Lord through Jacob's fraud not intervened. In opposing Jacob Isaac was opposing Christ, and likewise Abner in his opposition to David. For to David God had sworn truth. Yet in spite of his previous opposition to David, Abner might still be a true believer. The sole question is whether he truly repented.

As the narrative in the sequel reveals, the evidence that David was chosen of God to rule over His people continued to accumulate before Abner's eyes. Hear-

ing of the arrival in Gibeon of Ishbosheth's army under Abner, David, having anticipated the attack and being therefore fully prepared, opposed a force under Joab. (Joab is here introduced for the first time. He was the son of David's sister Zeruijah,—1 Chronicles 11:16. Among the members of David's band he, no doubt, had ranked high as a warrior and leader of men. Else he would not now appear as the leader of David's forces). Going forth, Joab and his band met the hostile advancing company at the pool of Gibeon, where the two armies encamped opposite one another. Abner proposed to Joab that "the young men now arise, and play before us." This was agreeable to Joab. What was contemplated was not a game of arms for entertainment but a serious battle-play, a combat to the death between a few warriors put up by both sides in order that the contest might be decided without war on a large scale. So there arose and went over to some intermediate point twelve of each side. Rushing upon one another they seized every man his fellow by the head and thrust his sword in his opponent's side. It was a duel between individual warriors in which each two combatants fell together. "Wherefore that place was called *helkath hazzurim*, meaning, the field of the strong." Others translate, "The field of knives or edges".

As the single and bitter conflict had proved undecided, there was a general and fierce battle between the two armies, which issued in the defeat and flight of Abner. In the language of the text, "And there was a very sore battle that day: and Abner was beaten, and the men of Israel, before the servants of David." It was so much more evidence that David was the anointed of God and must reign over all Israel.

The scene that follows is one of pursuit in which the three nephews of David—Joab, and Abishai, and Asahel—are especially conspicuous. They were brothers, for the text describes them as sons of Zeruijah. Asahel was light of foot and is therefore compared to a roe. He pursued after Abner as purposed to slay him. He must have reasoned that opposition to David would die with Abner, he being the soul of it. Asahel pursued after Abner with remarkable singleness of purpose. "In going he turned not to the right hand nor to the left from following Abner." Warned, no doubt, that he was being followed, Abner looked behind him and saw that he had almost been overtaken by one whom he recognized as Asahel. He put to him the question, "Art thou Asahel?" Asahel returned answer, "I am," and in grim silence continued his pursuit. Abner tried to dissuade him, "Turn thee aside to thy right hand or to thy left, and lay thee hold on one of the young men, and take thee his armour," were his words to his pursuer. "Take his armour," that is, after slaying him. The address was

based, perhaps, on the supposition that Asahel was only anxious for the glory of making a prisoner. But Asahel was determined. Abner was just as determined to avoid, if possible, entering with Asahel into personal combat. For no doubt Asahel was unarmed with helmet and coat of mail. Besides, he was but a stripling as compared with Abner who was an experienced and seasoned warrior, and who must have been fully armed. Such a combat must needs issue in Asahel's defeat and death. But Abner did not want to kill him. So he said again to him, "Turn thee aside from following me; wherefore should I smite thee to the ground? how then should I hold up my face to Joab thy brother?" He did not want to make an enemy of Joab with whom he stood in friendly relation. Asahel, however, would not desist from pressing on Abner. Compelled to defend himself, Abner smote him, not with the front part of the spear but with the hinder part in the abdomen so that it came out behind in his back, and he fell dead on the spot. Asahel being David's nephew and brother to Joab, the death of the young hero caused a shock among all the people and besides a mourning among the servants of David. This is indicated by the phrase, "And it came to pass that as many as came to the place where Asahel fell down and died stood still."

By the death of Asahel new fuel had been added to the fires of zeal that burned in the bosoms of David's servants. It provided the pursuit with an additional motive—that of revenge. So the chase was continued with all the more violence. Joab and Abishai followed Abner until the setting of the sun, when they came to the hill of Ammah, where the pursuit ended. The precise description of the locality of the hill testifies to the genuineness of the narrative. The text states that it lied before Giah by the way of the wilderness of Gibeon. This wilderness lay east of Gibeon in the tribe of Benjamin. As is indicated by the narrative throughout, the children of Benjamin took a prominent position among the followers of Ishbosheth. As the nearest tribesmen they were most interested for his kingdom. It was therefore the children of Benjamin who now gathered themselves together from the scattering that had resulted from their defeat and flight into one body after Abner on the hill, their purpose being the protection of Abner and themselves. But the defeated and harrassed Abner has had enough of the conflict. He wanted it stopped. So he "called to Joab and said, Shall the sword devour ever?" Then he asked, "Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end?" The shame and tragedy of God's covenant people who ought to cherish the kindest regard for one another destroying themselves by internal conflict and thereby playing into the hands of the adver-

