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MEDITATION

The Raising of Lazarus

"And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth." —John 11:43

The scene is laid at Bethany, that small village where three of the most beloved of Christ's disciples lived: Lazarus, Mary and Martha. What wondrously blessed mortals! even the common crowd knew that Jesus loved them. He would often resort to that quiet home, and while the Saviour talked Mary would sit down at His feet and drink in the words of life as they fell from the Redeemer's lips. Martha might be busy with much serving, Mary had chosen the best part: she would constantly drink from the Fountain of living water. Of Lazarus we know little, but that little is as precious as the diamond: Jesus calls him His friend and He loved him more than others.

While Jesus is about a day's journey from Bethany, a messenger appears who brings the sad tidings that Lazarus is sick. Notice the sweet diplomacy of the messenger; he does not say: Lord, Lazarus is sick! No, he says: Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick! Surely, Jesus will hurry to the side of that sick-bed, speak words of that wonderful, heavenly, Divine power—and Lazarus will arise from his sick-bed. Did He not heal thousands? And now His own particular friend is sick! No doubt, the Lord will hasten to Bethany. Let us hurry, John, Peter, James, all of you, my friends: Lazarus is sick!

But no, the Lord turns Himself to the messenger and speaks words that are intended for a message to the anxious sisters: This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby! And with these words the man may return to Bethany.

What follows now would be puzzling to us if we

did not know the glorious conclusion. We read: Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When He had heard therefore that he was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was! It is the very opposite of what we expect Jesus to do. He loves them and therefore He will not hurry to the sickbed of His beloved friend.

But when we remember who Jesus is, all difficulties are solved. Jesus is God and knows all things. He knew what He would do. Lazarus must die first, indeed, the messenger found him dead when he returned. Moreover, Lazarus must not only die first, he must be in the grave four days so that decomposition may set in. This is going to be the greatest of the Saviour's miracles, if we except His own resurrection from the dead. Therefore He abode two more days in the place where He was.

When the two days are spent, He says to His disciples: Come, let us go to Judea again.

And those simple souls, who saw so little of the heavenly vision at this stage of their life with Jesus, are filled with evil forebodings: Lord, the Jews will kill you! They had interpreted the Lord's stay, even after He knew that Lazarus was sick, to be fear of the Jews. How little they knew Jesus or the plan and counsel of God! Jesus knew that, although His hour was approaching when He would be crucified and die, at this stage He still had work to do. The Jews could not take Him until all His work was finished. And even then Jesus would force the issue contrary to the plans of the Jews. In the night when Judas betrayed Him, He would force the issue and say to Judas: Judas, now is the time: that which thou doest, do it quickly. And Judas went out into the night to do his devilish work. Always remember, Jesus is God, and God is not hurried! Even when the Divine Christ is going to hell and damnation for His sheep He will not be hurried. All things happen according to plan. Devils, wicken men and angels, yes, and also His wav-

ering and offended disciples all have their work to do in this drama of the Son of God.

Therefore, Christ is in no hurry now. He knew what He was about to do.

They arrive in Bethany and learn that Lazarus is dead. The disciples knew it already. Before starting on their journey the Lord spoke openly and said: Lazarus is dead. And Jesus was glad for the sake of His people. He said as much: "And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent that ye may believe: nevertheless let us go unto him! Jesus is the Godman who gives Divine answers on earth. Hallelujah!

Yes, Lazarus is dead. Four days dead and buried.

Well, that is the end, is it not? The end of all human action and earthly endeavor! As long as our loved ones live, doctors, medicine (and of the best!), sympathy, self-discipline, even prayers of a kind. But death is the end of all. A few tears, a few spades of dirt, a hole in the ground, a sigh that rends the heart and on we go. A few more wrinkles in our faces and perhaps the same in our hearts, but the riddles of life increase. Even the mourners that wail in the house of the dead have an air of finality.

And the thoughts of the heart may sometimes think on the cold grave, the earth, the horrible aftermath of malodorous effluvium. In a moment we will hear something of that out of the mouth of Martha. Ever careful Martha!

But Lazarus is dead, Lord. O, Master! Why did we not stay away, this day's journey? Have we need to hear lamenting for the dead?

And Martha hastened to the Lord. Mary was in the inner room, crying. She is the meditative kind. She had not heard of the Saviour's approach. Later she hears and also quickly runs to Jesus. And both have the same heart-rending story to tell, so brief, so poignant: Lord, if Thou hadst been here, our brother had not died.

For both sisters there is a wonderful message, even though they did not understand the full import of it. That message is the most important part in this whole plan of salvation: "I am the Resurrection and the Life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die!" Now, Martha, Mary: believest thou this? Well, Martha, to whom it was directly addressed, did not grasp the full import of this word, but she knew enough of Jesus and His wonderful essence to say: Yes, Lord, I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.

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And this conversation takes place before the mir-

acle of the raising of Lazarus. How divinely correct! Physical death, such as Martha had seen in Lazarus, her brother, was but a meager manifestation of that other, that greater death which is called spiritual death, later destined to be called the second death or eternal death, is the full name of the monster which holds the human race in its jaws from the cradle to the grave. Of that monster we see a little in the manifestation of physical death.

Death is conflict, a fight between God and His image bearer. Hence, spiritual death is hatred against God, and, conversely, it is the wrath of God against and over man. That fight is fought also in the body of man. When you see a man, first youthful and strong, in the vigor of his early years, it is not so very evident. But come with me to the sick-chamber, to the clinic and the hospital. There you see more clearly: there is a fight on. God says incessantly from the heavens: Return to destruction, O man! And he fades away and dies! A story which is repeated a million, million times. Returned to destruction we are and returned to the earth whence we came.

But that is only the smallest part of death. To our natural hatred against God, the Lord sayeth: Return, ye children of men! And they die the second, the eternal death in a grave that is called hell, the place prepared for the devil and his angels.

That is the reason why the Lord will instruct His own, even Martha and Mary: I am the Resurrection and the Life! Believe on Me and you will rise from your grave, be it earthly and physical, or spiritual and eternal. I am He who will save you all, my children, from hell and the grave, from the devil and the curse, from horror and eternal desolation. Believest thou, Martha?

Yes, Lord, but let us hurry to tell Mary. And Martha will return with her sister. Jesus has told them that He will see the last resting place of His friend.

The company of wailing friends and relatives will follow in their steps.

It is not far, the rocky sepulchres are nearing to the eye of friend and foe.

But while Jesus and His company of friends with the Jews near the sepulchre, a curious thing happens. It has given rise to many and ingenious explanations. It is this: when Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews also weeping, which came with her, He was angered in the spirit and troubled Himself. For so you must read the text. In passing I may testify to you that practically all agree to that. I may even point you to the only other times that this word is used in the New Testament. It is used in three other places, no more. Twice the word is used when Jesus

"straightly charged" men to say nothing of the miracle He had performed on them, and once it is used to indicate "murmuring" when people meant it as a rebuke against the use of costly ointment in the anointing of Jesus. And you will find in the margin of the revised version the word translated: He was moved with indignation. The three other places referred to are: Matt. 9:30; Mark 1:43; and Mark 14:5.

The question is: what moved Jesus to indignation so that He troubled Himself? In verse 38 we find the same expression. The answer is easy if we take into account the simple reading of the text: He is angered, says the text, because of the wailing or weeping of the Jews who wept with Mary. The Jews were those persons who did not believe on Him. And constantly John uses that term to denote the enemies of Jesus. Well, when Jesus saw the horrible mixture of Mary's heartbroken grief on the one hand, and the hypocritical wailing of the Jews on the other hand, He was angered and shuddered, as it were, from such evil. The anger and the shuddering was directed at those Jews who presently will be tale-bearers to the Sanhedrin so that they can conspire to slay Jesus.

But toward Mary and Martha in their terrible grief He has nothing but sweet compassion. For now follows that wonderful verse which is as short as it is dear to the heart of God's children: "Jesus wept." There is a tender difference in the two words that are used. Of Mary and the multitude there is a word used which means: to lament, that is, audible weeping. But in verse 35 we read: Jesus burst into tears. He wept silently. O, you may be sure that angels flew to gather those precious tears of Jesus. It shows how He is filled with real human, pure and loveable compassion for the object of His love in misery.

But the devil will have his due. Listen to some of these Jews: "Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?" That speech reeks of sulphur and hell. Imagine such speech after the three years' sojourn with all the manifestations of His Divinity! It shows the hardness of our natural hearts. Therefore, again the Lord is angered within His innermost soul.

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We have arrived at the grave.

Jesus gives the command to remove the stone which covered the opening of the grave. But Martha recoils from the idea that her brother's corpse, already partly decomposed and reeking with the result of malodorous putrefaction, will be exposed to the view of all this crowd: No, Lord, he is dead four days!

But Jesus insists. The stone is removed and the Lord lifts up His eyes to heaven. He will audibly thank His God and Father who alone doeth wondrous things. I thank Thee Father! And, Father, I thank Thee openly and audibly so that all may hear and know that it is Thou who givest Me the answer to my inmost prayers.

And then with a loud voice: "Lazarus, come forth!"

And he that was dead arose. He struggles to a sitting, a standing position and walking cumbrously, with halting steps because of the raiment of the dead, there stands Lazarus. The odour of the dead has disappeared. He lives and breathes. I fondly think that his eyes rested first of all on Jesus. Take away those wrappings of the dead and let him go. He knows his dwelling!

There is the simple story. But the whole plan of salvation is hidden in the history of this raising of the dead.

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Honestly, frankly now, is it not foolish to stand near the dead, reeking body and say: Come forth!? Would any man ever attempt it? He is *dead*. We would be inclined to say to Jesus: Stop such foolish crying as though the dead would hear!

Ah! But this is Jesus, that is, Jehovah Salvation! Therein you have the answer. And so this Jesus stands near our dead souls in our natural state where we always and continually say to God: Depart from me: I have no pleasure in Thy ways, O God! There stands Jesus and by the almighty power of His Spirit He says to the dead souls of His own, elect sheep: Come forth, My friend! Come forth, out of the sleep of hateful, reeking death! Come forth, my beloved! You are a sinner as were your fathers, and yet beloved still! Come forth out of the arms of the monster that has the power of death, whose name is Satan, and the Light of My blessed countenance shall beam upon you. The Voice of Jesus has the quickening power of life!

And the result? Such people stir in their reeking death and stand and live forever!

Never, O never be so foolish as to say, that man can raise himself. No, never an inch upon the way to the heart of God. You all will bear me witness that in this miracle the wonder is that almighty calling voice of Jesus! I assure you that if you hear the voice of Jesus say: Come unto Me and rest! that you will come and coming you will believe and believing you will have life, everlasting life in His name! To Him be glory forever! Amen!

G. Vos.

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EDITOR — Rev. Herman Hoeksema

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EDITORIALS**The Promise According to the Confessions**

We must still answer the question: *who* are the children of the promise?

