

# THE STANDARD

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## MEDITATION

### GOLGOTHA IN PROSPECT

"And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." — Gen. 22:1, 2

After these things!

No, this designation of time does not refer to Abraham's last vision, but has a far broader application.

After these things has reference to all what had happened to him beforehand: his struggles and sufferings, his hopes and fears, his anxieties and perplexities, his sojourns and wanderings from Ur to Haran to Egypt and to Canaan again, his longing for a child and the wonderful receipt of a son in his old age, in short, after all these things, when he finally had come to the relaxed estate of a happy father to whom the promise and partial fulfilment of that promise had come, after these things God came to tempt him.

And what a temptation!

Slay thy son for a burnt offering!

A burnt offering of all things!

A burnt offering is atonement for sin.

Everything in this order from on high seems to militate against all he knew of God.

A burnt offering is atonement: but how can his sinful son Isaac be an atonement for Abraham's sins?

How can God order him to slay a man? That's murder.

How can God make His own promise of non effect: was not Isaac the promised seed in whom the whole church around the great Seed was to be called?

And then, what about the fact that Abraham loved this son, this only begotten son? Does God desire to trample on his loving heart?

These and more questions must have presented themselves to the suffering, bleeding heart of Abraham.

This was indeed a great *temptation*.

Temptation?

Does not James say later, much later, "Let no one say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man."

The word "tempt" is not used here in its proper and real sense.

To tempt is to appeal to the sin in man with the intention and purpose that he may do evil. To tempt is to present that which is against God's will and to put it in its most attractive light with the purpose that the person tempted may fall into sin and do that which is against God's will.

But when this word "tempt" is used in its unreal sense, it has the meaning of *try* and *prove*.

As such, it means to appeal to that which is good in man, namely, his faith, with the purpose that he may stand, and that his faith may appear the stronger after the trial.

And in this sense does Jehovah tempt His servant Abraham.

As one writer puts it: "Do this pleasant thing! And do not be hindered that it is wrong!" That is to tempt unto evil.

While in the case of the trial of our faith it is put: "Do this terrible thing and do not be hindered by the fact that it is painful!" That is to try a person's faith.

\* \* \* \*

How did God prove Abraham?

Well, it concerned all that Abraham held dear.

Listen to the word of the Lord in which the trial came to him:

First: Take now thy son!

Second: Thine only son!

Third: Whom thou lovest!

Fourth: Get thee to Moriah! (That's a 3 day journey!)

Fifth: Offer him there!

Sixth: For a burnt offering! (Of all things!)

That is blow upon blow.

It did not take long to inflict these mortal wounds upon the soul and heart and very life of the patriarch.

At every word of God the knife sank deeper and deeper into his bleeding heart.

Note further how the holy record emphasizes the trial of Abraham's heart:

- a. Abide ye here: I and the *lad* will go yonder and worship and come again unto you.
- b. He takes with him *Isaac his son*.
- c. Lays the wood on *Isaac his son*.
- d. Isaac spake unto *Abraham his father*.
- e. Isaac says: *My father!*
- f. Abraham answers: Here am I *my son!*
- g. *My son*: God will provide!
- h. Abraham binds *Isaac his son*.
- j. Abraham took the knife to slay *his son*.

Do you not notice how this terrible trial is stressed in the whole narrative?

And what about the prospect of walking and riding with his son for those terrible three days with the knife and the blood and Isaac's death rattle in Abraham's ears?

Abraham's silence speaks volumes, volumes of agony.

\* \* \* \*

But he did.

He arose early and prepared for the journey.

It is also very clear that he never acquainted Sarah with this terrible news from heaven. Otherwise Sarah would certainly have embraced Isaac for the last time, and such unwarranted emotionalism would have aroused the curiosity of Isaac. No, Abraham did not take counsel with flesh and blood. Why should he? God spake, and for him that was final.

There was just one thing to do, and he did it: to obey the heavenly voice!

Oh, what faith!

And they went both of them together: twice you read that.

There may be no other witnesses.

I see the scene. Abraham with the knife and the fire in his hands. Isaac? His father laid the wood on his shoulders.

Much later we will see the fulfilment: God will lay on Jesus the wood of the cross when He ascends Moriah's hill. *And both of Them went together. This together-ness is the God-man.*

Well, the altar is built. Isaac does not remonstrate when the cords are bound around about him. He is the wondrous type of the silent Christ.

Abraham stretches forth his hands to the knife. The knife ascends and is ready to plunge into the heart of Isaac his beloved son.

But there comes the voice of the angel: Abraham! Abraham!

It is enough.

I think that neither Abraham nor Isaac talked much in their descent of Moriah's mount.

They had seen Jehovah in His provision of the lamb, the ram, caught in the thicket.

Caught in the thicket! The thicket of the wrath and fury of God Almighty.

They had seen the Christ!

No, but they worshipped!

I think that when Jesus later on would say: Abraham saw My day and rejoiced, He had in mind this hill of Moriah. There Abraham saw more than all the disciples of Jesus before His crucifixion, although He had prophesied the whole Divine Drama beforehand.

Oh, Abraham is the father of all believers. No one saw more during the Old Testament days of shadows than Abraham.

How strong must his faith have been.

God had said to him: look to the heavens, and thy seed will be as numerous as all those stars. And in Isaac shall thy seed be called.

But now he is called to sacrifice that son!

But he persisted in his blind love and obedience of faith, He actually would have slain his son. In fact that is exactly stated in Heb. 11:17-19. There we read twice that he *offered up* his only begotten son.

And that Scripture also tells us what was in the heart of Abraham. To all the considerations of his fleshly mind he answered: "That God was able to raise him up from the dead!"

Abraham had just one solitary thought in his heart all those terrible hours from Beer-sheba to Mount Moriah: GOD IS ABLE! And: GOD IS FAITHFUL!

\* \* \* \*

What we have seen of Abraham, Isaac and Mount Moriah is the everlasting Gospel of God.

It was a burnt offering. And Abraham was not allowed to go through with his contemplated offering. A burnt offering is atonement. And a sinful Isaac could not atone. Furthermore, in a burnt offering the hand was laid on the head of the sacrificial animal: that is substitution. That is Christ.

It was killed, flayed, cut in pieces, drained of its blood. That is the horrible death of Christ.

It all was burned until nothing remained, unto God a sweetsmelling Saviour. That was Jesus, Eph. 5:1, 2.

Every morning and every evening. There is a depth here in which I can look, but it is dazzling. Christ added an everlasting merit to His suffering.

And so Isaac and Abraham are types. And they knew it. Abraham intimated such when he said: God will provide Himself a Lamb for a burnt offering.

But here is the greatest of all: Abraham saw Golgotha and the garden of Joseph where Jesus would arise Triumphant!

For the Bible says of this event:

“By faith Abraham offered up Isaac, accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from whence also he received him *in a figure!*”

That can mean only one thing: Abraham saw in Isaac when this lad clambered down from the altar the resurrected Lord, but in a figure!

Holy jealousy assails us when reviewing the hero of faith.

But the worship of Abraham and Isaac is shared by our own: May our wondrous Jehovah God be praised unto eternity for the Gift of His dear Son! Amen.

G.V.

A VINDICATION OF GOD'S WAYS

God loveth the righteous, His goodness is sure,  
He never forsaketh the good and the pure;  
Yet once my faith faltered, I envied the proud,  
In doubt and disquiet my spirit was bowed.

The wicked are prospered and firm in their strength,  
No pangs do they suffer, though death come at length;  
They are not in trouble as other men are,  
The plagues of their fellows they view from afar.