sary who even at that juncture was overrunning their land. But who had begun that unholy conflict! Abner's third question is a demand that Joab suspend hostilities immediately. These are his words, "How long shall it be then, ere thou bid the people return from following their brethren?" Joab affirms with an oath his willingness to cease hostilities without a victory. These are his words, "As God liveth, unless thou hast spoken, surely then in the morning the people would have gone up every man from his brother." (Such is the rendering in our English version. It agrees perfectly with the original text). There are two explanations of these words. 1. As the Lord liveth, hadst thou not spoken, that is, hadst thou not come with the proposition that the contest be decided by a duel between individual warriors, each man would have returned to his place already in the morning, we to Hebron and you to Mahanaim, and this war would not have ensued. According to this interpretation, Joab wanted Abner to understand that the blame of the war rested largely, if not exclusively, on him, and that therefore he was the one to whom he should be directing his rebukes and admonitions. It is undoubtedly true that Joab, being as he was under orders of David, would not have made the attack, had he not been provoked by Abner's proposition. It must be assumed that David had instructed him merely to protect the territory of Judah.

Yet, it is not likely that this is the correct interpretation. It does not harmonize with Abner's appeal, definitely with his third question, "How long shall it be then, ere thou bid the people return *from after their brethren*?" To which Joab replied, "Surely if hast not spoken . . . the people had gone up from his brother in the morning". The interpretation under consideration completely ignores the phrase *from after their brethren* and translates as if the text reads, "*returned to his place*". There is also this question: How could Joab under an oath declare that the battle would not have occurred? But it did now lay in his power to put an end to the conflict in answer to Abner's appeal.

The common interpretation is the better: 2) As God liveth, if thou hast not spoken about a truce, then surely in the morning the people would have gone up every man from his brother, that is, I did not intend to continue the battle indefinitely, but if you had not spoken, my purpose was to withdraw my troops not immediately but in the morning.

Joab kept him to his word. He blew "a trumpet, and all the people stood still, and pursued after Israel no more, neither fought they any more." To avoid the heat of the day, Abner and his men walked all that night through the plain. Passing over Jordan, they went through all Bithron—not a city but a district—and finally came to Mahanaim. When Joab had as-

sembled his forces for return, he held a muster in order to learn his loss. Only nineteen of David's servants were lacking and Asahel. Doubtless the nineteen included the twelve that fell in the single conflict. Ishbosheth's loss was much greater, "360 men dead". Departing, Joab and his company took Asahel with them and buried him in the sepulchre of his father in Bethlehem." They went the whole night thence and they came to Hebron at break of day."

So did Abner come to his place, beaten, he and his army. To what is the failure of his venture to be ascribed? To this that "Joab had in his army only veteran servants of David, tried by many severe battles and privation, while Abner led into battle the remains of the army that was beaten by the Philistines at Gilboa?" The cause lies deeper. The consciences of Abner and his party were evil. They were spiritually devitalized by the awareness of the sinfulness of their way. God was against them and they knew it by His testimony in their hearts in connection with the clear and copious evidence that David was the Lord's anointed and must reign over all Israel. Hence, they were defeated before they had set out on their ill-conceived venture.

Yet the war continued. "There was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David." This does not mean that there were pitched battles. But it does mean that the house of Saul continued hostile. But, as had to be expected, in this war "David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker." It lost prestige and consideration more and more. Its power diminished in its lack of courage and energy. Nothing was attempted against the Philistines, it must be assumed. Hence nothing was accomplished. Abner lost all interest. He saw that he had championed a lost cause. The conviction became strong in him that he had set out on a wrong and forbidden course.

David's prestige grew more and more. As appears from the text at verse 17 of chapter 3, the people in a'ways increasing numbers were asking for him. They wanted him as their king.

G. M. Ophoff.

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## READING THE BIBLE

Within this ample volume lies  
The mystery of mysteries;  
Happiest they of human race  
To whom their God has given grace,  
To read, to fear, to hope, to pray,  
To lift the latch, to force the way;  
And better had they ne'er been born  
That read to doubt, or read to scorn.