And also the question: where are they found?

These questions are very important, especially with a view to our controversy with the Heynsian conception and with the Liberated.

The question is: are all the descendents of the father of believers also children of God? Are all the seed of Abraham spiritual seed by the grace of God?

This is the question with which Rom. 9:6-8 plainly deals. Is the conclusion warranted that because some one is a Jew, therefore he must be a child of the promise? In the old dispensation all the children of the promise were Jews. Were then all the Jews also children of God? In the new dispensation God establishes His covenant with believers and their children. Does this imply that all the children of believers are heirs according to the promise?

When the term *promise* is superficially considered that is, in the sense that it is a proclamation of a conditional assurance, it seems as if an affirmative answer would be justifiable.

And superficially considered, it would appear as if the promise to Abraham actually included all the Jews. Was not the Word of God to Abraham quite without limitation: "I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee"? Does not the Apostle Peter sound forth the same general promise when he proclaims in the text that is also quoted in our Baptism Form: "For unto you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call?"

But then the question arises: has the Word of God taken none effect? For the fact is that many, that the large majority, of the descendents of Abraham never received the promise, that thousands upon thousands of the seed of Abraham in the old dispensation perished, that at the very moment when the promise of God enters upon its realization, the nation of Israel is definitely rejected, and that the hearts of many individual Jews are so hardened that they are closed to the influence of the gospel of Christ. The same may be said of the children of believers in the new dispensation. Many of them receive the seal of God's covenant in infancy, are instructed in the way of God's covenant from their very youth, but nevertheless des-

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pise the promises of God and choose the way of destruction even unto the very bitter end.

This therefore, is a very serious question: has the Word of God taken none effect?

There are many who, as they face this question, take refuge in the explanation that the promise of God is contingent upon the consent and acceptance of the promise by the seed of Abraham, by the children of believers. The promise, in other words, is conditional. It is indeed for all the children of Abraham and for all the children of believers. They are all, without exception, comprehended in the covenant of God. From God's side the covenant is established with all of them. On God's part the promise to them all, head for head, and soul for soul, is "Yea and Amen." This, they claim, is the privilege of all that are born of believers in the church of Christ, that God sincerely holds out His promise to them, promises them the blessings of salvation. But when they come to years of discretion, they must accept their covenant obligation. They must believe and walk in the way of obedience. The promise is conditional. And if the promise is not accepted, they simply cannot receive it. Thus it was in the old dispensation. The promise to Abraham and his seed includes indeed all the children of Abraham, all his natural seed. But thousands for whom the promise was intended failed to accept the offer of salvation which was well-meaning on the part of God to them all. And therefore, many of the children of the promise were lost. And the same failure to accept the promise explains why so many children of believers in the new dispensation for whom the promise is intended are cast out and rejected.

The question is, however: is this interpretation in harmony with the Word of God in Romans 9:6-8?

The answer to this question is undoubtedly negative.

The apostle exactly emphasizes that the Word of God in the promise has not become of none effect. Even the awful phenomenon that countless numbers of Jews are rejected does not warrant the conclusion that the Word of God is fallen out.

Yet, according to the explanation just mentioned, this is exactly what happened. God's promise was for all. Yet, in the case of thousands upon thousands, this promise failed of its realization. Why? Do not answer that the promise failed in the case of carnal Jews because of their unwillingness to accept the promise and honor God's covenant. For although I fully understand and admit that in the way of their unbelief and iniquity they were lost, I nevertheless deny that this can serve as an explanation of the fact that God did not fulfill His promise in them.

Such an interpretation is absolutely impossible.

Consider that all the children of Abraham by nature are alike. They are all dead in trespasses and sins. No one is by nature able to enter into the covenant of God, to believe and hope in the promise, unless God first realizes His promise unto them. How shall the seed of Abraham, and how shall children of believers ever become children of the promise unless God takes the initiative and realizes His promise. If, then, God's promise is for all the seed of Abraham, and if by nature all the children of Abraham according to the flesh are alike, unable to render themselves worthy or receptive for the promise of God, it follows that the Word of God has fallen out, has become of none effect, has utterly failed in the case of those children of Abraham that never receive the promise.

But the text emphatically states the very opposite. The Word of God has not fallen out. The Word of God is the Word of GOD! Therefore it cannot possibly be conditional or contingent. It cannot depend on the creature for its realization. Its realization depends on God alone. And His Word of promise faileth never. Neither did it fail in the case of the unbelieving Jews. All, to whomsoever the promise was given, and to whom it pertained, were surely saved: not one of them ever perished. But from this it follows that the Word of God's promise, as far as its contents was concerned, was limited in scope, and that the promise did not pertain to all the seed of Abraham. This is the answer of the apostle, the explanation of Scripture of the fact that thousands of Israelites according to the flesh fail to become heirs of the kingdom of heaven. They are not all Israel that are out of Israel, that are the descendents of Jacob. Neither are they all children, that is, true children of God and children of the promise, because they are the carnal seed of Abraham. The children of the flesh are not the children of God, but the children of the promise, that is, those children of Abraham in whom God freely and sovereignly realizes His promise, that are therefore spiritually born through the power of the promise, these are accounted for the true seed of Abraham, and these are meant by the Word of God, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee."

And this is still of force. Also today the promise is unto us and to our children. God establishes His covenant in the line of continued generations of believers. Does this mean that all are children of the promise? Does it give parents with, say, four or five children a ground, a God-given ground, to plead that all their children be saved? Can they say to God in their intercession for their children: "On the basis of Thine own promise to me I am bold to ask that Thou transform all my children into Thine?" And if the

Lord does not hear this petition, and one or more of the children should evidently be lost, will they have reason to complain that the Word of God has taken none effect? God forbid! They are not all Israel that are of Israel. And not all the seed of believers are children of God. But the children of the promise shall be counted for the seed. God sovereignly takes out of our children His own, and realizes all His Word without fail and unconditionally.

Thus also the question is answered: where are the children of the promise?

And the answer is: they are in the line of the generations of believers.

But in the line of the generations of believers there are two kinds of seed: the carnal seed and the seed of the promise.

Outwardly and for a time they are one people. In the strictest sense this was the case in the old dispensation, when the line of the covenant was confined within the limits of the nation of Israel. They form a nation. They were all called Israel. They all lived under God's dealings with His own. They were all delivered with a mighty arm from the house of bondage. They were all witnesses of God's terrible signs and wonders. They all passed through the Red Sea. They were all baptized into Moses. They all ate of the spiritual bread. They all drank of the spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ. They were the nation that received the law, to whom the Word of God was entrusted, whose were the prophets, the priests, the kings, the service of the temple, altar and sacrifices. Yet, with the majority of them God was not well-pleased. There were always two seeds. There were within the nation of Israel the true children of the promise and the carnal children that despised God's covenant and trampled under foot the holy things of the covenant of God, His Word and precepts. In other words, there were always in the generations of Abraham the remnant according to the election of grace, and the carnal reprobate. And the latter were generally in the majority.

In the new dispensation it is no different.

The church in the world is the gathering of confessing believers and their children. And they form one people, even though the course of God's covenant is no longer confined to one nation. And to this people God reveals His covenant. They are called after His Name. Outwardly all that belong to them are subject to the same dealings. They are all baptized in the name of God Triune. To all the Word is proclaimed. All, young and old, are instructed in the knowledge of God and of our Savior Jesus Christ. Yet also in the church of God of the new dispensation the Word of God applies: "All is not Israel that is out of Israel"

There are always the children of the promise, the true spiritual seed; but there also develops always again the carnal seed, that live in close proximity and outward fellowship with the spiritual seed, dwell in the same house with the latter, are subject to the same influences as these, but are not children of the promise, and receive not the grace of God in their hearts.

Such is the evident meaning of Romans 9:6-8.

The children of the promise are found in the line of the generations of believers. But: all the children of believers are not children of the promise.

All is not Israel that is of Israel.

H.H.

OF BOOKS

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN, by Robert S. Candlish. Published by Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Mich. Price \$5.95.

This book is a commentary on the First Epistle of John, yet it is much more than a commentary. Being divided into four parts, it offers several lectures on John's first epistle. In a biographical sketch of Dr. Candlish, by Wilbur Smith of Pasadena, Calif., the latter writes that he is "grateful to the Zondervan Publishing House for making available again this epochal work, as near to an inspired volume as anything can be outside of the Holy Scriptures. I have not seen a copy advertised now for thirty years, nor have I known of anyone who has bought a copy in that time. I have loaned mine so frequently that it had to be rebound, and more than one person has said to me, 'I have read much of this on my knees,' which is not said concerning many books that fall into our hands these days. I commend this volume to all who love the Lord Jesus, who have longed for a deeper experience through the Holy Spirit of God, and to all seeking a richer understanding of the fathomless words of the beloved apostle."

Although this praise is, perhaps, somewhat excessive, yet, in general, I can agree with it. This is, indeed, a beautiful work. It faithfully attempts, not only to explain the sacred text, but enters into its spiritual meaning, not in the morbid, but in the sound sense of the word.

This does not mean that we always agree with the author. Instead of finding the main thought of the epistle in the triad "light, love, righteousness", I rather find it in the terms "light, love, life." In the ex-

position of I John 4:7-10 I certainly would have expected Dr. Candlish as a Calvinist to have explained the "first love" of God from His eternal counsel of election.

But apart from these and other points of criticism, I certainly recommend this book wholeheartedly to our readers. —H.H.

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HET EVANGELIE NAAR MATTHEUS by Dr. D. Jacobs. Published by J. H. Kok, Kampen, The Netherlands. Price f.3.50.

This volume occurs in the series "DE BIJBEL, toegelicht voor het Nederlandsche volk." It can hardly be called a commentary. It consists of brief notes of the text itself. This perhaps has the advantage for one that has not much time to study and yet wants to prepare himself in a measure for Bible discussion on the text, sometimes hardly more than a paraphrase in a society, that he may quickly look up an explanation of a certain passage. The book could also be used for collateral reading of the Bible in family worship.

Nevertheless, the brevity of the book also has the serious disadvantage that it does not always explain the text adequately. For an illustration of this weakness of the book I refer to the notes on ch. 23:37, where the chief problem is left entirely unanswered.

But to those that wish to use the book for the purposes above indicated and that can read the Holland language, I recommend this work. —H.H.

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KENTERING IN DE VRIJZINNIGHEID, by Dr G. Brillenburg Wurth, published by J. H. Kok, Kampen, The Netherlands. Price f.2.95.

In this book the author discusses and criticizes certain apparent changes in attitudes and tendencies of the modernistic and liberal theologians of the Netherlands. In eight chapters and an introduction he discusses the course of development of modernism in the Netherlands, its altered mentality, liberal dogmatics, the question whether, after all, the moderns are still modernistic, our attitude over against them, the question whether liberalism has really changed, the typically modern principle of autonomy, and our attitude over against liberalism. The general conclusion of the book is that, although modernism has assumed a different attitude over against many phenomena in the modern world, principally it has not changed.