I went to God's temple; my doubts were dispelled,  
The end of life's journey I clearly beheld;  
I saw in what peril ungodly men stand  
With sudden destruction and ruin at hand.

Psalm 73: 1, 2, 6

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## EDITORIALS

### The Free Offer

According to the authors of "The Free Offer" the fact that God loves all men, even the reprobate, even His enemies, is evident from the gifts of so-called "common grace" as clearly taught in Matt. 5:44-48. According to them, we must love our enemies, even the enemies of God, because God loves His own enemies, all His enemies, even the reprobate. This is supposed to be revealed in the fact that God causes the sun to shine upon the wicked and the righteous and rains upon them all alike. How, in the light of this general "common grace" of God, they would explain the "common curse" of God as is revealed in all kinds of evils, in sickness and death, in wars and rumors of war, or, as is the case in Texas at present, after a prolonged drought, in tornadoes and floods of rain, is a question which it is for them to answer. Does this "common curse" mean that God also hates the righteous and the wicked, the elect and the reprobate alike? Or must we rather accept the teaching of Scripture that, even as God causes all things to work together for good to them that love Him, to them that are the called according to His purpose, so He causes all things to work together for evil to them that hate Him, whom He has reprobated according to His purpose? Let them answer.

That the Scriptures must have nothing of the "common grace" of the authors of "The Free Offer" is very evident.

I could simply quote an abundance of passages.

But rather than simply quote I will explain one or two of them briefly. I have done this before, but it can do no harm to do it once again.

The first passage I have in mind is Ps. 73, which is very comforting for the people of God in the midst of the world of all ages.

The psalmist announces what we may consider the theme of the whole psalm in the very first verse: "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart."

The meaning of this verse is, according to the context which follows, that He is not good to the wicked and reprobate, no matter how much they may prosper in the world, but only to His own people, to the righteous, no matter how much they have to suffer in the present time.

Such is the theme.

And this theme the psalmist further develops in the psalm and this, too, not from a mere doctrinal viewpoint, but from the aspect of his own subjective experience.

His feet were, for a time, almost gone, his steps had almost slipped from the path of the righteous. The reason was that, like the authors of "The Free Offer," he had looked at the rain and sunshine, at the "common grace" of God. Only, according to him, the wicked received much

more of this "common grace" than the righteous. Hence his trouble and confusion. He was envious at the foolish; he saw the prosperity of the wicked. There are no bands in their death, their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; they are not plagued as other men. They are filled with pride and "violence covereth them as a garment." They live in abundance and have more than their hearts can desire. They are wicked and corrupt in heart and mind as well as in their walk. They speak loftily and even set their mouth against the heavens.

Thus are the wicked.

Thus are the objects of the "common grace" of God, according to the psalmist.

On the other hand, the poet and the people of God suffer.

They certainly do not enjoy the blessings and benefits of "common grace" according to the psalmist.

Just hear them complain:

"Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning."

Yet this is not the end.

The psalmist entered into the sanctuary of God. He now viewed the same situation in the world from God's point of view, in the light of His own revelation. In that light, he clearly understood that there is no "common grace."

He saw the end of the wicked which is eternal destruction. But he also saw that all the way of the wicked, all their prosperity and abundance, is only a means unto the end. For he writes:

"Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image."

Seeing all this, the psalmist now confesses that he was very foolish when he was envious at the prosperity of the wicked. He was ignorant when he was grieved and pricked in his reins because of this so-called common grace.

For now he understands, not only that the prosperity of the wicked must lead them to destruction, but also that his own way, and the way of all the people of God, is simply a means to lead them and him to everlasting life and glory. God shall lead him with his counsel, and afterward receive him to glory. And the conclusion of the whole matter is expressed in the words of vs. 26-28: "My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee."

But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works."

Another passage of Scripture with similar contents is found in Ps. 92:5-7:

"O Lord, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep. A brutish man knoweth not: neither doth a fool understand this. When the wicked spring as the grass and all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever."

This expresses the same thought as we explained in connection with Ps. 73. The things of this present life are, by no means, proof that God loves the reprobate wicked. The very contrary is true. They may and do prosper and flourish. And only a foolish and brutish man may imagine that this prosperity is a proof of the grace and love of God to them. But, in the light of revelation the child of God knows better, for he understands the deep thoughts of God. He understands the purpose of God with all this prosperity. It is that they may be led to everlasting destruction.

Such is the current teaching of Scripture.

How in the light of Scripture the authors of "The Free Offer" can write as they do, is a mystery to me.

For they write:

"Clearly implied is the thought that God, the Father, loves his enemies and that it is because he loves his enemies that he makes his sun rise upon them and sends them rain. This is just saying that the kindness bestowed in sunshine and rain is the expression of divine love, that back of the bestowal there is an attitude on the part of God, called love, which constrains him to bestow these tokens of his loving-kindness. This informs us that the gifts bestowed by God are not simply gifts which have the effect of good and blessing to those who are the recipients but that they are also a manifestation or expression of lovingkindness and goodness in the heart or will of God with reference to those who are the recipients. The enjoyment on the part of its recipients has its ground as well as its source in this lovingkindness of which the gifts enjoyed are the expression. In other words, these are gifts and are enjoyed because there is in a true and high sense benevolence in the heart of God."

This interpretation, that rain and sunshine teaches us that God loves all his enemies, elect and reprobate, is contrary to all Scripture.

To me, the Word of God teaches:

1. That God loves the righteous but hates the wicked.
2. That, indeed, He loves His enemies, but only in Christ Jesus.
3. That in sunshine and rain His people may, indeed, behold a symbol of this love of God to His enemies who are in Christ.
4. That, because of this, the disciples, too, must love, not God's enemies, but their own.

5. That they do this exactly in bringing to them the Word of God that God loves the righteous and hates the wicked, that He loves His enemies only in Christ Jesus, and that, therefore, they must come to Him in the way of repentance.

This is the only love of their enemies the people of God can show. H.H.

### Persecution in Hungary

The Dutch papers in the Old Country published recently a call to prayer which was sent to all the consistories of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. It is a call to prayer for the people of God in Hungary, particularly those of Calvinistic origin, because they appear to suffer rather severe persecution from the Soviet enemy.

Many pastors and other leaders in the churches were arrested and were subjected to many hours of questioning. They were so maltreated and heavily beaten that permanent injuries were the result. Many homes were searched, and even several of the common members were arrested and put into prison. A reign of terror seems to prevail.

Shall we, in our private and public prayers, also remember our fellow-saint in Hungary, even though we do not necessarily specifically mention them?

H.H.

### As to the Gospel Invitation

On this subject writes the Rev. H. J. Kuiper in *The Banner* of April 27, 1957.

He maintains:

1. That the gospel is not only a command and a warning, but "also a gracious invitation to come to Christ and find rest of soul through faith in His name."
2. He adduces some passages of Scripture that allegedly must prove this contention.
3. Further, he argues that the gospel as an invitation does not come only to the elect but also to the non-elect or reprobate who hear it.
4. Next, he takes the position that God is *desirous* that all who hear the gospel invitation should come to Christ and be saved, whether they are elect or reprobate. As far as God is concerned, none need to be lost. He wants to save all men; in fact he longs to save all men, at least, in as far they hear the gospel invitation. In other words, it is not of God, but it is up to man to accept the invitation. This is supposed to be Reformed doctrine! To me, this is sheer Arminianism.
5. Also this the Rev. Kuiper attempts to prove from Scripture. To this we may return later.