## SION'S ZANGEN

### Liefdevol, Schoon Zwaar Getergd

(Psalm 106; Derde Deel)

Met een sterke hand en met een uitgebreide arm had Jehovah Zijn volk uit Egypte uitgeleid. De kinderen Israels waren droogvoets door een zee gekomen, en de goddelooze Egyptenaren, dat ook beproevende, zijn vergaan. En de kinderen Israels zijn toen aan 't zingen gegaan. Eerst hebben de mannen gezongen, en ik verzeker U, dat het een schoon lied is. Leest het lied in Exodus 15. Leest het, en ge zult opmerken, dat het een klankgeslacht heeft, dat vreemd aandoet. In deze hoerige eeuw waarin we leven spreekt men anders van God, dan men deed bij de Schelfzee. Daar had men het over den brandenden toorn Gods over de goddeloozen, en over de grenzelooze liefde voor Zijn volk. Dat verstond Mozes en het overblijfsel in Egypte.

Maar vandaag?

Ik heb iemand vandaag (en dan bedoel ik het vandaag van de dagen der jaren mijns levens) hooren zeggen: jullie Protestantsche Gereformeerden worden altijd welsprekend wanneer het gaat over de verdoemenis der goddeloozen! Ja, aan de overzijde heeft men veel meer medelijden met den mensch, dat is waar. Maar vanwege de overmaat van medelijden voor den mensch moet het medelijden voor God ingeboet worden. Men heeft meer te doen met den mensch die tot in eeuwigheid vergaat, dan met de deugden Gods die vertrapt worden en om wraak roepen.

Mozes heeft geen medelijden met den mensch als de eer Gods op het spel staat. Dan zal hij zelfs zingen van den brandenden toorn die over de godvergetenen is uitgestort. Dan zal hij het telkens weer herhalen, dat God het paard en zijn ruiters verdronken heeft in de Schelfzee.

En als gij eerlijk wilt zijn, dan zult ge toestemmen, dat Mozes zingt vanwege het verderf der goddeloozen vanuit het motief der liefde Gods. Hij mag het gaarne zien, dat de goddelooze Egyptenaar verdrinkt, want daardoor komt het recht en de gerechtigheid tot openbaring. En dat God regeert en wonderen doet.

En de positieve reden van hun gezang is de verlossing van het volk. Luistert, en ik zal een vers overnemen uit het gezang van Mozes en het Lam: "Gij leidt door Uwe weldadigheid dit volk dat Gij verlost hebt, Gij voert ze zachtens door Uwe sterkte tot de lieflijke woning Uwer heiligheid." Is het niet hemelsch in zijn heerlijkheid?

O ja, toen geloofden zij aan Zijne woorden, zij zongen Zijn lof!

En toen de mannen uitgezongen waren om te zin-

gen van het eeuwige wonder van Gods gena, toen zeide Mirjam: Komt, vrouwen Israels, komt en laat ons de mannen antwoorden in het lieflijk gezang den Heere. En zij namen de trommelen en zongen de refreinen van de groote verlossing: Hij heeft het paard en zijn ruiters in de Roode Zee verdronken!

Maar och arme!

"Doch zij vergaten haast Zijne werken, zij verbeidden Zijnen raad niet; maar zij werden belust met lust in de woestijn, en zij verzochten God in de wildernis."

Is het niet om bij te weenen?

Ja, weent slechts, doch vergeet niet, dat dit thema herhaald wordt door alle eeuwen heen tot in Uw eigen leven. Zoo staat het er bij met elk kind van God. De Heere komt en herschept ons, en wij worden bewust Zijn kind. Hij zegent en Hij zegent en Hij zegent, zoodat wij mogen groeien en bloeien in de voorhoven onzes Gods. En daar zingen wij. Doch wij vergeten Hem die ons gemaakt heeft. Dat doen wij iederen dag. Dat doen wij ieder oogenblik. Dat zullen wij doen totdat geen zon meer schijnt. Dat gedoe is het vreeselijke monster dat zonde geheeten wordt.

Men zou zeggen: Nu zal God hen ook vergeten tot in eeuwigheid. Maar neen, dat doet Hij niet. Leest den titel boven dit stukje, en de andere stukjes, en ge hebt het antwoord: Liefdevol, dat is, Hij is vol van liefde voor Zijn volk, en het is de liefde Gods, en die is eeuwig. Die liefde kan nooit vergeleken worden bij onze liefde, want die is doodelijk zwak en veranderlijk. Maar Gods liefde is eeuwig. Schoon zwaar getergd. Was het geen tergen Gods om die groote wonderen Gods bij de schelfzee te vergeten?

Zij verbeidden Zijn raad niet.