Anyone that desires to become a little more intimately acquainted with the development and recent changes of modernism in the Netherlands will do well to read this clearly written little book. —H.H.

THE TRIPLE KNOWLEDGE

An Exposition Of The Heidelberg Catechism

PART III

OF THANKFULNESS

Lord's Day 34

2

The One God (cont.)

This implies further that God alone is the Lord: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one Lord." That He is Lord, and one Lord, implies that He is the sole and absolute Proprietor of all things: "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof." He is the Creator of the heavens and of the earth and of all things they contain. He is their only Possessor, to do with them according to His good pleasure. This signifies too that He alone has all authority, that His is the sole prerogative to determine what the creature shall do and what purpose he shall serve. He is the only Lawgiver, Whose will is the criterion for the whole universe and for every creature. Besides, it means that He is the sole Judge, that judges all the world with equity. Moreover, it implies that His is all the power, and that He governs all things according to His eternal good pleasure. No creature is exempt from His control. Nothing betides in heaven or in earth, but by His will. For mark you well, He is not a Lord, but the Lord. He is not merely supreme Lord, but simply Lord, Lord over all, and Lord alone. Even as you cannot divide God's virtues, so you cannot split His lordship. Lord is He, not only over the good things, but also over the evil; not only of the righteous, but also of the wicked; not only of life, but also of death; not only of prosperity, but also of adversity; not only of peace, but also of war. All things are absolutely under His Lordship, and under His alone: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." This He can say because He is God alone, and God is the Lord.

Such, then, are the implications of the first commandment.

God is One, and there is no God beside Him.

Now, when we are saved by grace, redeemed by the blood of Christ, and, in principle delivered from the power of sin and death, so that we stand in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, we embrace this truth of God and confess it from the heart.

Then indeed we respond to this language of the law: "Yea, Jehovah, Thou art my God, and Thou art God alone. There is none beside Thee. Thou art Lord. And I know and confess Thee as *my* Lord, my Sovereign, my King forever. And Thou hast redeemed me, delivered me out of the power of sin and death, to clothe me with righteousness and life." And then the prayer rises from our heart and from our lips: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me do?" And the answer comes from the first commandment: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." And this commandment we love, even as it comes to us in its negative, or prohibitive, form. For, on the one hand, we deeply feel that the motions of sin are still in our members, and that therefore we are always inclined to seek and to serve other gods. And, on the other hand, we understand that the positive meaning of this commandment is that we shall know and acknowledge and worship the one, only true God, and Him alone.

3.

Worshipping The One God

The first commandment forbids all idolatry, and warns the believer in Christ against it.

What is meant by idolatry?

The Catechism defines it in Question and Answer 95 as follows: "Idolatry is, instead of, or besides that one true God, who has manifested himself in his word, to contrive, or have any other object, in which men place their trust."

This implies that by nature, apart from the grace of God in Christ, we are all idolaters. In the preceding chapter I stated that man cannot live without some god. Now we may add that the god which the sinner by nature serves, and in whom he puts his trust, is always an idol. He cannot put his trust in the true God. For trust, or confidence, presupposes the love-relation. To trust in God implies, on the one hand, the consciousness that God loves us, and, on the other hand, the consciousness that we love God, because He loved us first. Neither is possible for the natural man. He stands in enmity against God. And in the consciousness of that enmity, he can only feel that God is his enemy, and that apart from Christ the wrath of God abideth on him. Hence, he can never trust in God. And seeing that it is impossible for him to live without some object in which he may put his trust, he contrives an idol. He may probably imagine, as does the modern civilized pagan, and as even the Christian according to his old man does, that besides his idol he can also put his confidence in the true God. But this is impossible. For God is One, and we must put either all our confidence in Him, or none at all.

In the light of this truth, it can readily be understood that the first commandment in its prohibitive form puts its finger on a very sore spot in our nature. O, as long as we have an eye only for that coarser form of idolatry found among the nations of heathendom, who bow themselves before the powers of nature, the beasts of the field, the fowls of the air, and creeping things, we may imagine that the law in its negative form does not apply to us. Surely, we are inclined to say, we are no idolaters, and the first commandment in its prohibitive form has lost its significance. Its positive implication may still be of value. It may serve to remind us that we must always and with all our heart and soul and strength serve the living and true God. But we certainly cannot be called idolaters. Of this sin we are not guilty. But the case becomes altogether different, the moment we understand the definition which the Heidelberg Catechism offers in this 95th Question and Answer. Idolatry is to contrive or to have any other object besides the true and living God, or instead of Him, in which we put our trust. Then we certainly begin to understand that in as far as we are not delivered from the power of sin, as far as the motions of sin still rule in my members, the inclination of my sinful heart is always exactly to idolatry. Always we are inclined to rule out the true and living God, and to place something next to Him or instead of Him.

No, we do not bow ourselves before wood and stone, before idols of gold and silver. Nevertheless, how easily we are inclined to put our trust into some object of our own contrivance. In prosperity we are inclined to put our trust in our own strength and ingenuity, in conditions and circumstances next to the living God or instead of Him: and we do not glorify Him and give Him thanks. On the other hand, in adversity, in trouble and difficulty, in sickness and suffering, in war and rumors of war in the midst of the world, we often put our confidence in men, and our hearts are filled with fear, simply because we do not put our confidence in the Lord of life and death. All this is simply idolatry. Next to the Lord there is nothing. All things and every creature are but means in His hand. And to place any trust in things, or in men, is to rob the living God of His glory, and is nothing but idolatry.

In the 94th Question and Answer the Catechism mentions under the subject of idolatry also "sorcery, soothsaying, superstition, invocation of saints, or any other creatures." Sorcery is magic. It is really divination with the supposed help of evil spirits. It is the power to command such evil spirits and to press them into our service. The Word of God, especially in the Old Testament, strongly warns against this

form of idolatry, as, for instance, in Lev. 19:31: "Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God." And in Deut. 18:9-11 we read: "When thou art come into the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abomination of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer." From Ex. 7 we learn that at first the sorcerers of Egypt performed the same signs which the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron to perform before Pharaoh: "Then Pharaoh called the wise men and the sorcerers; now the magicians of Egypt they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For they cast down every man his rod and they became serpents: but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods." And again, when upon the commandment of the Lord Moses lifted up his rod and smote the waters of Egypt, turning them into blood, we read: "And the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments." vs. 22. From these passages it is also evident that there is no principal difference between sorcerers and soothsayers. A soothsayer is one that prognosticates, that foretells the future or pretends to foretell it by some signs, whether it be by looking at the stars, as the astrologers, or by observing the entrails of animals or other signs. Of soothsayers we read in Isa. 2:6: "Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people, the house of Jacob, because they be replenished from the east, and are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they please themselves in the children of strangers." And again, in Dan. 2:27: "And Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, show unto the king." And again, in Dan. 4:7: "Then came in the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers: and I told the dream before them; but they did not make known unto me the interpretation thereof." And in Acts 16:16 we read of a certain damsel which followed the apostle Paul, and who was "possessed with a spirit of divination... which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying." Magicians, astrologers, sorcerers, and soothsayers are therefore in the same class. They are all false prophets, the term *sorcerers* probably emphasizing the idea that as false prophets they could perform signs and wonders, while the term *soothsayers* rather suggests the idea of prognostication. All these are of course at the same time superstition. The idea of superstition is defined by Dr. Geesink in his "Gereformeerde Ethiek," I, p. 251, as the erring subjective

conviction infringing upon God's sovereignty concerning the causal relation between supersensuous powers and sensuous operations. That superstition is still rampant in the form of a dread or fear of such relationship between the supersensuous and the sensuous is evident from many phenomena in the modern world, as, for instance, the fear of a howling dog, and the well-known fear of the number thirteen. All these manifestations of idolatry are, of course, rooted in the denial of the true God as He has manifested Himself in His Word. Finally, under the head of idolatry the Catechism also mentions "the invocation of saints or any other creatures." This is undoubtedly directed against the Roman Catholic Church with its Mariolatry, its invocation of saints and of angels, to which may be added also the worship of the host, which the Heidelberg Catechism calls an accursed idolatry.

Over against all these forms of idolatry the Heidelberg Catechism interprets the positive meaning of the first commandment as follows: "And learn rightly to know the only true God; trust in him alone, with humility and patience, submit to him; expect all good things from him only; love, fear and glorify him with my whole heart; so that I renounce and forsake all creatures, rather than commit even the least thing contrary to his will."

At the head of all these enumerations of the implications of the positive meaning of the first commandment stands that we must rightly know the only true God. This implies that we learn to know Him only from His revelation. It is fundamentally characteristic of idolatry that it creates a figment of its own imagination and calls it god. It implies that man says who and what God is, instead of diligently listening to the Word of God Himself. Idolatry rejects His revelation, in order then to invent its own vanities. And this is characteristic, not only of the cultured pagan, but also of all mere human philosophy, of ancient and modern times both. God alone can reveal to us who He is, and what He is, and how He must be worshipped and glorified. The first commandment in its positive meaning, therefore, certainly teaches us that we must be silent and let God speak, that we diligently search His Word, as revealed in the Scriptures, and attend to the preaching of His Word, that we may be instructed in the true knowledge of God. The first commandment, therefore, means that we must reject all mere human philosophy about God: for when man speaks about God from his own mind and heart, he always lies; and that, on the contrary, we turn diligently to God's revelation in Jesus Christ our Lord, and thus rightly know Him and acknowledge Him as God alone.

Secondly, the positive demand of the first com-

mandment also implies that I love this one God as I know Him from His own Word, with all my heart and with all my mind and with all my soul and with all my strength. But what does it mean that I love the only true God? Is this love of God merely a certain sentiment or sweet feeling or mystical emotion? O, it is that too, to be sure. But it is above all that grace, that response to God's love to us in Jesus Christ that causes us to seek His glory, to do His will, to keep His Word. It is this, that knowing the true God, we now prostrate ourselves before Him, and exclaim in adoration: "My Lord and my God!" It means that we reject all and every form of lordship that is contrary to His sovereign Word. God is the Lord! And to have no other gods before Him means that we acknowledge no other lords, that He is our Lord alone. We acknowledge and earnestly desire to live in harmony with the acknowledgement that He is the Lord over our body and over our soul, over our heart and over our mind, over our will and over all our desires, that therefore we submit ourselves and all things to Him, and press them into His service unconditionally. We acknowledge that He is Lord over all our relationships in the world: the relationships of the home, the marriage relationship, the parental relationship, the relationship of brother and sister; and that in all those relationships we shall ask, "Lord, what wilt Thou have us do?" We acknowledge that He is Lord over all our relationships in society, in church and state; that He is Lord over our life in shop or in office, in school, college, or university; that He is Lord over the relation between employees and employers, over our goods and possessions. He is Lord, and we acknowledge Him as such, over all our relationships in the church, the relation between ministers, elders, and deacons, between officebearers and members, and between the members mutually. And He is the sole Lord, and we acknowledge Him as such, over all the relationships in the state, between those that are in a position of authority and those that are called to obey. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" implies that we shall acknowledge God as the only Lord, with rejection of all others.