6. What we are immediately interested in, however, is his quotation from Canons III, IV, 8, because he, finally, refers to us and maintains that we cannot subscribe to this article of the Canons. Writes he: "This article is the rock on which the denial of a sincere invitation of the gospel to all who hear is shattered. Honesty should compel all those who deny that there is such an invitation to say that this is one article with which they do not agree."

This is rather strong. Kuiper virtually accuses us of dishonesty. This we cannot let go unchallenged.

Let us, then, first of all quote the article:

"As many as are called by the gospel, are unfeignedly (seriously, Latin: serio, H.H.) called. For God hath most earnestly and truly declared in His Word what would be acceptable to him: namely, that the called should come unto Him. (The text in our old psalters is corrupt. It reads: "that *all* who are called should comply with the invitation." Too bad, for Kuiper that this is not the text!) He, moreover, seriously promises eternal life, and rest, to as many as shall come to him, and believe on him."

Kuiper would render this article, according to his own interpretation, as follows:

"As many as are invited by the preaching of the gospel, are unfeignedly invited by God. For God hath most earnestly and truly declared in His Word, that He is desirous, yea, longs and yearns that every one that hears the gospel invitation should comply with it and accept it. Moreover, He seriously promises to all who accept the invitation, and thus come to him and believe, rest and eternal life."

This is a very serious corruption of Canons III, IV, 8. No Arminian would object to it. Even for that very reason, it cannot be the meaning of this article of the Canons, for they are composed to combat the Arminian and Pelagian errors. But the teaching of Kuiper in this entire article in *The Banner* is, not Reformed but downright Arminian.

Repeatedly I instructed my catechism classes in the whole of the Canons. The same I did in our theological school. I omitted no article at all. Also III, IV, 8 was explained. I still have my notes from which I dictated. I may, therefore, refer to them. Canons III, IV, 8 I explained as follows:

First of all, in those notes, I ask the question, whether this article of the Canons speaks of the external or of the internal calling.

This question Kuiper does not and cannot even ask for he makes of the calling an invitation, and it is nonsense to speak of an external and internal invitation.

But I answer that question by stating that, although article 8 might be explained as referring to the internal calling, so that we might read: "As many as are internally called by the gospel are unfeignedly called," yet there are several

objections against such an explanation, such as: 1. That the internal calling is not only by the preaching of the gospel, but also by the Spirit. 2. The term "unfeignedly" has no meaning if the calling is conceived as being internal. 3. The article speaks of what God truly declares in His Word. 4. Article 9 of the same chapter of the Canons speaks undoubtedly of the external calling and this article is most closely connected with Article 8. Hence, my conclusion is that this article refers, not to the internal, but to external calling by the preaching of the gospel.

The word "unfeignedly" (I am still referring to my notes) signifies that God means exactly what He says in the gospel; He certainly does not lie. He never puts to shame. He is always serious and fulfills all the promises of the gospel. Does He say, in this calling of the gospel that He is desirous and longs that everybody accepts the gospel invitation? By no means. But He, in the calling of the gospel, certainly declares that He wants the sinner to repent and, in the way of repentance, come unto Him. That is the contents of this external calling of the gospel. It, therefore, does not mean that God simply "invites" every one that hears the gospel without distinction, but that He calls every sinner to forsake his wicked way and, in the way of sincere repentance to come unto Him. Hence, the way of repentance is the only way to come to God. And this God "unfeignedly" declares in the gospel or in the calling of the gospel.

Hence, also the promise of the gospel is "unfeigned" and "serious." What is that promise? Is it that God will give eternal life and rest to all without distinction or to all that accept a certain general invitation? By no means. According to the article of the Canons, He promises these blessings only to those that come unto Him in the way of sincere repentance, and believe on Him. But who are they? According to all the rest of the Canons, they are those who by the power of His grace, believe on Him. No one else can or will ever believe on Him. Briefly, therefore, they are the elect.

This is the interpretation that is in harmony with all the rest of the Canons.

I challenge Kuiper to deny this.

I challenge him to show: 1. That the Confessions in general and the Canons ever speak of the "invitation" instead of the calling of the gospel. 2. That the Confessions or, particularly, the Canons ever speak of a possibility of coming to God except in the way of repentance. 3. That the Confessions and, particularly, the Canons ever teach that repentance is possible except by the grace of God. 4. That the promise mentioned in Canons III, IV, 8 is general and means all that hear the gospel.

This he can never do.

His interpretation of this part of the Canons is thoroughly Arminian!

He likes "contradiction" or "apparent contradictions." He, evidently, finds such an "apparent contradiction" between article 8 of Canons III, IV and the rest of the Canons that maintain the truths of predestination. And, according to him, the Canons are not afraid of such "apparent contradictions." Writes he:

"There is not a single creed which presents the doctrine of divine predestination as uncompromisingly as the Canons of Dort. Yet when the authors come to this article, they do not, for the sake of maintaining the doctrine of predestination, sacrifice the plain teaching of Scripture that the invitation of the gospel comes to all who hear the good tidings. Neither do they try to solve the apparent contradiction, or even mention it. Instead of agreeing with those who dare say that God would be a hypocrite to offer salvation to those whom He excluded from it by His decree of reprobation, they say the very opposite; namely, that 'as many as are called by the gospel are *unfeignedly* called, . . . ; that is *without* hypocrisy, pretense, or false show."

But to me there is no contradiction or apparent contradiction between this article and the rest of the Canons.

It is possible that one invents a contradiction by using the term "invitation" as Kuiper does, instead of "calling." But this term is neither Confessional nor Scriptural. The Bible always speaks of "Calling" and so do the Confessions. But if we employ this term, there certainly is no contradiction or even apparent contradiction between Canons III, IV, 8 and the rest of the Canons.

Just let us test the truth of this statement by reading this particular article in connection with the rest.

"Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, from the foundation of the world, he hath out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of his own will, chosen, from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault, from their primitive state of rectitude, into sin and destruction, a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom he from eternity appointed Mediator and Head of the elect, and the foundation of Salvation.

"This elect number, though by nature neither better nor more deserving than others, but with them involved in the common misery, God hath decreed to give to Christ, to be saved by him and effectually to call (note that this calling is distinct from that in III, IV, 8, H.H.) and draw them to his communion by his Word and Spirit" etc. I, 7.

"What peculiarly tends to illustrate and recommend to us the eternal and unmerited grace of election, is the express testimony of sacred Scripture, that not all, but some only are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal decree, etc. I, 15.

"Moreover, the promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified, shall not perish but have ever-

lasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the gospel." II, 5. This, therefore, is the external calling. It is not an invitation, but the preaching of the promise together with the command to repent and believe.

"For this was the sovereign counsel and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of his Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation." etc. II, 8.

"As many as are called by the gospel (This is the same external calling mentioned in II, 5, which must be accompanied with the command to repent and believe, H.H.) are unfeignedly (seriously, H.H.) called. For God hath most earnestly and truly declared in His Word, what will be acceptable to him; namely, that the called should come unto him (in the way of repentance and faith, see II, 5, H.H.), He, moreover, seriously promises eternal life and rest, to as many as shall come to Him, (in the way of repentance and faith, see II, 5, H.H.) and believe on him." III, IV, 8.

"But that others who are called by the gospel, obey the call, and are converted, is not to be ascribed to the proper exercise of free will, whereby one distinguishes himself above others, equally furnished with grace sufficient for faith and conversion, as the proud heresy of Pelagius maintains; but must be wholly ascribed to God, who as he has chosen his own from eternity in Christ, so he confers upon them faith and repentance, rescues them from the power of darkness and translates them into the kingdom of his dear Son." etc. III, IV, 10.

I challenge Kuiper to detect any contradiction in all this.