Verbeiden is verwachten, ergens naar uitzien of het ook komen mocht, verlangend wachten voor iets. In dit geval dat iets is de raad Gods over hen.

Het is onze roeping om elken morgen bij het ontwaken te zeggen: Wat heeft de Heere met mij voor vandaag? Wat moet ik doen? Waarhenen wilt Gij mij leiden, O God? Wat heeft Uw raad te zeggen voor mij en voor mijn leven dezen dag? Dan wandelt men met God. En dan is men zalig. Zoo, en niet anders, leven de troon-geesten in den hemel. Die weten, dat Gods Raad de oorsprong is van al hun doen en laten. En daarom is hun aangezicht altijd gekeerd tot den troon: Heere, wat moet er nu geschieden? Zalig leven!

Zulk leven is zalig want dan wordt men vol van God, dan wordt men godvruchtig.

Het tegenovergestelde lezen we nu; zij werden belust met lust in de woestijn. Leest Numeri 11:4 en ge zult leeren wat die lust was. Ze zetten hun ziel meer op vleesch, de visschen, komkommers, pompoezen, ajuinen en knoflook dan op God. Dat was de lust van dit volk in de woestijn.

En let wel, zoo is het met Gods volk van alle eeuwen. Zoo zijn we allen geneigd om de aarde en de aardische dingen te verkiezen boven de gemeenschap der liefde en der vriendschap van Gods trouwverbond.

En dan gaan wij God verzoeken. Dat is het klagen, het murmureeren, het uitdagend vragen tot God. Dat kan soms ver gaan. Ook vandaag brengt ge dat tot uiting in Uw wrevel als de dingen niet loopen zooals gij het gaarne hebben zoudt. Dan schijnt het alsof ge het tegen den mensch hebt, maar eigenlijk doet ge niet anders dan God verzoeken. Ge zegt: Dat ellendige ding! Die vervelende kerel! Dat dit of dat net nu moet komen! O, waarom kan het niet zoo of zoo!? Dat zegt ge, maar daar achter zit verzoeken van God. Daar achter zit de zonde dat ge Zijn raad zekerlijk niet verbeidt. Ge hebt lusten die aardisch, natuurlijk, duivelsch zijn. En wij moesten ons schamen. Geen wonder, dat Daniel, als hij met God te doen krijgt zegt, bij ons is beschaming des aangezichts!

En toen is er iets vreeselijks gebeurd!

Want we lezen verder: "Toen gaf Hij hun hunne begeerte, maar Hij zond aan hunne zielen eene magerheid."

Het is in één woord vreeselijk als de Heere onze verkeerde begeerte ons geeft. Want dan komt er magerheid over onze ziel. En de ziel is veel meer belangrijk dan het lichaam.

Zeg nu, dat ge al de visschen, het vleesch; de komkommers, de pompoenen, de ajuinen en het knoflook hebt; kunt ge daarmee Uwe ziel voeden? Uwe ziel kent maar één voedsel en dat eene is God.

En zoo kwam er magerheid over de zielen van Israel.

Een van de resultaten van die magerheid is ons hier geboekstaafd: "En zij benijdden Mozes in het leger, en Aaron, den heilige des Heeren."

Als we ons voeden willen met de aardische dingen, dan worden we stekeblind voor God en goddelijke dingen. Dan zien we de juiste verhoudingen niet meer. Dan zeggen we op den duur: wat moet die ouderling toch? Wil die man mij regeeren? Ben ik zelf niet een kind Gods, ken ik God niet en ken ik Zijn wil niet? Wat zou die ouderling van God met mij willen? En men benijdt dien ouderling die tot mij komt in 's Heeren Naam.

Want dat is de geschiedenis. Men benijdde Mozes in het leger. Let wel, in het leger. In de sfeer van zijn ambt. Mozes was aangesteld met regeeringsmacht en Aaron met de heiligheid des Heeren.

En men had eenvoudig te luisteren en dat was al. Want God sprak door Mozes en zong Zijn lied der liefde door Aaron. Want Aaron was een priester. En het hart van de idee van den priester is liefde.

Maar men benijdde hen.

Dat beteekent dat men God niet zag achter die twee mannen.

En het beteekent ook, dat men niet eens zag, dat al het doen en laten van die twee mannen was tot hun heil. Het toont de groote domheid van den natuurlijke mensch: "Door domheid voortgedreven!" Ja, en dat zijn wij. Niet een uitgezonderd.

En nu zal de Heere een toonbeeld van Zijn toorn over de zonde geven. Er komen nu angstige dingen.