In the third place, it also means that we shall put all our confidence in Him alone, and that we renounce every creature as the ground of our trust. For, that in which we put our confidence is surely our god. If in time of war we put our trust in chariots and horses, these are our god. If we put our confidence in princes, in powers, in great men, these are our gods. If we trust in our ingenuity, goodness, work, we are our own god. If we put our trust in money, business, possessions, these are our gods. And according as we put our trust in these idols, we fear them too. But

the first commandment demands that we shall renounce every creature, and put our confidence in God alone, in order also to fear Him only, in reverence and child-like love. This, we understand, is possible only in Christ Jesus our Lord. The sinner in himself, apart from Christ, cannot possibly put his trust in the living God. For as we remarked before, confidence implies and is based upon the assurance that this only God and Lord, this mighty Potentate of potentates, this Sovereign of heaven and earth, loves us. And this assurance is possible only when the Spirit of God in Christ Jesus has shed abroad the love of God in our hearts. Outside of Christ the sinner can not have this assurance, for he is an enemy of God, and God looks down upon him in wrath. The knowledge that God is One makes even the very devils tremble. But in Christ Jesus this mighty God has revealed His love. And the cross of Christ is the central revelation of this love of God toward us. Looking at our God in the face of Jesus Christ, we know that He loves us, that He forgives all our iniquities, that He delivers us from sin and death, and that He will cause all things to turn to our advantage and salvation. Then indeed we can patiently submit ourselves to Him in all circumstances of life. Then we are assured that all things work together for good to them that love God. Then we trust in Him, and in Him alone. Then we fear Him, and Him only. Then we rather renounce all creatures, than to walk contrary to His will. And whatever men or devils may do to us, we fearlessly and with a good conscience keep His testimonies and fight the good fight of faith in the midst of the world.

For let us not overlook the fact that we must thus know the true God, love and fear and worship Him alone in the midst of this present world of sin and darkness. The first commandment, like all the other precepts of the decalogue, is antithetical: you cannot serve God and Mammon. Neither can you in the present world serve God with a total disregard of Mammon. We are called to serve God antithetically, that is, with rejection of Mammon. In the midst of the world we must live from the principle of regeneration and according to the Word of God. We must be His witnesses. In walk and confession we must renounce all things that are against the precepts of the God of our salvation. And standing as of the party of the living God in the midst of the world of darkness, the first commandment demands that we fight the good fight against the devil and his host, against the antichristian powers in the world, and against the sin that still is in our members, so that we cleanse ourselves from all the defilement of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Thus the preaching of the first commandment will prove to be a means of our continued conversation. It will lead us to a deeper knowledge of sin and to a more complete confidence in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ as the revelation of the God of our salvation. The preaching of the first commandment will exhort us to pray more earnestly: "God, be merciful, for my sins are very great." It will be to us an exhortation to crucify the flesh and to forsake the world and to walk in a new and holy life. And at the same time the believer in Christ will be comforted with the only comfort in life and death, that he belongs to Him Who has delivered us from all the power of sin and the devil. And though the handwriting of sin, also with respect to the first commandment, is against us, over the entrance of this first department of the law of God we read the sentence of God's boundless grace: "Atoned and forgiven."

H.H.

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Thou, O Lord, art God alone;
Everlasting is Thy throne;
Through the ages men shall sing
Praise to heaven's eternal king.
Thou, enthroned above the skies,
Wilt for Zion's help arise;
Let Thy grace to her appear,
For the promised time is near.

If with love compassionate
We, Thy servants, mourn her state
Wilt not Thou, O gracious Lord,
Help in Zion's need afford?
Lord, Thy glory shall appear,
Kings and nations then shall fear;
And Thy Name shall be adored
When Thy Zion is restored.

This all ages shall record
For the glory of the Lord;
Thou dost hear the humble prayer,
For the helpless Thou dost care.
Thou eternal art, and great,
Heaven and earth Thou didst create,
Heaven and earth shall pass away,
Changeless Thou shalt live for aye.

OUR DOCTRINE

God's Providence

(9)

GOD'S PROVIDENCE AND THE MIRACLE

A COMMON INTERPRETATION OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MIRACLES

R. C. Trench

In our previous article we called attention to a common interpretation of the significance of the miracles of Holy Writ. We quoted from three authors. In this article we would conclude our discussion of the common interpretation of the miracle by offering to our readers a somewhat lengthy quotation of Trench, who wrote a book on miracles. We quote as follows, pages 9-14:

"Wherein, it may be asked, does the miracle differ from any event in the ordinary course of nature? For that too is wonderful; the fact that it is a marvel of continual recurrence may rob it, subjectively, of our admiration; we may be content to look at it with a dull incurious eye, and to think we find an explanation of it in its constant repetition, even as we often find in this repetition sufficient reason for excusing ourselves altogether from wonder and reverent admiration; yet it does not remain the less a marvel still.

"To this question some have answered, that since all is thus marvellous, since the grass growing, the seed sprouting, the sun rising, are as much the result of powers which we cannot trace or measure, as the water turned into wine, or the sick healed by a word, or the blind restored to vision by a touch, there is therefore no such thing as a miracle, eminently so called. We have no right, they say, in the mighty and complex miracle of nature which encompasses us on every side, to separate off in an arbitrary manner some certain facts, and to affirm of this and the other that they are wonders, and all the rest ordinary processes of nature; but rather we must confine ourselves to one language or the other, and count all miracle, or nothing.

"But this, however at first sight it may seem very deep and true, is indeed most shallow and fallacious. There is quite enough in itself and in its purposes to distinguish that which we call by this name, from all with which it is thus sought to be confounded, and in which to be lost. The distinction indeed which is sometimes drawn, that in the miracle, God is immedi-

ately working, and in other events is leaving it to the laws which He has established to work, cannot at all be allowed: for it rests on a dead mechanical view of the universe, altogether remote from the truth. The clockmaker makes his clock, and leaves it; the ship-builder builds and launches his ship, which others navigate; but the world is no curious piece of mechanism which its Maker constructs, and then dismisses from his hands, only from time to time reviewing and repairing it, but, as our Lord says, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (I John 5:17); He upholdeth all things by the word of His power" (Heb. 1:3). And to speak of "laws of God," "laws of nature," may become to us a language altogether deceptive, and hiding the deeper reality from our eyes. *Laws* of God exist only for us. It is a *will* of God for Himself. That will indeed, being the will of highest wisdom and love, excludes all wilfulness; it is a will upon which we can securely count; from the past expressions of it we can presume its future, and so we rightfully call it a law. But still from moment to moment it is a will: each law, as we term it, of nature is only that which we have learned concerning this will in that particular region of its activity. To say then that there is more of the will of God in a miracle than in any other work of His, is insufficient.

"Yet while we deny the conclusion, that since all is wonder, therefore the miracle, commonly so called, is only in the same way as the ordinary processes of nature a manifestation of the presence and power of God, we must not with this deny the truth which lies in this statement. All is wonder; to make a man is at least as great a marvel as to raise a man from the dead. The seed that multiplies in the furrow is as marvellous as the bread that multiplied in Christ's hands. The miracle is not a *greater* manifestation of God's power than those ordinary and ever-repeated processes; but it is a different manifestation. By those other God is speaking at all times and to all the world; they are a vast unbroken revelation of Him. "The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead." (Romans 1 verse 20). Yet from the very circumstances that nature is thus speaking evermore to all, that this speaking is diffused over all time, addressed unto all men, that its sound has gone out into all lands, from the very constancy and universality of this language, it may fail to make itself heard. It cannot be said to stand in nearer relation to one man than another, to confirm one man's word more than that of others, to address one man's conscience more than that of every other man. However, it may sometimes have, it must often lack, a peculiar and personal significance. But in the miracle,

wrought in the sight of some certain men, and claiming their special attention, there is a speaking to them in particular. There is then a voice in nature which addresses itself directly to them, a singling of them out from the multitude. It is plain that God has now a particular word which they are to give heed to, a message to which He is bidding them to listen.

"An extraordinary divine causality, and not that ordinary which we acknowledge everywhere and in everything, belongs, then, to the essence of the miracle; powers of God other than those which have always been working; such, indeed, as most seldom or never have been working before. The unresting activity of God, which at other times hides and conceals itself behind the veil of what we term natural laws, does in the miracle unveil itself; it steps out from its concealment, and the hand which works is laid bare. Beside and beyond the ordinary operations of nature, higher powers (higher, not as coming from a higher source, but as working toward higher ends) intrude and make themselves felt even at the very springs and sources of her power.

"While it is of the very essence of the miracle that it should be thus "a new thing", it is not herewith denied that the natural itself may become miraculous to *us* by the way in which it is timed, by the ends which it is made to serve. It is indeed true that aught which is perfectly explicable from the course of nature and history is assuredly no miracle in the most proper sense of the word. At the same time the finger of God may be so plainly discernible in it, there may be in it so remarkable a convergence of many unconnected causes to a single end, it may so meet a crisis in the lives of men, or in the onward march of the kingdom of God, may stand in such noticeable relation with God's great work of redemption, that even while it is plainly explicable by natural causes, while there are such, perfectly adequate to produce the effects, we yet may be entirely justified in terming it a miracle, a providential, although not an absolute, miracle. Absolute it cannot be called, since there were known causes perfectly capable of bringing it about, and, these existing, it would be superstition to betake ourselves to others, or to seek to disconnect it from these. Yet the natural may in a manner lift itself up into the miraculous, by the moment at which it falls out, by the purposes which it is made to fulfil. It is a subjective wonder, a wonder *for us*, though not an objective, not a wonder in itself."