He invents contradictions, first, by quoting article 8 of Canons II, IV out of its context; secondly, by introducing the term "invitation" instead of "calling."

Thus he corrupts the Canons, deceives his reading public the majority of whom, I am confident, never study the Canons, and teaches the proud heresy of Pelagius.

H.H.

## NOTICE!

The Editorial Staff of the *Standard Bearer* will meet, the Lord willing, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, at the home of Rev. H. Hoeksema, on Thursday evening, June 6, 1957. The members of the staff will please view this announcement as an official notice.

Rev. H. Veldman, Secretary

## OUR DOCTRINE

### THE BOOK OF REVELATION

#### CHAPTER XI

#### THE VISION OF THE THRONE OF GOD

#### Revelation 4

On the one hand, therefore, we shall find in the battle that is pictured before us in the Book of Revelation the force of the devil, Satan, the Antichrist, the beast and the false prophet, Babylon, and Gog and Magog. On the other hand, we shall find the Almighty God revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord, the Lamb, the holy angels, the church, and the new creation, with all its powers battling for victory, even though on the part of Christ the victory is not only sure but is also already won. Hence, the ultimate result will be that the force of the kingdom of Satan is hopelessly and definitely defeated forever, while the glorious kingdom of our God has the eternal victory.

One thing we must be warned against, as we follow the discussion of this most intricate, but at the same time most beautiful part of the Word of God. And that is that we have in the Book of Revelation, no more than in any prophecy of Scripture, not a mere history written beforehand. If such were the character of the book we are studying, the matter would be quite simple indeed. In that case you would simply be able to turn page after page, just as you peruse the pages of history, in order then to find scene after scene of the world's history depicted in this book, and that also, just in the order in which they will take place. In that case you would, of course, also be able to identify the fulfillment of every portion in actual history, and point out very definitely how far we have already advanced on the road that leads to the end of time and to the victory of the kingdom of God. Even though many interpreters of the Book of Revelation entertain this notion, and still persist that only in this way can we properly understand the book, this conception is nevertheless very false. We must rather present the whole book to your attention as a picture of all that must still come to pass thrown on the screen of symbolism. No attempt is made at all at following the historical order of things. At no time does the book present the chronological order. The element of time is wanting. John merely perceives different scenes, and he relates those scenes as they are held before his vision. No attempt is made in the book to point out historical causes and effects, so essential in the record of any history worthy of the name. John merely presents to us the scenes that are presented to his vision and that picture the future, as they are all connected with their main cause, the Almighty God and His eternal decree as revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. This, therefore, you must remember as we

shall study in the chapters that follow the gradual displacement of the sinful order by the perfect one, pictured to us in the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven vials, that represent the general outline of the second part of the book. Even as we have already maintained in connection with the discussion of the seven churches, so also in relation to the second part of the Book of Revelation we must remember that what is pictured in this part is both contemporaneous and consecutive. History repeats itself. And in that ever-repeating history you will see the recurrence of the scenes pictured on this screen, only remembering this, that they develop and repeat themselves with ever increasing force and vehemence, till finally Christ shall come to establish His own kingdom forever and in perfect righteousness.

There is a parallel noticeable between the first part of the book, which we already discussed, and this second part. You will remember that in the first part, before the letters to the seven churches were written, we found the vision of the Christ, the Head and the very life of the church. Thus it is also here, in the second part. Before the Lord shows John the actual battle between the two opposing kingdoms in history, He reveals to him in chapters 4 and 5 the eternal and unconquerable power that surely shall have the victory. In these two chapters He gives us the picture of the battling force of the kingdom of God from its ideal point of view. In these two chapters, therefore, there occurs as yet nothing that relates to the battle as such. But they give us a picture of the eternal power and control of the world's history as it will display itself in the new dispensation. We shall find that it gives us a picture of the new order of the kingdom as it must surely battle on to victory throughout this dispensation, even unto the end. In chapter 4 we have the vision of the throne of God, an ideal representation of the new order that is to come at the parousia, in the day of the Lord, the realization of which is the efficient cause of all that is revealed in the rest of the book.

"After this," so John tells us, "I looked, and behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter." There is no reason to believe, as some have it, that there was a long interval between the time that the first vision was finished and the time that the second vision began. However, John was conscious of a change, as is evident from the entire description, and especially from the words of verse 2, "And immediately I was in the spirit . . ." We remember that he told us with respect to the first vision that he was in the spirit on the Lord's day. It seems that after that first vision was finished he returned to the natural state. And now, at the call of the same voice he had heard before, the voice as of a trumpet, he again is translated in the spirit, so that he can behold the things which natural eye cannot perceive. Although, therefore, we must not suppose that there was a long interval of time between the first and

the second visions, there is nevertheless a decided transition from the first vision to the second,—a transition of which John is very definitely conscious. The difference between the first and the second vision is characterized especially by the change of scene. The first vision was on earth, and for that reason had a very definite historical background, which made it rather easy for John and also for us to understand and comprehend its meaning. John was acquainted with the seven churches. And those seven churches, as we know, were a picture of the whole church as it exists throughout the ages, as it also exists today. But in the second vision John is called to heaven. Heaven is opened to his spiritual eye, and a voice calls to him, "Come up hither." Of course, we do not understand this to have been a literal and bodily translation; but it was a translation only in the spirit. It was a being called to heaven in the vision, and it was for that same reason also the obedience to the call that was visionary, or, if you please, in the spirit. The door, the voice that called him up hither, and the obedience to that call, all were visionary. Nevertheless, we must remember that what we are to see and to study in the future is more idealistic and more symbolic than that which we have studied in the past.

The things revealed in this second part are things which must come to pass hereafter. This *must*, you understand, is a divine must. It implies the necessity of God's counsel. God has decreed the entire course of history, and because of that decree things must necessarily come to pass, and that also, exactly as decreed, and not otherwise. It is because of this fact of the decree of God that the Almighty only possesses the power to reveal what must come to pass in the future. Nothing that is revealed in this book can fail to come to pass, because behind it all stands the unchangeable counsel of the Almighty, that has determined the end from the beginning. And when these things are further described as things that must come to pass hereafter, and therefore, in the future, we must in no wise understand this to mean after the church has finished its history. Thus, indeed, some would have it. They present the course of events and the outline of the Book of Revelation as follows. First there is the history of the church in the world, as pictured in the first three chapters of this book. Then follows the rapture of the church, the being caught up of the church in heaven. This is supposed to be described in chapters 4 and 5. After this, according to these interpreters, follows the period of the great tribulation for the world, when all the woes and afflictions that are predicted in the main body of this book shall be realized. But the church shall have no part in this great tribulation. For from the time that is pictured in chapters 4 and 5 the church is no more in the world, but in heaven. Thus these interpreters picture the order of this second part of the Book of Revelation. Evidently, however, this is a mistaken notion. The church is spoken of several times, also in the remaining portion of the Book of Revelation. And besides, John never tells us that the church is caught up

in heaven. He merely informs us that he himself was translated, and that too, only in the spirit. But above all, if that were the case, if the church from this time forth would have no part in all the tribulations the world must suffer, what would be the use and the purpose of the rest of this book, which is plainly written for the comfort of the church in the midst of the tribulation of this present time? Hence, we will have nothing of this interpretation, but maintain that all is recorded in the rest of the book concerns the whole church in the world, and is written for the joy and comfort and hope of the church of Christ in this present time. And when the text says that these things must come to pass hereafter, it does not mean after the church has finished her course, but simply after the present time, from John's point of view. John was to record the things that are and the things that will be in the future, according to 1:19. The things that are he has recorded with a view to the seven churches of Asia. In the rest of the book he is to receive the revelation of the things that must come to pass in the future, and then again, not merely things that happen only toward the end of time, but in the entire future, in this entire new dispensation, from the time that John receives his vision even unto the end. But again we must remember that these things shall come to pass in this dispensation with increasing force as the day of the Lord draws nigh.