"De aarde opende zich en verslond Dathan, en overdekte de vergadering Abirams; en een vuur brandde onder hunne vergadering, eene vlam stak de goddeloozen aan brand."

Dat zijn angstige dingen.

Korach, Dathan en Abiram zijn de vertegenwoordigers der verworpenen die altijd onder en met Gods volk verkeerden. En als het den verkeerden kant opgaat met Gods ware volk, dan gaan die verworpenen vooraan en geven stuur en richting aan de rebellie in Gods gemeente. En vanwege de verzoeking der vleeschelijke lusten gaat het ware volk van God soms een eindweegs mee met die vervloekten. Totdat Mozes in den Naam des Heeren riep: "Wijkt toch af van de tenten dezer goddelooze mannen, en roert niets aan van hetgeen dat het hunne is, opdat gij niet misschien verdaan wordt in alle hunne zonden." (Num. 16:26)

De verdelging der goddeloozen in het leger der kerk is een waarschuwing voor het ware volk. Dan slaat ons de schrik om het hart: zoo zou de Heere rechtvaardiglijk met mij ook kunnen doen! Want ook wij zijn Hem wederspannig geweest.

Maar Hij is liefdevol voor Israel.

Het was de liefde Gods voor de uitverkorenen dat Korach, Dathan en Abiram levend ter helle zijn gevaren. Hij geeft van alle eeuwen volken in de plaats van Israel. De verwerping dient de verkiezing.

Angstige dingen!

Want in de verbranding van de vergadering dier goddelooze mannen hebben we een prediking der hel, der vlammen die nooit uitgebluscht zullen worden, maar branden zullen tot in alle eeuwigheid.

Angstig! En weet ge waarom?

Omdat die vlammen niet anders zijn dan de reactie der zelfliefde van den DrieEenigen God!

Maar ook schoon en liefelijk.

Want in de verderving dier goddelooze mannen komt de Heere tot mij om mij te waarschuwen, om mij terug te roepen van het verkeerde pad, om mij naar huis te leiden tot bede tot dank.

O God! Blijf ons trekken totdat wij allen thuis zijn, daarboven bij God.

Dan zullen wij verzadigd worden met de deugden Gods. Dan geen magerheid meer, maar dan 't vette van Uw Huis gesmaakt!

Gedenkt het ten allen tijde: Hij is de Liefdevolle Heiland, schoon zwaar getergd! Het is tot openbaring Zijner eeuwige deugden!

G. Vos.



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## IN HIS FEAR

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### Training For Life's Calling

*Training in the History Class. (continued)*

*"Walk about Zion, and go round about her:  
tell the towers thereof.*

*Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her  
palaces;*

*That ye may tell it to the generation following.*

*For this God is our God for ever and ever.*

*He will be our guide even unto death.*

With these words does the Psalmist in Psalm 48 conclude his song of praise to God. And that most beautifully expresses the calling of the *Christian* school as well as of the church. While the Christian school is dealing with the history of the world, the above truth cannot be ignored without that school loosing the first six letters of its name. And we care not at all for an "Ian school". If we cannot put the Christ there and make it a Christian school, we must not be so deceptive as still to call it a Christian school. Christ and His Church are inseparable. Therefore in the history class must nations and men be judged according to the position they have taken against Christ and His Church, as we remarked last time, but ever and again must the child also be shown in the history class whenever possible that all history is for the benefit of the church. The covenant child in the Christian school must never be left in doubt as to how and where the history of the world will end. He must not be deceived into expecting the Utopia of which the world formerly spoke so enthusiastically and still does but now with feeble hope. Nor must he be terror-struck with the present day pessimism of unbelief according to which man is resigned to the end of civilization and to oblivion. Oblivion is a mighty strange word for the glorious kingdom of Christ which is the real end of the history of this world. And even in the midst of that last terrible battle of Armageddon, which must yet come, the child of God should be taken for a walk about Zion, should have her towers counted, the strength of her bulwarks pointed out to him and the beauty of her palaces declared.

The way history is taught in the worldly schools there is and can be no room for the return of Christ as the climax of all history. And if there ever was a time when that fact of the return of Christ, not only in judgment but also for the glory of His church should be emphasized, that time is now. There is now, as never before, so much that would tend and

is used to turn our minds from that blessed truth. God forbid that when our children are taught the history of this world they should receive the impression that the nations of the world which hate Christ and His Church should be extolled and lauded and that they are after all anything more than the chaff which serves the wheat, the scaffold which serves the erection of that glorious temple of God, His Church. But that is repeatedly done in that which calls itself "Christian school". But properly, the purpose of God, the plan of God should ever be kept before the mind of God's covenant child in the history class and whenever possible the particular event should be shown in its relation to that end.