In connection with this lengthy quotation we would make the following observations. In the first place, Trench defines the miracle, and we again quote: "An extraordinary Divine causality, and not that ordinary which we acknowledge everywhere and in everything, belongs, then, to the essence of the miracle;

powers of God other than those which have always been working, such, indeed, as most seldom or never have been working before." Hence, in these words the writer declares emphatically that the extraordinary belongs indeed to the essence of the miracle. Secondly, Trench rejects the distinction between mediate and immediate (with or without means, H. V.). It is interesting to note how the author disposes of this distinction. This distinction, between the mediate and the immediate, the author declares, rests upon a dead mechanical view of the universe, altogether remote from the truth. The clockmaker makes his clock and leaves it; the ship-builder builds and launches his ship and others navigate it; but the world is no curious piece of mechanism which its Maker constructs, and then dismisses from His hands, only from time to time reviewing and repairing it. One can hardly, therefore, define the miracle as an immediate work of the Lord, for the simple reason that all things are worked directly and immediately by the Lord. The world is not a clock which runs by itself. The Lord is in constant and immediate charge. To separate the Lord from the continuous existence of the world is Deism. Thirdly, Trench distinguishes between miracles in the absolute and in the providential sense, although the latter are miracles only in the sense that they are miracles *to us*: a subjective wonder, a wonder *for us*, although not an objective miracle, a miracle in itself. The author, distinguishing between absolute and providential miracles, means the following. An absolute miracle, then, is a work of God which simply cannot be attributed to any natural causes. It is simply impossible, from a human and natural viewpoint, to account for them. They were not caused by any causes or forces inherent in nature, or, if you will, in the works of God's hands. Providential miracles, on the other hand, were brought about by known causes. These miracles can be traced and explained. However, the timing is so wonderful, the subsequent order of events so striking that the entire sequence of causes and events strikes us as very wonderful, and therefore as a miracle in the providential sense of the word—it is called providential because of the providential order of events. Let us listen once more to the author in this connection: "At the same time the finger of God may be so plainly discernible in it, there may be in it so remarkable a convergence of many unconnected causes to a single end, it may so meet a crisis in the lives of men, or in the onward march of the kingdom of God, may stand in such noticeable relation with God's great work of redemption, that even while it is plainly explicable by natural causes, while there are such, perfectly adequate to produce the effects, we yet may be entirely justified in terming it a miracle a *providential*, although not an

absolute, miracle. Absolute it cannot be called, since there were known causes perfectly capable of bringing it about, and, these existing, it would be superstition to betake ourselves to others, or to seek to disconnect it from these. Yet the natural may in a manner lift itself up into the miraculous, by the moment at which it falls out, by the purposes which it is made to fulfill. It is a subjective wonder, a wonder *for us*, although not an objective, not a wonder in itself."

According to Trench, the essence of the miracle lies in its extraordinary Divine causality. Hence, a miracle is essentially supernatural, although his rejection of the distinction between mediate and immediate may indeed be called refreshing.

From all these quotations it appears that the essence of the miracle has been sought in its supernatural character. And, although it is true that these authors have also attempted to view the miracle in connection with God's plan of redemption and salvation, it can hardly be said that they have viewed the miracle as essentially belonging to the sphere of God's redeeming grace. Clarity of thought and expression does not characterize these quotations.

ITS SCRIPTURAL NAMES

The Scriptural word "wonder"

This is the same word as "miracle." The word "miracle" is derived from a word which means literally: to wonder at. Miracles are wonders from the viewpoint of their effect upon the people. They cause people to wonder, be filled with amazement.

We consider the following quotation from Trench of more than passing interest, and we quote from his book on pages 2-3: "In the name 'wonder,' the astonishment which the work produces upon the beholders, an astonishment often graphically portrayed by the Evangelists when relating our Lord's miracles (Mark 2:12; 4:41; 6:51; 7:37; Acts 3:10,11), is transferred to the work itself. This word, as will at once be felt, does but touch the outside of the matter. The ethical meaning of the miracle would be wholly lost, were blank astonishment or mere amazement *all* which it aroused; since the same effect might be produced by a thousand meaner causes. Indeed it is not a little remarkable, rather is it profoundly characteristic of the miracles of the New Testament, as Origen noted long ago, that this name 'wonders' is never applied to them but in connection with some other name. They are 'signs and wonders' (Acts 14:3; Romans 15:19; Matt. 24:24; Heb. 2:4); or 'signs' alone (John 2:11; Acts 8:6; Rev. 13:13); or 'powers' alone (Mk. 6:13; Acts 19:11); but never 'wonders' alone. Not that the miracle, considered simply as a wonder, as an astonishing event which the beholders can reduce

to no law with which we are acquainted, is even as such without its meaning and its purposes; that purpose being forcibly to startle men from the dull dream of a sense-bound existence, and, however it may not be itself an appeal to the spiritual in man, yet to act as a summons to him that he now open his eyes to the spiritual appeal which is about to be addressed to him (Acts 14:8-18).

We instinctively feel that this word merely touches the outside of the matter. It is true that miracles are special acts or works of God which draw the attention of the people and cause them to stare in amazement. Even so, however, the word "wonder" does not define the essence of that particular work of God which causes this amazement. Indeed, it is not a little remarkable but rather profoundly a verification of the truth that the word "wonder" merely touches the outside of the matter, that this word "wonder" or miracle is never used in the New Testament with respect to the miracles of Holy Writ except in connection with other words or names. We read of "signs and wonders," or "sings" alone, or "powers" alone, but never of "wonders" alone.

The Scriptural word "powers"

This word probably emphasizes that these miracles of Holy Writ are not "tricks" which are played upon the people, as, for example, the tricks of a magician.

They are powers, and as such this word emphasizes the truth that they are wonderful works which are wrought by the power of the Lord God.

However, it is evident that also this word does not inform us with respect to the essential significance of these particular works of God. It tells us that they are works of the Lord. But it does not inform us what kind of works of the Lord they are.

The Scriptural word "sign"

A sign is a visible token, a visible symbol taken out of the earthy life of our existence, which is a symbol or representation of something invisible. Natural life around us is full of signs, visible representations of something invisible. The sign of the flag is the visible token of the nationality of that particular ship; the uniform of the soldier reveals the country to which he owes allegiance; the badge of the policeman is the visible sign of his authority; insignia and buttons are signs, outward and external representations of the particular organization of which one is a member.

Also this word is used to designate the miracles which are recorded in Holy Writ. When Scripture, therefore, speaks of miracles as signs it emphasizes the fact that these works of the Lord are visible to-

kens or symbols of another reality which is invisible. Scripture is full of signs. All miracles are signs but all signs in Holy Writ are not necessarily miracles. Whenever the Lord performs a miracle He gives us a sign. But there are many signs in Scripture which are not miracle signs, as, for example, the temple and all its details (furniture, spoons, forks, etc.), the various high-priestly, kingly, prophetic types, etc. The types also symbolize invisible realities. We need not at this time call attention in detail to many types of the Old Dispensation. Types refer to persons (typical kings, prophets and priests) or events (the flood, passage of Israel through the Red Sea or the Jordan) in the Old Testament which refer to future realities that are as yet invisible but will be revealed in due time, and, when they are revealed, these types fall away. Then they are no longer necessary. Signs, however, represent the invisible power of the grace of God which is essentially invisible.

It is surely the word "sign" which expresses the essence of the miracle of Holy Writ. If it be true that these wonders are wonders because they work and evoke amazement and wonderment, and also that they are mighty works because they are wrought by the mighty power of the everlasting God, the word "signs" undoubtedly expresses the essence of these works of God because this word gives us the purpose of the miracle, and, therefore, tells us more definitely and exactly what they are. It is true that miracles also verify the Divine mission of the Christ, confirm and establish the fact that He has been sent by the Father—see John 10:37,38. But, although they establish the fact that Christ has been sent of the Father, yet in the word "sign" the purpose of Christ's coming and of the miracles is expressed, the why of His coming is held before us. These miracles reveal Christ Himself; in them our Saviour stands before us; they declare unto us not only that Christ has been sent, but also why He was sent. Miracles constitute an essential element in the Divine revelation of Himself as the God of our salvation.

H. Veldman

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Sons of men, awake to praise
 God the Lord Who reigns above,
 Gracious in His works and ways,
 Wondrous in redeeming love;
 Praise Him where the people meet,
 Praise Him in the elders' seat.

IN HIS FEAR

Looking To The Future

CHAPTER 5

NATIONAL ORGANIZATION

About the above subject we wish to make a few remarks in this concluding chapter of our series concerning the future of our movement for Protestant Reformed education. It will be noticed at once that the present subject is somewhat different in nature than those matters which we have previously treated. The matter of national organization in itself constitutes no problem, in the first place. It is simply a matter of desirability or non-desirability. And in the second place, it is not a matter that inherently concerns either the education of our children as such or the Protestant Reformed character of such organization, as do, for example, such matters as teachers, teacher-training, and text-books. It is simply a formal matter, one which concerns the method, the technique, of achieving our ideals of Protestant Reformed education. The question is therefore: should we, or should we not have any form of national organization to espouse and further the ideals of Protestant Reformed education? Should our answer be in the affirmative, other, connected, questions will arise: who should be organized, the boards, the teachers, or both? What should be the powers of such an organization, judicatory or advisory? What should be the aims and the scope?

As far as the history is concerned, I am not aware of any concerted action, either on the part of teachers or school boards, in the full-fledged sense of the term, that has taken place in the past. It is true, as we might notice in our historical review of the efforts toward the establishment of our own teacher-training facilities, that all the school-boards were contacted at one time for their reactions on that subject. And, if I am not mistaken, there once arose a proposal from the Redlands, California, school for some form of national organization, which met with little or no approval, though I am not acquainted with either the proposal or the details in regard to its rejection. It may also be possible that there have been scattered instances of cooperation and consultation between local school boards. But thus far there certainly has been no permanent national organization formed, nor has there been any noteworthy instance of cooperation or concerted action on a national scale among our schools that has been publicized. The reason for this I do not know. Whether the local schools have been

too busy in the early stages of their growth to concern themselves with this subject, or whether they have hesitated because of an innate fear of big central organizations, or whether it is a plain case of lethargy, only they can tell.

Nevertheless, I believe that whatever may be the reason or lack of a reason for the failure to form such an organization heretofore, some very cogent reasons may be presented for taking immediate steps to correct this failure, and that both as far as school boards and teachers are concerned.

It can scarcely be denied that our schools have common interests and aims. This is so true on the very surface that is not necessary to prove it. They have a common spiritual principle, a common basis, and a common goal. They have, besides, common problems, several of which we have discussed in previous articles of this series. Now, it is evident that to a large extent each school society, school board, and teaching staff must function by itself. The local school is, as to its establishment, its operation, and its quality, the concern solely of the local school society. And this certainly implies too that, whatever national organization may be formed, it must keep hands off the affairs of the local schools. It must have absolutely no authority to rule in the affairs of the local schools. To use a simple example, it must not be able to dictate to any local school board as to how many teachers it should hire, who it must hire, and how much it must pay the teachers. It is very well conceivable, however, that even in such matters a national organization could have a very beneficial place, not in a legislative and judicial capacity, but in an advisory position. It can never do any harm, in fact it can do much good for those who are charged with the operation of our schools to consult with one another concerning all the problems and difficulties which face them. Our churches do this, in classis and synod. Why should not our local schools follow suit? Besides, it seems to me that the very fact that we are small and that at the same time we are pioneering as yet in a relatively new field, seeking to attain not merely the ideal of our own educational facilities, but seeking to establish *distinctively Protestant Reformed educational facilities*, should draw us together, in order that we may mutually kindle one another's zeal and enthusiasm for the cause, as well as assist each other with our advice. It may be that our largest school, the Adams Street School in Grand Rapids, may feel the least need of such fellowship, just because of its size. The larger and stronger we are, the more self-sufficient and independent we are inclined to feel. But I would suggest that for that very reason those in Grand Rapids should unselfishly take

the lead in this matter, and show their willingness to assist our smaller school societies as much as possible in this common cause.