Having thus introduced the vision and prepared our minds and hearts to receive it, John informs us about the things which he saw in heaven. The first object that draws his attention is a throne. It is indeed the central figure in the whole vision, the chief element of it. It, above all, draws his attention. All the rest is grouped around that throne. A throne, as we have had occasion to remark before, is the symbol of royal sovereignty and majesty, and therefore, of course, at the same time, of the supreme power of judgment. Here, of course, as we learn from the rest of the vision, it stands for the highest sovereignty of heaven and earth. For He that sits on the throne is none other than the Triune God. It is true that John simply speaks of one sitting on that throne, He does not attempt to describe Him. And this is perfectly appropriate: no one has ever seen God, and John could not definitely describe His form. He merely states the general impression he received of His holiness and righteousness and glory and majesty in general, when he tells us: "He was to look upon like a jasper and a sardius." A sardius is a stone of bright red color, and therefore is representative here of the fire of God's holiness and wrath. Exactly what was the appearance of the jasper which John here mentions cannot be ascertained. But in connection with elements of other visions of God, in Ezekiel and Daniel, we may probably think of a bright, crystal-white stone, something like the diamond, thus indicating the righteousness and purity of God, as well as His glory and victory. These stones, shining together and their glittering view intermingling, present a beautiful picture of the righteousness and

holiness of God in themselves, as well as in their action against a sinful world, shining forth in their majesty and sovereignty, and therefore also in His holy wrath.

But there are still more elements to be considered. Round about the throne John saw a rainbow, like an emerald to look upon. We are all acquainted with the rainbow. It calls to our mind every time it stretches forth its beauty in the heavens the gracious covenant God made with Noah, promising him that the world should no more be destroyed as in the flood. In general, therefore, the rainbow is a symbol of God's grace with a view to all His works. And if we read, as we do in this section, that this rainbow round about the throne of God was like an emerald to look upon, we find in it especially the symbol of hope. The emerald is green. It is the symbol of nature budding forth and renewing itself in the time of spring, the symbol also of the new creation, and therefore the symbol of hope with respect to the coming of the day of the Lord. Together, therefore, the vision of the throne, with God to look upon as a jasper and sardius and with the rainbow round about the throne, represents God in His righteousness, holiness, purity, grace, and majesty, and at the same time in His wrath against sin and Satan, and as promising the coming of the new and sinless order in the new heavens and the new earth. It is a throne of righteousness and grace, holiness and purity, wrath against the world and hope for the people of God. Still more. Out of the throne proceed lightnings and thunderings and voices. Voices here does not stand for anything definite, as if the voice of God or the voice of any creature were meant, but simply indicates the impression John received over and above that of the lightnings and the thunders. They were accompanied, no doubt, by the roaring noise of the stormy sea, which John calls the voices. They are as the voices of many waters. What is more important is that in this description we find once more a symbol of the majesty of God, both in itself and in its terrible activity against the sinful world as the Judge of all. When we read of these lightnings and thunders, we naturally think of Mt. Horeb, where God appeared in His majesty as the King of Israel and its Law-giver. We may also think of the many psalms that describe the Lord in His majesty and His coming for judgment in lightnings and thunder. But there is still more. Before the throne are seven lamps burning, which are the seven Spirits of God. These seven Spirits, as we have already explained in connection with 1:4, are indeed the Holy Spirit, but then as the Spirit of Christ as He dwells in the church of God forever. The Triune God sits on the throne; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost in their essential divinity are enthroned as the Lord God Almighty, thrice holy. But here, before the throne stands the Spirit of Christ. It is the Holy Spirit as He dwells in Christ as the Head of His church, and therefore, the Spirit that also dwells in the church. It is also the Spirit of God in Christ through Whom the kingdom of God will be perfected, and in its perfection exist

forever. This, therefore, is the place of the seven Spirits in this beautiful vision which is symbolic of the new order that is to come.

There is still more. Before the throne John beholds as it were a sea of glass like unto crystal. Some have made of this sea of glass the realization of the brazen sea in the temple, connected with the altar of burnt offering in the court. Others are of the opinion that this sea of glass represents the sea of nations, because in the Book of Revelation the term *sea* always refers to the nations of the world. However, neither of these explanations can satisfy us. For the brazen sea there is in this scene no place, no more than for the altar of burnt offering. For it is plainly the picture of the ideal new order, as it will ultimately have the victory. And although it be true that the term *sea* in the Book of Revelation generally symbolizes the nations, it must be remembered that for such nations there is no room here. Nor is the picture of the crystal sea very appropriate to indicate the sea of the rebellious nations. And secondly, John does not say that he saw a sea, but as it were a sea, something like it. We therefore rather fasten our attention on the glass and crystal, and explain that this sea is a symbol of the splendor, as well as of the transparency, of the entire new creation. In the sea of glass and crystal before the throne the new creation in all its glory and beauty must have been reflected. So in the new creation all things shall reflect the glory and beauty, the holiness and righteousness and grace of Him that sits on the throne. In that creation there shall be no more darkness. There nothing shall hinder the beauty of God to shine forth gloriously. And there all things shall reflect His glory, where we shall know even as we are known.

John in his vision, however, beholds still more. Round about the throne of God he beholds twenty-four different thrones. On those twenty-four different thrones he perceives twenty-four elders. It is not difficult to understand the symbolism of this all, and to be convinced as to the identity of these twenty-four elders. Literally, the term *elders* refers to older men, and therefore to the heads of tribes and families. Here, in the words of our text, it is to be understood in that sense. It does not mean elders as officebearers of the church, or elders in any official meaning of the word, but it simply refers to older people, first of all, — heads of the tribes, heads of families, heads of a certain people. And as far as the number twenty-four is concerned, immediately you observe that it is twice twelve, and that as such the number will have to be explained. Twelve tribes there were of the people of Israel. And in the church of the new dispensation there were also twelve apostles. There can be no shadow of doubt that these twenty-four elders here must be taken as representatives of the church and of the people of God of all ages, both of the old and of the new dispensation, of Jew and Gentile. How, in the face of this symbolism, people can possibly maintain that there was no church in the old dispensation, how, in the light of this symbol, people can pos-

sibly maintain that Jew and Gentile shall not be one in the kingdom of heaven that is to come, we confess is a mystery to us. Evidently these twenty-four elders represent the entire church of the old and of the new dispensation, the church as she was redeemed and washed in the blood of the Lamb throughout the ages of history. For notice that these twenty-four elders sit on thrones surrounding the great throne in the midst of them. This symbolism, which means that also they possess royal glory and dominion, at the same time makes it very plain that their royal dominion, the royal dominion of the church, is dependent upon the throne which they surround. Moreover, wreaths or crowns of victory, they wear. For the church is, of course, pictured here from its ideal point of view, not as the church in tribulation but as it exists in the decree of God, looked at from the point of view of eternal glory in heaven, and therefore as having already overcome. And garments of white these elders wear, for they are washed in the blood of the Lamb, Who is still to appear on the scene. Round about the throne, therefore, the church, washed in the blood of Christ, having overcome in the battle of faith, and being set in royal dominion and glory in dependence on God Almighty, appears here in the vision which John beholds.