This, of course, does not mean that the history class in a Christian school becomes a course in Ecclesiology or Eschatology. It does not and must not become a dogmatics class which specializes in teaching the doctrine of the church and of the last things. But the thing that is required is that somewhere in the history class a few choice remarks in regard to these things should be made. In some historical events a direct bearing can be seen on the Church of God. Always, of course, the Church is benefited by historical events, but not always in the same way. Note point "b" under "2" of the principles we submitted before. We quote it here again, "Nations are born, they rise up, develop and fall at the word of God's power. They are given power by God (Dan. 5:18). They live out of the principle of sin (Dan. 5:20), attain many-sided developments and come to great riches, as for example Babylon and Greece and the Antichristian kingdom of Rev. 18:10-17. Through all these God also sets forth and forward the cause of His Church in this world, but along that way comes also the fulfilled power of the Antichristian kingdom." We repeat and underscore the first part of that last sentence, "*Through all these God sets forth and forward the cause of His Church.*" The towers and bulwarks of Zion are always intact, and that is how history ought to be taught in the Christian school. The purpose and plan of God revealed in the Scriptures must be shown in connection with the history lesson, but the *absolute* certainty of its realization should also be stressed at every opportunity.

The persecutions the Church has undergone have rid it of dead timber but also have helped to spread the Church geographically to the serving of the gathering of all its elect members from the nations, tongues, and tribes of this earth. The inventions of such things as the printing press, the radio, that swift means of transportation, the plane, hurdling mountains and jungles, (the extensive development of this last mentioned invention occasioned by the last World War) have all served the church. And never forget that both World Wars served the Church. The last one

more clearly than the former served the coming of the Antichrist, but also in that very way served the Church of Christ and His glorious return. The printing press served not only for the distribution of the Scriptures but serves also in the multiplication and spread of copies of the truth as the Spirit led the church fathers into the doctrines of God's Word and serves in the preservation of these thoughts of their study for the ages that followed. The radio, the modern ocean liner, the speedy plane, all serve the feet of them that preach the glad tidings of salvation to the four corners of the earth. The discovery of this country was used by God to set forth and forward the cause of His Church. He provided a haven for the preservation and development of His Church. Certain kings and nations protected the church, and the doctrine developed. Whether they did it in faith or unbelief is besides the point here. Their works must be judged by the Word of God, but regardless of what the motive of their attitude to the church was, in and through it God set forth and forward His Church. And should not the covenant child, who belongs to that church and who is constantly being served by the world, even though the world knows it not and does not deliberately do so, be informed of these things? He should. Take him for a walk around Zion's towers and bulwarks. Show him Zion's palaces. There they still stand after all the onslaughts of all the ages! And why should they not? God's eternal plan calls for a glorious Church in Christ. And all events in history are subservient to that plan. History is not something that God finds and then uses to realize His Church. History is not something against which God must constantly pit His strength and wisdom lest that which He promised in Christ be not fulfilled. He does not use history. He determines it. He planned it eternally, every single event of it, in His eternal counsel. Let the history teacher prepare the lesson in the light of Art. 13 of the Belgic Confession, and the covenant child will not be misled by historical fact. Let me jot down a few of the expressions we read there: "Nothing happens in this world without His appointment. . . . He executes and orders His work in the most excellent and just manner, even then, when devils and wicked men act unjustly. . . ." Historical events have their appointment from God.

And He planned it all for the realization of that glorious Church in Christ. Let the Christian school teacher have this fact in mind when preparing the history lesson. And let the teacher also strive to find the particular way in which an event serves the Church if possible. It will take time and effort, but God's covenant child requires this presentation. The effort put forth is never vain in the Lord, and the blessedness of teaching in a Christian school is that we behold our works as prospered by the Spirit bearing

fruit, and we see our children beginning to observe Zion's palaces and beginning to count her towers.