But from a practical viewpoint there are several advantages to forming a national organization. If we are ever to establish our own teacher-training facilities, and if we are ever to achieve the goal of our own textbooks, it will not be through the medium of scattered, weak, local efforts. Such matters as these are the concern of all our schools in common. And here exactly there is a wide open field for the labor of a central organization to give leadership and direction. To be sure, such an organization must not operate independently of the local societies even here. We must be careful too that it does not trample on the rights of the local societies and disregard their needs or their financial power. But this may very well be avoided by democratic processes. As long as the organization is formed by the school boards themselves, with fair representation of the various societies, this danger of a strong and dictatorial central power in our school system need not be feared. And I submit that as long as various schools continue to ignore one another and to exist and operate in complete independence, we shall never as Protestant Reformed people achieve the goal of a *complete system* of Protestant Reformed education, and we shall fail in achieving the goal of a *thoroughly Protestant Reformed* system of education.

In addition to all this, it seems to me that it cannot be denied that we have an obligation in all our churches with respect to the ideal of Protestant Reformed education. To be sure, it is primarily the calling of the parents in each locality to strive toward this goal. And it is the calling of consistories to see to it that there are good Christian schools to which the parents send their children (and for us this can mean but one thing: wherever possible our own schools). But if we who are convinced of this cause and who in several instances have established our own schools already have any concern for our Protestant Reformed brethren and for our Protestant Reformed truth and for Protestant Reformed education in particular, —as we should have,—we should not keep silence. We may not be satisfied, selfishly satisfied, when we have some thing for ourselves. We should make propaganda. We should be ready to lend assistance and information to others who desire to establish their own school. We should show others that it is both possible and feasible even for our smaller churches to attain the goal of their own schools. And what better help and advice and encouragement can be given than by those who have experience in the field? This purpose, I believe, could be admirably achieved by means of a

national organization, serving as a central propaganda and information agency throughout our denomination.

In unity there is strength! Let us unite!

Also as far as our teachers are concerned, I would strongly recommend a national organization. Our Protestant Reformed teachers are few in number. Many of them labor in small schools, sharing the problems and difficulties of their profession as Protestant Reformed teachers with one or two others. Besides, our teachers too, and perhaps more than any others associated with our schools, face a wellnigh completely new field. They must, more than parents and school boards, concretely face the task of making our schools Protestant Reformed in fact as well as in name. If it were but for the benefit of the inspiration to be derived from such an organization alone, I believe it would be worth the benefit. But especially as long as we have no teacher-training facilities of our own, I think it would be highly beneficial for our teachers to meet in an extended annual convention. Surely, such a meeting would involve a financial outlay, and teachers are far from millionaires. But let our school boards pay for it. The cost is nothing, if such a convention may be means toward obtaining a dedicated band of thoroughly Protestant Reformed teachers. Such a convention, if it is to be worthwhile, should in my opinion not be held during the school term, when the time can hardly be spared, but during the summer vacation, when an extended convention of one or two weeks' duration could be held. Let a thorough program of subjects dealing not simply with the formal aspects of education, but with our specific goal of *Protestant Reformed education* be prepared. Let some of our leaders be invited to speak and instruct. And let our teachers themselves get together and tackle the problems in group discussions. And you will see what inspiration, what instruction, and what fellowship can be packed into one convention!

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This closes our discussion on this subject. Personally this little study has convinced me more than ever of the need of thorough-going Protestant Reformed education. I hope that the goal may be reached more than it has already been reached, and that these articles may be of value, under the blessing of our covenant God, to convince our people of this high ideal and calling, to bring up our children according to our specific Protestant Reformed truth, and that at the same time these writings may inspire us not to slacken our efforts until the reality conforms to the ideal.

H. C. Hoeksema

THE DAY OF SHADOWS

David's Flight

Continued

II Sam. 15:13-16:14

As we saw, on his flight the king halted at "the house afar off"—probably the last house in the city—to allow the sorrowful procession to pass by in review before him. The servants went first, then all the Cherethites and the Pelethites, next the six hundred Gittites and, lastly, Ittai and his company, 15:18-22.

Then follows the notice: "And all the land wept with a loud voice" (ver. 23). "All the land" is all the inhabitants of the open country that had come out with the procession. They stood by the wayside, weeping, as David and his faithful followers were passing by before them. The plight of the king touched their hearts. It must indicate that the bulk of the people remained loyal to David and that the rebellion was not the success that it had appeared to be to the "servant" who had reported to David "that the heart of all Israel was after Absalom."

Having been marshalled, the refugee procession went on down into the valley and across the Kidron toward the way of the wilderness of Judah. It being summer, the Kidron was not filled with water. Its course ran east of Jerusalem and not at a great distance from it. A little to the east of this brook rose Mt. Olivet. Ver. 24 a. "And, lo also Zadok *was there* and all the Levites *were* with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God. And *they* set down the ark of God." Zadok was of the branch of Eleazar. He and the priests, too, had fled the city. Arriving with the others on the other side of the Kidron, they set down the ark that they had taken with them.

Vers. 24 b. "And Abiathar went up, until all the people had done passing out of the city." The text is difficult here. Perhaps the meaning is that Abiathar, who was of the line of Eli and thus of the branch of Ithamar, had not left the city until the people had all passed over from the city.

Vers. 25 sqq.

But why should they have brought out to him the Ark? Shall he commit the folly and the wickedness of putting his confidence in the ark, now that the hand of the Lord is upon him? Can the ark save him? It is but a thing of metal and wood. It is God that he needed, and His favor and pardoning love. As to the ark, unless he had the assurance of being the object of the Lord's favor, what comfort could he derive from the consideration that it was the symbol of the Lord's

presence, if He was near to save such only in whom He took delight? So the king said to Zadok: "Carry back the ark of God unto the city." definitely Jerusalem, Mt. Zion. Why to this mount? The Lord had chosen Zion. He had desired it for His habitation. Zion was His rest forever. Here being His altars, from out of Zion He blest. Here were His beauties seen. Here the saints rejoiced. To be exiled from Zion permanently was to be doomed to everlasting darkness and death. David well understood. "If I find favor in the eyes of the Lord," he said, "he will bring me again"—to Zion," and show me it," *the ark*, "and its habitation," that is, shew me, His face, shine upon me with the light of His countenance, tell me that He loves me, despite all my sins, clothe me with salvation, satisfy me with His beauties, and give me to walk and talk with Him in his habitation." "But if he say thus, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let him do unto me as seemeth good unto Him." "And I will be silent. Nay, I will yet praise Him, and say that He is good. For what am I but a vile and undone sinner."

There is all this in the words of this penitent. His conviction of sin is that deep, his consciousness of his guilt and his awareness of his vileness before God is that lively that he can't bring over his lips a prayer for pardon. All he can manage to say in this moment is that the Lord do to him what seemeth good to Him. Yet in his heart he knows that in the end it will be well with him. The Lord had said that in Zion he would make the horn of David to bud and would make the crown upon him to flourish, Ps. 132:17. That this penitent well knows. By the promise he lives in this crisis. It is not unbelief that brought these words over his lips but the belief that in the way of humbling himself, the Lord would restore him to His habitation. His saying, "and let Him do unto me what seemeth good unto Him," was his way of telling the Lord how utterly vile he felt himself to be in the Lord's sight.

Vers. 27,28. But his faith was equalled only by his prudence, as is clear from his counsel to Zadok. "Art thou a seer? Return unto the city in peace, and your two sons with you, Ahimaaz thy son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar. See, I will tarry in the plain of the wilderness, until there come word from you to certify me."

The English A.V. inserts a negative here and translates: "Art thou not a seer?" But this is unwarrantable. Perhaps the best rendering is: Thou seer, thou prophet." It would not be amiss to call the high-priest a prophet, seeing that he received divine revelations through the Urim and the Thummim. But David's reason for so naming him was not that he

might learn through him whether the Lord would again take him into His favor and restore him to Jerusalem. He could have no doubt about that. His purpose was different. Zadok must observe the state of affairs in Jerusalem. He must learn of Absalom's plans and tell the king in order that he might know on what course to embark, whether to abide in the plain or to flee across the Jordan. And his incentive was his knowing that however ill-deserving he might be, the Lord had forgiven him and, accordingly, would deliver him out of his troubles.

"Zadok therefore and Abiathar carried back the ark of God to Jerusalem: and they tarried there."

Ver. 30. "And David went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet, going up and weeping. And he had his head covered, and he went barefoot; and all the people that were with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up."

It is well that he weeps. For the Lord lays His strokes upon him. Should he then not weep? The only question is whether he thanks the Lord for his pain by confessing that it is deserved. He does so. He covers his head. He goes barefoot. He is thus a penitent. The essence of his sorrow is love of God. Heshall therefore be comforted And so he is blessed.

Ver.31. David now, for the first time learns about the treachery of Ahithophel. "And one told David, saying, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom." The view that he had known before, and had kept silence out of consideration for his friends cannot well be harmonized with the consternation of soul that the prayer, brought over his lips by the evil tidings, bespeaks. This is his prayer: "O Lord, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness."

Well might he thus pray. Ahithophel had acquired fame as a counselor in the employ of David. It was being said that his counsel was, "as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God.

Vers. 32-37. A little while later, when David came to the top of the mount (Olivet), where men mere wont to worship God (Eng. A.V. where he-David-worshipped God. But not so good), Hushai the Archite, from the city of Erech in Ephraim, made his appearance with his coat rent, and earth upon his head As one of David's counselors, he had won the complete confidence of the king. This is plain from the task assigned him (ver. 34: sq.). Repeatedly he is called "David's friend," ver. 37; xvi:16; I Chron. xxvii:33. Hushai came to meet David, had consequently preceded him in the flight or else had been out of the city. His coming at this particular moment, immediately after the king had learned of Ahithophel's treachery, seems to have suggested to him, that he was a fitting

instrument for counteracting the influence of that traitor. Hence he said to him; "If thou passest on with me, then thou shalt be a burden unto me: but if to the city thou return and say to Absalom, Thy servant am I, O king; as I have been a servant of thy father, so from now on I am thy servant, even I, then mayest thou frustrate for me the counsel of Ahithophel." So reads this discourse literally.

But this was not honest. That through this forbidden stratagem the Lord defeats the counsel of Ahithophel, does not make it honest for David. Though God makes also wickedness, including the sins of His own people, to work for good to them that love Him, He loathes wickedness nevertheless, and destroys the impenitent. It is not true that a lie told for a good end is equivalent to the truth. We are not called to vindicate David's conduct. The Scriptures simply record it: and we are not to suppose that everything is here approved, which is not directly, and in so many words condemned.