More difficult it may seem to explain the appearance of the four living creatures. John informs us that he "saw in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, four living creatures full of eyes before and behind. And the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had the face of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, having each one of them six wings, are full of eyes round about and within." Innumerable explanations have been given of these four living creatures. We shall not consider them all here. Only two of them deserve our consideration. In the first place, there is the interpretation which explains these four creatures to be mere cherubs, heavenly beings, angels, therefore, of a specific class. And in the second place, there is also the interpretation that refers these four creatures to all living creation and its powers. It appears to us that we must rather combine these two as they are in the vision, and say that they are cherubim, which, however, in the vision are made to represent the entire fulness of creation in all its various powers from an ideal point of view. When the kingdom of Christ shall once be completed, the sigh and groan of the brute creation which is mentioned in the 8th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans shall also cease, and all creation, with all its powers and with all its forces, shall be delivered actually from the bondage of corruption, and share in the glorious liberty of the children of God. And this ideal creation, with all its fulness of life, with all its powers and gifts, these four cherubim represent in the vision. Clear this is especially, if we compare this vision with that in Ezekiel 1. The prophet there also has a vision of four cherubim with faces of a lion, a calf, a man,

and an eagle. And therefore, the two visions are strikingly similar. It will not do to interpret the one without the other. What is the purpose of the vision in Ezekiel? It forms the basis of the entire prophecy. Ezekiel was commissioned especially to prophesy the destruction of the old temple and the rebuilding of the new, that is, of the ideal temple of God. Or, if you please, he was to predict the displacement of the old temple that was made with hands by the new temple that would consist of the new creation, of the new heavens and the new earth. Just as John must prophesy the displacement of the sinful order by that of the perfect order of the new creation, so also Ezekiel. And even as John, so also Ezekiel at the outset receives a vision of the perfect order that is to replace the old and where God shall dwell among His people in all the new creation. And therefore, in Ezekiel, as well as in John, you may call the beings, the four living creatures, cherubim. But in both these visions the cherubim are made to represent the fulness of the life of creation as it will shine forth in the new heavens and the new earth. If we bear this in mind, we shall be able also to explain their appearance. In the first place, we must consider their number. John saw four of these creatures. Four is the number that is symbolic of creation in all its fulness. Think of the four winds of heaven, and the four corners of the earth. In their number they therefore represent the entire creation. Then we can also explain their appearance. These four creatures present the appearance of a lion, of an ox, of a man, and of an eagle. They are therefore four royal representatives of the animate powers of creation. What the lion is among the beasts of the field, the ox is among the cattle, man among the intelligent creatures, and the eagle among the birds. They represent, therefore, the powers of creation in their physical strength, in their keen intelligence and intuition, in their freedom of movement and development with majestic flight. In a word, once more, they represent creation in all the fulness of its power and talents, as once it shall develop to the glory of Him that sits on the throne. Then we can also understand the symbolism of the eyes and of the six wings. As to the latter, the wing is the symbol of free flight and movement, as well as of ascent and development. Six is the number of creation as it originally received its power from God. The six wings of every creature indicate its power of development to its full extent, unhindered and unhampered. In the new world all creation shall mount up with its six wings, and reach the fulness of its development to the glory of God. And as to the former, namely, that these creatures were full of eyes, we must not refer this symbol to their ability of looking and moving in every direction, but much rather as revealing plainly their inmost nature and being. All creation is to reveal itself plainly and openly to God's glory, and the nature of creation shall no more be under the veil of sin. That this is the meaning of the symbol is plain to us from the following chapter, where we read of the Lamb that has the seven eyes, which

mean that we can say: "love" is God. We cannot change "love" into being the subject. Love is still "predicated" to God. But the truth that God is "love" surely means that such is His whole ethical perfection. God is the Law fulfilled in Himself. God loves Himself eternally. Such He does out of the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. Such is the love-life of God in the ontological Trinity. Such is the love of God in its archetypal sense.

This love of God is also manifested ek-typically, that is, outside of God toward and in the creature, created in his own image, man. And always, even then this love is out of the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit. Love in its operation is never from us to God. Love never has its source, its fountain in us. Love only and always has, and shall forever have its source alone *in* God. And this love is, therefore, such that it *will* not rest until its object is completely perfect in *ethical* perfection, that is, until the object of that love, will in that love turn unto God in the Spirit, and through the Son, and say: Abba, Father! In that same love for God, we will then also seek the eternal, spiritual well-being of the other members in the church, as is so beautifully expressed by Paul in Ephesians 4:15-16, "but speaking the truth *in love*, may grow up in all things unto him, who is the head, even Christ; from whom all the body filty framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh the increase of the body unto the *building up of itself in love!*"

Such is the love spoken of in the text.

It is greater than both faith and hope, since it is the *spiritual energy* and power of both! Thus Paul writes in Galatians 5:6, ". . . but faith *working* (being energized) by love."

Paul says: Except I have love, it makes no difference what spiritual gift I have received from the Lord, or what virtue I may display in my life, I still am nothing, and it profits me nothing.

For, note well, Paul does not speak here of "love" simply in the abstract. I know that the text says: "and have not love!" It could have read and *practiced* love, that is, Paul could have written that had he willed to express that thought. Evidently, Paul has in mind "and *have* not love." He wills to emphasize that one must *have* love, shall anything he does have spiritual and moral value. Only when we have this love, only when we grow more and more in this love, will our lives also be spiritually sensitive in the things that differ.

And, now, to demonstrate this tremendous reality, Paul cites three possibilities in which all gifts, seeming preeminences in the church are so much loss and dung, since "love" is absent. And he does this by stating that such would be the case first of all in regard to *himself*. Writes he: If I

*speak* . . . . And if I have the gift of prophecy . . . . And if I bestow all my good to feed the poor . . . . Forsooth, says Paul, such would be the state of affairs with anyone, beginning with *myself*. This is, indeed, a fine touch of pedagogy! But it is more than that: it is simply the truth of the situation. And it is such a tremendous reality, that the very thought of it makes Paul write: "If I speak with the tongues," etc., etc.

We should notice that Paul writes in climactic effect. This heightens the sense of the reality of the indispensable-ness of love.

We should observe that Paul reasons, ascends from the lower, the lesser gifts to the greater.

That he begins with the gift of "speaking with tongues" probably has its reason in the sad fact, that there was a great misunderstanding concerning the importance of this particular gift in the church at Corinth. It seemed that this was the one and all that counted with some. And that must be done away with once and for all. Paul will return to this subject later, in I Corinthians 14. To make certain that no possible kind of "speaking with tongues" be excluded, Paul says: "If I speak with the *tongues of men* and of *angels*, and *had not love* (!) then he would be like a clanging symbal and sounding brass. Paul, evidently, means to say: then my speaking would have in it as little spiritual life and vigor, as little manifestation of the image of God, as there is in so much noise by brass and steel. And, indirectly, this is a keen and pointed rebuke to so much "noise" in the church at Corinth, who are not spiritually sensitive.

One would think that if one had the "gift of prophecy" he would at least fare better, if he had not love. At least that would be to the objective upbuilding of the church, or, at least, the impartation of knowledge. But, hold on! Not so, congregation at Corinth. Why, even if you had all knowledge, and knew all the Mysteries of the kingdom, and did not have "love," one is simply: *nothing!*

And thus is also the case, even though one gave all his goods to feed the poor. Yea, even though one gave his body to be burned. Even that has nothing of spiritual value in it, when love is absent. When love is absent then the image of God is not revealed. Then it all still *profits* nothing!

Such is the sobering reality Paul presses forward to our attention.