By all means, let the Christian school teacher refrain from trying to interest God's covenant child in the kingdom of the Antichrist. We will indeed have to take our children by the hand in the history class and cause them to stand before that image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. We will have to point out the glory of that kingdom of gold. We will have to show them the kingdom's of silver and brass, iron and clay. We will have to point out where the one exceeds in beauty and wealth in natural things and the other in greater strength of organization and the arm of flesh. But we will have to stand foursquare on the Word of God when we show their culture, art, civilization, organization and all the rest. We will have to remind our children of the truth of Hebrews 11:6 that "without faith it is impossible to please God", and that therefore God's wrath is upon it all even though in and through it all He sets forth and forward the cause of His Church. Tubal Cain, that wicked descendant of Cain and of Lamech, had to be the artificer in brass and iron, for the cross of Christ needed the nails which pierced His hands and feet and let forth His precious blood. His work did not proceed from true faith. And without faith he did not please God. But God most surely had the cross of Christ in mind when this historical event of man's progress in metals and their craft received its appointment from Him. So we could go on. So we must present history to God's child. We will have to show what men achieved. We will have to take them to stand not only before Babylon the head of gold, Persia, Greece and Rome but also before England, Germany, France, Russia, China, Japan and the United States of America. But we do not fulfill our task unless we remind them that all these perish—as history also has shown—but that there is one kingdom growing quietly and steadily which will presently fill the whole earth according to the purpose of the Almighty God.

Especially today should the child and can the child be taught more clearly than ever before that the kingdoms of this world are heading for the kingdom of the Antichrist. Their culture, wealth, progress in science and industry, just exactly because without faith they cannot in these please God, are employed in the erection of the kingdom of the beast. Let us not try to deceive God's children. Unbelief and the works apart from faith cannot produce Christ's kingdom, they must always serve the kingdom of darkness. God's child must have his attention focussed on the temple God is building, and he should be shown as much as is possible in the history class that God is fulfilling His counsel which decrees a glorified Church on the new earth at and through Christ's return.

Thus we can train our children for life's calling to

seek that kingdom of Christ. Thus we can warn them against the deceptiveness of the Antichristian kingdom. Thus we can instruct them that Jerusalem and Athens must not be united in wedlock. Thus we can train them to be alert for the wolf who comes in sheep's clothing. Then they can be trained to exercise their heavenly citizenship on this present earth, walking obediently, rendering honor and fear where they are due, but ever looking for the kingdom of Christ.

J. A. Heys.

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## PERISCOPE

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### *Dramatic Fever—5.*

From the "Calvin College Chimes" of October 28 we quote the following:

"The Chimes hereby humbly but unequivocally requests the authorities of Calvin College to reconsider Calvin's rule against the movies. That such a rule should never have been made in the first place, that it is now already too long since it should have been revised, and that it is not consistent Calvinism, is obvious. Furthermore, the amount of good it has accomplished is negligible, and is more than nullified by the stultifying position in which it has placed all Calvinists.

"We insist that the motion picture—that drama—is not evil, that instead it is a gift of God which He intended that we use to His glory. Calvin teaches drama, e.g., Shakespeare, in its classrooms; it has a Thespians Club, which turns out dramatic productions, and it has just recently begun to recognize the tremendous value of movies for educational purposes.

"But we insist that at least 95 percent of Hollywood productions are not worthwhile seeing; (Examples of the very few that are worthwhile are David Copperfield, Abraham Lincoln, Over the Hill, I Remember Mama, The Yearling, and Lawrence Oliver's Shakespearean productions.) that they are saturated with crime and sex, that they present the extremes as though they are the norm, that they reek with emotion and sentimentality, and as such give an entirely distorted picture of life. . . .

"Knowing the evil that is being disseminated thru the motion picture today, and realizing the good that it could accomplish, we Calvinists—Calvinist, mind you—turn away our heads, condemn the motion picture per se, thus making it impossible for us to take constructive, vigorous action to improve their quality.

How ridiculous! We may as well make a rule against voting on November 2 because politics is corrupt and politicians lead offensive lives!

"What we Calvinists must do is give leadership to the scattered fight now being waged for an improvement in the quality of motion pictures. The catholics have done some good, and much sound criticism has come from movie reviewers, etc. But we need a force with deep, moral integrity that can give impetus and power to this currently weak drive against Hollywood's dramatic drivel. That force obviously, is Calvinism. What we need is to put that force into action, but denouncing the motion picture—regardless of how it is used, not only enervates but virtually nullifies any program for sound, constructive action.

"To repeat, Chimes wishes the authorities to reconsider the decision against worldly amusements; to give a clear, intelligent understanding of what constitutes "worldliness"; and to eliminate the clause <sup>there</sup> against theatre attendance. It hopes that the Board of Trustees will do so at its next meeting next February, and if they feel that the final decision does not rest with them, to take the problem to Synod next June and let them do what must be done."

In how far this editorial expression in "Chimes" is the individual expression of the author and in how far it represents the thought and sentiments of the student-body in general, I do not know. And again in how far the expression of "Chimes" is under the control and guidance of the faculty of Calvin College, I do not know. That this can hardly be the voice of a lone individual however becomes plain when we read the rest of "Chimes" as well as by the confident, I would almost say belligerent tone of the entire article.