Why Hushai would have been a burden to the king, should he have passed on with him, is not said. It may have been on account of his age or because he was not a warrior.

David encourages Hushai by saying that he will have with him there in Jerusalem Zadok and Abiathar and their two sons. By them he shall tell David all the things that he hears in the palace of the king. The reference here is again to Absalom who now reigns in Jerusalem.

XVI:1-4. When they reach the top of the hill, and had commenced the descent on the opposite side, Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, met them, bringing supplies, two hundred loaves of bread, and a hundred bunches of raisens, and a hunderd fruits, and a bottle of wine. He came to meet David, approached him from the opposite direction, must therefore have gone on in advance before the army. In answer to the king's question, "What meanest thou by these," he replies, "The asses be for the king's household to ride on; and the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat, and the wine that such that be faint in the wilderness may drink." As his purpose was to ingratiate himself with the king, he must have been shrewd enough to perceive that the revolt of Absalom was doomed to failure. But he lodges a false accusation against his master. In reply to the king's question, "where is the son (Mephibosheth) of thy master (Jonathan), he replies, "Behold, he abideth at Jerusalem: for he said, Today shall the house of Israel restore me the kingdom of my father." He had reference to Jonathan, who, if he had lived, would have been king.

But Mephibosheth was a cripple. Was it likely that he should have designs on the throne? Evidently

it was a lie. But David was too excited to see the trap that was laid for him, and unsuspectingly fell into it, and gave to Ziba as a gift all the land that he had been farming for Mephibosheth. "Behold, thine are all that pertaineth unto Mephibosheth." These were his words. He believed Ziba without investigation. And the swindler replies, "I humbly beseech thee that I may find grace in thy sight, O my Lord." David had acted with undue haste. It was another example of his credulity.

Vers. 5-14. Meanwhile the sorrowful company moved on. The path was along a ridge which had a deep ravine beneath it, and another ridge of a similar sort rising on the opposite side. As they went forward on the other side, a wicked man of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, made his appearance on the other side. Keeping abreast the while, he heaped curses on the head of David. He cried, "Come out, come out thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial: the Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned; and the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son: and behold, thou art taken in thy sins, because thou art a bloody man."

What an amazing perversion of history. His stand was that David had come to power as wading through the blood of Saul's house, and that therefore the rebellion of Absalom was a calamity that had befallen him by the direction of God on account of his blood-guiltiness regarding that house. Nor was he content with uttering maledictions; but cast stones at David and his servants across the gorge, and made every manifestation of implacability and malignity. It all shows how David's elevation to the throne had embittered Saul's kindred.

Abishai, the brother of Joab, was greatly incensed by his procedure, and asked permission to slay him. He said: "Why should this dead dog curse my Lord the king? Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head." But David restrained him with an expression that shows how keenly he felt the ascendancy which Joab and his brother had obtained over him. This was his reply: "What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah?" "What fellowship have I with you? We are persons of a different spirit." And continuing, "So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?"

Not that this wicked man had received from the Lord the charge: "Curse David." Yet it was by the providential direction of God that he cursed. David understands, and he patiently bows his head to receive from the Lord also this stroke. Yet he did not exonerate the reviler but held him guilty as is evident

from his instructions to Solomon regarding this man later on. But he felt that at this moment it was not his business to assert his rights, but only to humble himself under God's hand. And therefore turning once more to Abishai and to all his servants he said: "Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life; how much more now may this Benjamite do it? let him alone, let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look upon my affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day," that is, he means, "if I kiss his rod in humble recognition of my vileness, and of His righteous chastising providence."

Shimei's rage increased by David's quiet behaviour. For he threw stones at him and cast dust.

The king and his people came weary and refreshed themselves there. No place is named, but it must have been near the Jordan.

The collection of psalms of the Old Testament Bible includes one that bears the superscription: "A psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son." Thus if we want to know what went on in David's soul in this dark hour, how he was disposed toward the Lord and how he reacted toward God's strokes, we must pour over this psalm. For in it the penitent lays bare his heart.

It reads:

"Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! many are they that rise up against me.

"Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. Selah.

"But thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.

"I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and he heard me out of His holy hill. Selah.

"I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the Lord sustained me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves around me, round about.

"Arise, O Lord, save me, O my God; for thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly.

"Salvation belongeth unto the Lord: thy blessing is upon thy people. Ps. 3.

There was an element in Israel that troubled David before the Absalom rebellion. This was because of his public confessions of sin and his being occupied with matters of religion after his deep fall into sin. As one expressed it, had he been a worthless rake, making no pretention to religion, they would not have objected to him; or had he been a devout man, with a blameless reputation, they would have been compelled to respect him. But knowing his sin, and seeing

his devotion, they branded him a hypocrite and despised him. That this is true is clear from certain expressions in the 69th Psalm. They read: "When I wept and chastened my soul with fasting, that was to my reproach. I made sackcloth also my garment; and I became a proverb to them. They that sit in the gate speak against me; and I was the song of the drunkards."

Then he received tidings of Absalom's rebellion. His being told that the heart of all Israel was after Absalom, caused him to exclaim in amazement: "Lord how are they increased that trouble me." His life was in danger. That many were saying that there was no help for him in God implies that they had taken position that God was against him because of his sins and that as a result he now faced certain ruin. It added immensely to his suffering. But his faith did not cease because Christ prayed for him. And so he continues to cleave to God as his shield. And in that confidence he laid him down and slept and awakened.

We see in this psalm a wonderful thing, namely a penitent saint crawling always closer to God, as God laid on him His strokes.

G. M. Ophoff



Lord, hear my prayer, and let my cry
Have ready access unto Thee;
When in distress to Thee I fly,
O hide not Thou Thy face from me.

Attend, O Lord, to my desire,
O haste to answer when I pray,
For grief consumes my strength like fire,
My days as smoke pass swift away.

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CLASSIS WEST

Classis West will meet in the Protestant Reformed Church at Sioux Center, Iowa, on Wednesday, March 4, 1953. M. Gritters, S.C.

"Children's Retreat" Et Alia

The reader will, no doubt, bear with us, that in this issue no article appears from our hand under the heading "From Holy Writ".

The reason?

It is simply this: a rather urgent request came to the undersigned, whether we would not be willing to write a few thoughts in connection with the now rather well-known "Children's Retreat". After having consulted the Editor-in-Chief of the *Standard Bearer* I consented. However, it should be remembered by the reader of these lines, that the *Standard Bearer* does not open its columns for propaganda purposes for drives for this and for that. The purpose of the *Standard Bearer* is to attempt to give principal orientation; that and none other is the aim of these few lines. Let each then do as he sees his duty and as the Lord has prospered him let him give.

First of all, we would call attention to what, in our conviction, must be considered the fundamental principles for our conduct in regard to the establishment, maintenance and use of an institution such as *Children's Retreat et Alia*.

There is certainly no one in whom the love of God dwells, and who lives by the precepts of the Gospel, who will doubt that the performance of Christian mercy is not obligatory for the children of God in this world of sickness, pain, sorrow and death. Such life and conduct simply belongs to the very rudiments of our Christian life. Does not James say, speaking of the life of those, who are some first-fruits of the New Creation, that their pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and (thus) to keep themselves unspotted from the world? (James 1:27) And does not Jesus point out very clearly to the Jews of His day, that the question in our Christian life is not so much, who is my neighbor; but that the question is rather: whose neighbor am I? Now, certainly, the manifestation of mercy is not the whole of the pure religion, but it certainly is the very clear proof that our faith is not dead, but very much alive, since we have not shut up the bowels of our affection from the brethren.

Such is the chief motive; it is principal. This is more than mere practical consideration: I or my family might sometime need the aid of this institution. Such is the wisdom of this world in their generations. Ours should be that of making friends out of the unrighteous mammon in the all-together other sense of the pure love of aiding the helpless, the widows and orphans in their affliction. Then we live from prin-

ciple, that can stand the test of God's judgment, as He tries the hearts and reins. Worldly philanthropy and Christian mercy are as far apart as the poles; as far as east from west, and as different as Christ and the Devil. This truth should be our guiding star in all of our life; only thus do we keep our conscience pure before the all-seeing eye of God.

Our second observation is, that this responsibility toward our "neighbor" must not be assumed in a haphazard and arbitrary manner. God is a God of order. Things must be done orderly in the church of God, which is the pillar and ground of the truth.

To what do we refer?

That it is an inexorable law of God, that the natural is first and then the spiritual. That is true in a general sense; God first made the earthly creation and man as a "living soul" and afterwards, through the recreation in Christ Jesus, we have the heavenly, and man as the life-giving Spirit. Such it is in general, we say. But such is also true in the details of life, particularly in our exercise of mercy. Mercy begins at home. From out of the very center of the first institution by God all mercy must begin. Unless this is seen our mercy is blind, unreal, pretentious, and does not meet with God's approval. God is not mocked. Did Paul vainly write: "Honor widows that are widows indeed. But if any widow have children or nephews, let them *learn first to show piety at home*, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God."? And, again, does not Paul write: "But if any provide not for his own, (kin) and especially those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel"? Forsooth, these are words of instruction, precepts of the Gospel, which we should have as frontlets between our eyes, and which we should bind about our neck!

Mercy begins at home!

This we must keep in mind.

This truth of Scripture should also be brought into full relevancy when we establish, maintain and use such an institution as "Children's Retreat Et Alia". We must not be swayed by mere emotional addresses; we live by faith in the Scriptures and our mercy must be well-motivated. Mercy is more than sentimental, uncontrolled action. It is anchored in the will of God. We must follow the blue-print of God as He has designed life "from the beginning".

In the Old Testament Dispensation this was worked out for us in the minutest detail; there the people of God could turn to page so and so, and read exactly what to do in the given case. They were told exactly what institutions they might have. They were as children in a state of minority. Today this is no long-

er true. We are to work out our salvation; with fear and trembling we are to work it out. That is true when we face the question of establishing an institution such as "Children's Retreat". But let us not forget that this is no less true of the Christian Day School. Yes, we must work out our salvation when we send our children to our Christian Day School, but also when we have children, who must be cared for in Children's Retreat. In both cases this must be done in holy fear, trembling before God in the beauty of holiness. Both must go through the Holy Place of God.

When we are deeply conscious, that we are *working out* our salvation, then the two principles, referred to earlier in this essay, will stand clearly before our minds.