This way of love is called the "more excellent" way. It is not a way in which "gifts" cannot come to their own: It is the only way in which all gifts, speaking with tongues, prophecy, giving of goods to the poor, dying for the faith, if need be, come to *their own*.

We need not shun these gifts.

Nay we seek the best gifts, and place them in the service of God in the church!

G.L.

## IN HIS FEAR

### Keep it a Thing of Beauty!

(3)

A beautiful beginning!

And a terrible ending!

Many a wedding ceremony is impressive and seems to breathe such a beautiful spirit of reverence and of godliness. All things as far as the earthly eye can see were done decently and in order. The Word of God was there clearly and emphatically spoken. Our covenant God and His praise were there in song as well as in speech. A blessing was asked upon the bride and bridegroom. They were in prayer committed to the care of a loving Father Who as it were with His hand brings to every man his wife and to every woman her husband. The request that their life might be a reflection of that blessed union of Christ and His Church had been offered before the throne of grace.

A few moments were spent in the congratulations and best wishes to the "newlyweds" while loud, joyful strains from the organ painted an appropriate background for these unforgettable moments in the lives of the bride and bridegroom.

Then the wedding reception begins and again a blessing is asked upon the youthful couple and upon the food and drink that has been prepared.

Usually, rather than unusually, that reception then becomes an ugly thing rather than a thing of beauty. All restraint, decency and beauty are discarded and moral filth and sensual hilarity is the order of the day (night).

Why?

Why must a "master of ceremonies" become a slave of immorality? Why at the weddings of our covenant youth must the "success" of the "master of ceremonies" be measured by his ability to get the group assembled into fits of laughter by filthy, suggestive jokes?

O, it is a time of rejoicing. We are not required to sit there with long faces and to speak in hushed or sad tones. Solomon says, "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven: a time . . . to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance . . .," Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4. And Jesus says, "Can the children of the bridechamber mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?" Matthew 9:15. A wedding celebration is a time for rejoicing; and laughter is not necessarily out of place there.

But filthy talk, immoral jokes, sly (and often even bold) references to the marriage relationship as a license for immorality and fornication do not belong there at all!

"Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge," Heb. 13:4.

And we may add that those who ridicule with adultery and hold up the whoremonger as an interesting and altogether fitting fellow to bring to the wedding ceremony to invoke a little (or much) wicked laughter, God will also judge. The beauty of the whole evening flies quickly away when the "master of ceremonies" (slave of indecency and immoral ceremony) ignores all the truth and beauty of the event as expressed in the wedding form and seeks to bring his hearers to a carnal merriment and laughter about lewdness and all violation of the Seventh Commandment.

The bride and bridegroom are not always to blame for this. Often they are and invite it by deliberately appointing one who is known for such gross indecency. There are, however, times when to their utter amazement and embarrassment the one whom they had picked for this "entertainment" reverts to these things and that with more boldness and shamelessness than they ever expected this person was capable of performing. It is a strange thing that those, who seem so shy and hesitant to speak of these things otherwise, reveal a great boldness and freedom to do so at the wedding reception. But the very least that the bride and bridegroom can do is to speak plainly and with definiteness to the one they have chosen to take the lead in all the activities of the wedding reception and so make it clear that they want absolutely none of it. These things happen all too frequently today for the bridal party to be considered naive for assuming that it might happen at their wedding ceremony.

By all means, keep it a thing of beauty by keeping all these wickednesses out of your wedding celebration.

Then, too, the program so often contains things that take away the beauty of the event. The vocal solos that are sung as a rule are not the most obnoxious elements on the program. But the songs that are given to the audience or celebrants at this wedding reception are often something quite different. Here again, we do not object to a little clean humor. But we maintain that it surely is not in His fear when in these songs the proper relationship between husband and wife is denied and ridiculed.

That usually is also the theme of the dialogues and skits that often plague our wedding receptions. We have just heard the Word of God. In no uncertain terms from the Scripture we have been told that the husband is the head of the wife. And now that ordinance of God, that divine arrangement in the home is ridiculed and made to be the reason for sinful laughter. Do we dare to believe that God approves of such wickedness? Do we dare to believe that a few words of prayer before all this takes place and a few muttered phrases of prayer at the end of the reception "make it all right?"

We are not against a program.

We do not say that we must do away with the "wedding feast."

But there surely is something wrong when the gathering is relieved to see the officiating minister go home after the

meal so that all restraints and inhibitions may be lifted.

That it may be and can be a time of rejoicing and gladness ought to be evident in that Jesus changed the water into wine at Cana for use at such a wedding celebration. And in Psalm 104:15 we read that God giveth "wine that maketh glad the heart of man." It must be used wisely and with *great* restraint, but in it God has created the power to make the heart of man glad. It is better, nevertheless, not to have it at our wedding ceremonies and receptions today because the danger of it being overdone is far greater today than in the days when Jesus changed the water into wine. Nevertheless, the fact that He changed the water into this substance that maketh glad the heart of man shows not only that God does not disapprove of man being glad and happy but also that there is at a wedding celebration nothing necessarily wrong with a joyful and happy heart.

The same thing holds true, of course, with the "wedding feast." Things are not "taboo" and sinful just because they bring delight and pleasure to man. God did not put into our foods the delicious taste that they have; He did not place in the flower the fragrant aroma; He did not create the world of melody and harmony in order to make things that would be sinful for man to enjoy and experience. He gives to each cut of meat and type of flesh its own peculiar taste. He gives to each flower its own peculiar fragrance. He has led man to find out the law whereby the plaintive yet pleasing oboe produces its sound, whereby the flute gives forth its round, pure tone, whereby the strings give their smooth, flowing quality and the brasses their vibrant power. And all this He does that we may see HIM, may hear HIM and know HIM in all His beauty and glory. "Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving" Paul writes in I Timothy 4:4. If then we can receive these things as gifts of God, if we can see Him in these things so that we serve Him therewith, if we use them with a heart that is grateful to Him, we surely may have beautiful music, the fragranciness and beauty of flowers and the delicious, pleasing taste of well prepared food at our wedding celebrations.

We may not do these things when we do so beyond our means just to keep up or to surpass the "Joneses." We may not make an empty, vain show and put up a big front. Nor may we, when we do have abundant means, make display of it to show others how a wedding celebration "ought to be done." God hates all such things. For they cannot possibly be done in His fear. As much as He forbids jealousy, so much He hates all works of men designed to provoke jealousy. And how easy it is at a wedding celebration to plan things to show others what we can do. Then that food, music and flowers, costly clothing and the like are not received with thanksgiving; and the good creature we use in a sinful way.

And as far as the program at this wedding reception is

concerned, if no sermon was forthcoming at the wedding ceremony and the prescribed form alone was read, then by all means, there ought to be a few words spoken at the reception concerning this important event in the lives of those joined in the bond of matrimony.

That does not mean that there should be a mere repetition of what was declared in the form just in order to have a religious atmosphere also at the reception. Not at all! But there certainly is ample room for a short talk to bring out more in detail the things that are merely indicated in the form. A few well chosen words of admonition and of Christian counsel to those who have taken this important step is never out of order. Surely it is a fitting thing at the reception when it was not given in a sermon at the ceremony.

And in conclusion let us state that a union in the bonds of matrimony as performed by the Justice of Peace is entirely to be condemned by those who profess to be members of the body of Christ, the Church which He loved and for which He gave His life.

That surely is not in His fear.

Those who live in His fear, as we wrote a few years ago, will also live in His sphere. In the sphere of the covenant they will live and move. In the sphere of His covenant they will seek to have the marriage bond confirmed. And that means that they *desire* to have a form read wherein the things of God's covenant are brought to their attention as they enter into a covenant amongst themselves as husband and wife.