When we read this article we thought immediately: "A fruit of 'Common Grace'?" and then: "But isn't this an inevitable fruit and the logical consequence of the 'Decisions on Worldly Amusements'?" Of this we quote the following: "The question may be asked whether the theater *as such* is a sinful institution. The answer depends on whether acting, particularly professional acting, is necessarily sinful. Is acting as such sin? Is it always sin to give or witness a dramatic performance? Your Committee feels quite safe in declaring that no ground for an affirmative answer can be found in the Bible. . . ." (Page 27). And again: "But what shall we say about the so-called *good plays*? It cannot be denied that a few plays, taken by themselves, apart from the evil cause which they are made to serve, the actors who present them, and the environment where they are shown, are unobjectionable; and that some Christian people see no wrong in viewing them. Is this morally defensible? Your Committee is of the opinion that he who takes this stand toward the theatre is, in spite of the fact that he may take it conscientiously, on *dangerous*

ground. . . . We believe that the safest course to pursue is the way of total abstinence." (Notice that here is no principal condemnation of acting.)

And what shall we say? Certainly a Calvinism that seeks for a closer and closer contact with the world, and that exactly in the sphere of amusements is a strange substitute for that which is historically Calvinism. And once again the general principle may well be repeated; that anything which has the tendency to break down the walls of separation and obliterate the lines of demarcation between the Church and the world is to be condemned. We must hate even the "garments spotted by the flesh".

One more thought arises: Calvin is the primary training ground of our Christian School teachers. There is also a close though unofficial relation between the National Union of Christian Schools and Calvin College. If this tendency continues and if it is indicative of a trend what is the future of our Schools?

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#### *How Far Are We From Persecution?*

Repeatedly it has been and is being stated that the time may soon be here in which persecution for Christ's sake may once again assume a more violent form. And in view of the rapidly increasing and intensified signs the church may well take heed.

But from a slightly different point of view this question, "How far are we from persecution?" may be answered, "Only some hundreds of miles are we from persecution."

And we quote from the November issue of Moody Monthly.

"The fires of persecution still burn in Mexico. . . .

"We have just read in one of our esteemed colleagues (El Heraldo Mexicano) some documents in which brethren from a town of the state of Veracruz give notice to the proper authorities. . . . how they were attacked with firearms by fanatical Romanists while celebrating a religious service, three of the congregation being killed and various wounded.

"Also in El Tiempo, one of the best read magazines of the republic, we find the news of the attack on the Christmas of Rio Verde, S.L.P., at a time when they were meeting in a special service of worship and praise to God. To the ringing of the bells and the shouts of the priest from the pulpit, a mob composed of men and women rushed upon the church, destroying a part of it and wounding several brethren, among them a North American, Brother Halliday.

"From all parts of the country, in these last seven or eight years. . . . there are constantly reaching the capitol of the republic the saddest, most bitter and sorrowful reports of evangelical Christians assassinated with impunity, of churches attacked with fire or stones, of persecutions of groups of believers to force them to emigrate from the smaller towns."

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From the Banner of October 29 we quote the following:

#### *"Who Are Your Friends?"*

"One of the clearest marks of genuine spirituality is a strong desire for fellowship with Christian friends, preferably those of our own faith. . . .

"One of the most perilous forms of worldliness is worldly friendship. It is not less destructive than following after worldly entertainment, for it is sure to lead to dangerous compromises and to base denials of the Lord who bought us with his precious blood . . .

"James knew the peril of close social connections on the part of believers with those who do not love the truth. Therefore he says, bluntly and uncompromisingly: "Ye adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" Spiritual adultery! Enmity with God! Nothing less than that!

"Worldly friendship is usually symptomatic of spiritual disease. When in days of prosperity Christians begin to climb the social ladder, the "pride of life" may fasten its tentacles on their souls. Sometimes members of the church begin to seek their associated among the "nice" people of the world because they have become too important in their own eyes to associate with the less "cultured" fellow-members. But as they sacrifice the indispensable benefits of spiritual fellowship with Christian friends, and make increasingly serious compromises with their faith for the sake of pleasing worldly companions, they lose interest in the church, and their religious life deteriorates; their faith declines, their worship becomes irregular, their hearts turn cold. . . ."

Rev. J. Howerzyl.

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Begin the day with God:  
Kneel down to Him in prayer;  
Lift up thy heart to His abode,  
And seek His love to share.