1. We will be deeply conscious that ours is a calling to mercy; to love our neighbor as ourselves.

2. We will also see, that such mercy begins at home. He, who works out his salvation, will ask God for grace to cheerfully bear his cross; to care for the weak in his home. He will desire to *learn* the spiritual art of caring for his kith and kin; and the spiritual harvest of the faithful he will now claim in hope, and presently he will receive the reward of the faithful. I am thinking of a mother, who had eight children of her own, all of whom were in need of her care, and who cared for her aged father and mother for nearly fourteen years. Finally her mother was totally blind for 5 years. When this young busy mother died, she had great peace. She had learned the joy of showing mercy at home. The righteous are glorious in their death. This spiritual art must not be lost sight of because of the mere existence of a necessary institution; that an institution is necessary does not mean that it is, therefore, necessary for me. Each case must be decided upon its own merits, and, what must not be forgotten, it must be working out of our salvation. Life is not a Pullman Train, but it is the trying ground, where, by God's grace, we may be found faithful in little to presently be placed over much in the Kingdom above.

It is well to bear in mind, that, also in the matter of the evaluation the merits of an institution such as "Children's Retreat", all the misuse of it, is no argument against the proper use of it. But this is true of everything in this world. "Children's Retreat Et Alia" is no exception. One cannot legislate Christianity. Evil men will be evil also in the Church. Those who have not salvation to work out, will certainly work out their damnation, even in "Children's Retreat Et Alia". The Lord is not mocked.

You give to this cause, a worthy one in itself?

Well and good. Only work out your salvation; let it be the pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father!

There are, it seems to me, some very important considerations, which must not be overlooked, when we work out our salvation in the given case of "Children's Retreat Et Alia".

The first consideration is, that we must not forget our former and earlier moral and financial commitments. We have the Ministry of the Word and the Schools to maintain. As Protestant Reformed Churches we have also a Theological School building presently to erect or to purchase. That is an earlier responsibility. We should not be like the little lad, who starts very vigorously to build a wagon, but who soon tires of it, and leaves it unfinished because of a new object of interest. We must not be children but men and women of purpose true. This latter too is working out our salvation with fear and trembling. It is the order of the day. Let us not forget that we have our Adam's Street School, our Hope School, not to forget Edgerton, Redlands. Having put our hand to the plow we must not look back. *Sapienti sat!*

The second consideration is, that we must not too easily say: if we give a gift for "Children's Retreat Et Alia" then we cannot meet out earlier commitments. God is not mocked. We must not tell the Lord, that He has not given sufficient into our hands, when, indeed, He has. First things must be first. It is good to remember the wonderful promise given to those who remember the poor; the Lord will remember Him in the time of trouble: He will preserve him and keep him alive, and he will be blessed upon earth. Yes, the Lord will strengthen such upon the bed of languishing; God will make his bed in His sickness.

Finally, we wish to close this article with a remark concerning the nature and extent of our cooperation with "Children's Retreat Et Alia".

It has been the observation of this writer, that the error of the "common grace" theory, as this concurs with the modern empirical theories of Psychology, has not left itself unfelt in the Institution that we are considering. The danger, of proceeding from the empirical principles of Freudian behaviorism, is more than imagery for an institution as Pine Rest Christian Association. In the actual psychiatric advice this is not seldom the case. The Scriptural psychology concerning the soul of man can so easily be substituted for the rather undefined conception of the "soul" of modern psychology. Rather than speaking of the deeper spiritual attitudes of the heart and mind, mention is made of the "emotions" and the "waves" of thought-patterns.

It is true, the problems here must not be over-simplified. Much needs to be explored. But the God-given guide-post must not be moved. Then all is lost, the foundations are destroyed. Then what can the righteous do?

It is with this reserved note, that we close these observations.

Remember: eternal vigilance is the price of freedom. This is also true in the Lord. It is an important factor in working out our salvation, and in our sowing mercy!

G. C. Lubbers



PERISCOPE

IGNORANCE?

In *Signs of the Times*, Jan. 6, 1953, there occurs an article under the title "Congress on Prophecy" in which the following paragraph especially drew our attention:

There was a time when Seventh-day Adventists were almost the only exponents of this doctrine—to the amusement and scorn of their fellow Christians. But they are not alone any more. The conviction that the world may soon end with Christ's return in glory is spreading like wildfire around the globe. It is penetrating the most orthodox communions. Even high-ranking theologians have boldly confessed their acceptance of this view of eschatology. If there should be anyone who, like Elijah, is saying to himself, "I, even I only, am left" to herald the Savior's return, he will soon learn that there are "seven thousand" others, and many more besides, in whose hearts the blessed hope is burning.

I mean, of course, to call special attention to the sentence: "There was a time when Seventh Day Adventists were almost the only exponents of this doctrine—to the amusement and scorn of their fellow Christians." I know not whether this reveals ignorance or conceit or both. Certain it is that it is not true. The entire Church of Christ in the world, from its earliest times, has always believed and confessed the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. From the time that the "Apostolicum" was written, and even before that, the Church confessed: "I believe.... In Jesus Christ.... He ascended up to heaven, and sit-

teth at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead." And everyone of the great confessions of the church since the time of the Reformation has an article confessing faith in the second coming of the Lord. It may be true that not always equal emphasis was placed upon this doctrine, but the faith in the second coming of the Lord was always the hope of the Church. And if the Seventh Day Adventists ever added any new element to the exposition of this doctrine, we confess that we are not aware of it.

THE NEW BIBLE.

Much is being written about the "New Bible" or the *Revised Standard Version* of the Holy Scriptures, both pro and con. The pro's are usually in the camp of liberal theologians, the con's belong to the orthodox, conservative type. Recently we received a "manifesto" in the form of a "United Protestant Declaration and Testimony in Defense of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the Word of God." We publish it here in its entirety:

BE IT KNOWN TO ALL:

In this year of our Lord, 1952, in order that a historic record may be attested in behalf of the Holy Scriptures, we, the undersigned Protestant ministers, ordained and called by the Lord Jesus Christ to preach His holy Word, and living within the United States of America, do hereby testify and declare the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

We declare that the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, published September 30, 1952, and copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, is unworthy of the name "Holy Bible." It is the Bible of Modernism and higher criticism.

Therefore, we do faithfully warn the English-speaking Christians throughout the world against the use of this book in their private devotions, and we call upon the Christian churches to refuse to accept it in their public worship. We specify the following:

1. The new translation removes the teaching of the virgin birth of our Lord Jesus Christ from the Old Testament. In Isaiah 7:14 "a young woman" is substituted for the word "virgin," which has been infallibly in-

terpreted in Matthew 1:23 by the Apostle Matthew as meaning virgin. The removal of the word "virgin" from Isaiah eliminates the miraculous element which the context explains God was giving to the house of David as a sign.

2. Numerous passages throughout the translation teaching the deity of Christ have been removed and others have been toned down. Psalm 2:11 and 12, which declares, "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry," has dropped all reference to the Son. Psalm 45:6, which, in the King James Version, reads, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever," and is declared to apply to the Son in Hebrews 1:8, in the new version eliminates all reference to God and the Son. The translators tell us that they use "thee" and "thou" to denote deity, and "you" and "yours" otherwise. Therefore, Peter's great confession in Matthew 16:16, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," is now a denial of Christ's deity by the Revised Standard Version rendering, "You are the Christ."

3. The translators in numerous places substitute their own conjecture for renderings which they are themselves unable to understand. These have been indicated by "Cn" and in some instances not indicated at all.

4. The translators are themselves men of liberal or modernist views in the present day ecclesiastical struggle. Therefore, the Bible may properly be called the "modernist Bible" because it reflects in so many ways their liberal theological position.

5. The new version indicates in no way the words supplied by the translators and not found in the original language. The italics as found in the King James Version indicate such words.

6. The preface to the book makes it clear that the translators did not consider the Bible to be the Word of God.

7. The effort of the National Council of Churches to set itself up as a competent authorizing agency for the new Bible is presumptuous. Neither the National Council nor any other Protestant body has the right or authority to assume such a prerogative among Protestants. Only the Spirit of God has authorized the Bible which belongs to all the people of God.

8. The securing of royalties from the sale



of the book by the National Council of Churches represents a commercializing and profit enterprise on the part of the Council for the promotion of its own particular liberal and modernistic ideas and programs, which implicates every purchaser of the Bible.

9. The widespread propaganda and fanfare in behalf of the Bible, with the holding of 3000 rallies across the United States, all in advance of the release and introduction of the Bible, involved a procedure which has led many to purchase and commend the book sight unseen.

10. The use of such a Bible by the church of Christ will bring untold harm not only to the ministry of the church but also to the souls of men.

We, the undersigned, desire it to be a matter of public record that we stand opposed to the entire program represented by this Bible and we call on our fellow Christians to continue to use the time-honored King James Version, with due recognition of English words which have changed their meaning, and we await the day when, in the gracious providence of the Almighty God, a faithful translation may be produced by Bible-believing and Bible-honoring scholars.

In support of this testimony and declaration we hereby affix our signatures with the earnest prayer that God may be pleased to use this witness everywhere.

What strikes us in this declaration is that the signers recommend the King James Version in distinction from other versions. This recommendation I heartily endorse, in spite of the fact that some improvements occur in Revised Versions.

We agree with Edward J. Young who, writing on the subject of the "New Bible" in *The Presbyterian Guardian*, Dec. 22, 1952, has the following to say:

For our part we welcome every serious attempt to get at the meaning of the original languages of the Bible. Every effort that is made to make the Word of God understandable to the world is surely to be commended. No translation of the Bible is sacrosanct and free from error, and there can surely be no objection to attempts to render the original more accurately.

There are many who feel that the King James' Version of the Bible is antiquated, and that a new version should be produced to supplant its use. On the other hand, al-

though the King James' Version is in some respects antiquated and even contains errors, it is nevertheless a model of English prose which has endeared itself to the hearts of the vast majority in English speaking Christendom. The reasons for discarding this time-honored version of the Bible must be very cogent. Any version which would seek to take its place must be of unusually fine quality.

The Revised Standard Version has made its appearance, as we have said, in the midst of great fanfare. At the same time, it has been the object of severe criticism, and this criticism has come for the most part from those who believe the Bible to be the Word of God. This is surely significant. At the same time, we prefer to make an investigation and examination of this new version for ourselves. In this present article, we shall merely set forth the results of a preliminary survey. What, then, is the first opinion which a preliminary survey of this new work leaves with one who believes that the Bible is the inspired and infallible Word of God.

He continues to express his opinion as what, above all else, should characterize a new translation of the Holy Scriptures:

To the present writer it seems that there is one thing above all else which should characterize a good translation, and that is its faithfulness to the original. A translation may be in beautiful and up-to-date language. If, however, it does not accurately reflect the original, it is not a good translation. It is, therefore, just that point which we must keep in mind as we examine the Revised Standard Version of the Old Testament. Is this translation an accurate rendering of the original, or is it not? That is the question which we must seek to decide in this present article.

Thereupon he subjects the new translation to a careful critical scrutiny and draws the conclusion that it must be found wanting in many respects.

It is not probable that our people will fall for this new attempt of modernism to attack the Holy Scriptures. Nevertheless, it is a good thing to call attention to this attempt. Even the attempt to popularize the language of Scripture we would condemn. The Bible as the Word of God is unique and must remain standing alone.

H.H.