But to avoid such a form and to avoid the Word of God at the ceremony and reception is to show no interest in God's covenant.

The bride and bridegroom who make a covenant amongst themselves outside the sphere of the covenant of God can expect no blessing upon their married life.

Keep the wedding ceremony and reception things of beauty by conducting them in His fear.

J.A.H.

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#### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On June 2, 1957, the Lord willing, our dear parents,

MR. and MRS. DANIEL VAN ALTEN

hope to commemorate their 35th wedding anniversary.

That the Lord will continue to bless them as He has in the past, is the prayer of their grateful children.

Dr. and Mrs. Lloyd Van Alten  
Mr. and Mrs. Pierson J. Van Alten  
and 2 granddaughters,  
Ann and Bonnie Wynne

## Contending For The Faith

### The Church and the Sacraments

VIEWS DURING THE THIRD PERIOD (750-1517 A.D.)

#### THE SUPREMACY OF THE POPE

GREGORY VII AND THE PAPACY (continued).

Among his favorite Scripture quotations, besides the prophecy about Peter (Matt. 16:18, 19), are two passages from the Old Testament: the words of the prophet Samuel to Saul, which suited his attitude to rebellious kings (I Sam. 15:23): "Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as idolatry and teraphim; but because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected thee from being king;" and the words of the prophet Jeremiah (48:10): "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord negligently, and cursed by he that keepeth back his sword from blood." He meant the spiritual sword chiefly, but also the temporal, if necessary. He would have liked to lead an army of soldiers of St. Peter for the conquest of the Holy Land, and the subjection of all rebellious monarchs. He projected the first crusade, which his second successor carried out.

We must consider more particularly his views on the relation of Church and State. Public opinion in the Middle Ages believed neither in co-ordination nor separation of the two powers, but in the subordination of one to the other on the basis of union. Church and State were inseparably interwoven from the days of Charlemagne and even of Constantine, and both together constituted the Christian commonwealth, *republica Christiana*. There was also a general agreement that the Church was the spiritual, the State, the temporal power.

But the parties divided on the question of the precise boundary line. The papal party maintained the theocratic superiority of the Church over the State: the imperial party maintained the caesaropapistic superiority of the State, or at least the equality of the two powers. It was a conflict between priestcraft and statecraft, between *sacerdotium* and *imperium*, the clergy and the laity. The imperialists emphasized the divine origin and superior antiquity of the civil government, to which even Christ and the Apostles were subject; the hierachical party disparaged the State, and put the Church above it even in temporal affairs, when they conflicted with the spiritual. Emperors like Otto I and Henry III deposed and elected popes; while popes like Gregory VII and Innocent III deposed and elected emperors.

Gregory compares the Church to the sun, the State to the moon, which borrows her light from the sun. The episcopal dignity is above the kingly and imperial dignity, as heaven is above the earth. He admits the necessity of the

State for the temporal government of men; but in his conflict with the civil power he takes the pessimistic view that the State is the product of robbery, murder, and all sorts of crimes, and a disturbance of the original equality, which must be restored by the priestly power. He combined the highest view of the Church and the papacy with the lowest view of the State and the empire.

His theory of the papal power could not have been more explicitly stated than when, writing to Sancho, king of Aaron, he said that Jesus, the king of glory, had made Peter lord over the kingdoms of the world. This principle he consistently acted upon. Henry IV of Germany he twice deposed and absolved his subjects from allegiance to him. He concluded his second excommunication of Henry IV, at the synod of Lent, March 7, 1080, with this startling peroration: "And now, O ye princes and fathers, most holy Apostles Peter and Paul, deal ye with us in such wise that all the world may know and understand that, having the power to bind and to loose in heaven, you have the like power to take away empires, kingdoms, principalities, duchies, marquises, earldoms, and all manner of human rights and properties . . . Having such mighty power in spiritual things, what is there on earth that may transcend your authority in temporal things? And if ye judge the angels, who are high above the proudest of princes, what may ye not do unto those beneath them? Let the kings and princes of the earth know and feel how great ye are — how exalted your power! Let them tremble to despise the commands of your Church! But upon the said Henry do judgment quickly, that all men may know that it is not by fortune or chance, but by your power, that he has fallen! May he thus be confounded unto repentance, that his soul may be saved in the day of the Lord!"

This is the extreme of hierachical arrogance and severity. Gregory always assumed the air of supreme authority over kings and nobles as well as bishops and abbots, and expects from them absolute obedience.

Sardinia and Corsica he treated as fiefs (a fief was a feudal estate, a landed estate held under feudal tenure — H.V.). To the Spanish princes, in 1073, he wrote that from old Spain had belonged to St. Peter, and that it belonged to no mortal man but to the Apostolic see. For had not the Holy See made a grant of Spanish territory to a certain Evulus on condition of his conquering it from pagan hands? Alfonso of Castile and Sancho of Aragon, he reminded that St. Paul had gone to Spain and that seven bishops, sent by Paul and Peter, had founded the Christian Church in Spain. Philip I, king of France, he coolly told, that every house in his kingdom owed Peter's Pence, and he threatened the king, in case he did not desist from simony, to place his realm under the interdict. A few months later in a letter to Manasses, archbishop of Rheims, he called the king a rapacious wolf, the enemy of God and religion. He summoned the king of Denmark, Sueno, to recognize the dependence of his kingdom upon Rome and to send his son to Rome that he might

draw the sword against the enemies of God, promising the son a certain rich province in Italy for his services. Boleslav, duke of Poland, he admonished to pay certain monies to the king of Russia, whose son, as we are informed in another letter, had come to Rome, to secure his throne from the pope. The Hungarian king, Salomon, was reminded that King Stephen had given his kingdom to St. Peter and that it belonged of right to Rome, and he was sharply rebuked for having received his crown from the king of the Germans as a fief and not having sought it from Rome. On Demetrius, duke of Dalmatia, Gregory conferred the royal title on condition of his rendering a yearly payment of two hundred pieces of silver to himself and his papal successors. To Michael, Byzantine emperor, he wrote, expressing the hope that the Church of Constantinople as a true daughter might be reconciled to its mother, the Church of Rome. In other communications to the emperor, Gregory made propositions concerning a crusade to rescue the Holy Land.

For William the Conqueror, Gregory expressed great affection, addressing him as "best beloved" *carrissime*, but solemnly reminded him that he owed his promotion to the throne of England to the favor of the Roman see and bidding him to be prompt in the payment of Peter's Pence. The proud Englishman replied that he owed his crown to God and his own sword, not to the pope. He was willing to pay Peter's Pence which his predecessors had paid, but fealty he refused to pay as his predecessors had refused to pay it. In a letter William the Conqueror had written: "Hubert, your legate in your behalf has bade me to do fealty to you and your successors, and to think better in the matter of the money which my predecessors were wont to send to the Roman Church. The one point I agreed to, the other I did not agree to. Fealty I refused to do, nor will I do it, nor do I find that my predecessors did it to your predecessors."

Unbiblical and intolerable as is Hildebrand's scheme of papal absolutism as a theory of abiding validity, for the Middle Ages it was better that the papacy should rule. It was, indeed, a spiritual despotism; but it checked a military despotism which was the only alternative, and would have been far worse. The Church, after all, represented the moral and intellectual interests over against rude force and passions. She could not discharge her full duty unless she was free and independent. The princes of the Middle Ages were mostly ignorant and licentious despots; while the popes, in their official character, advocated the cause of learning, the sanctity of marriage, and the rights of the people. It was a conflict of moral with physical power, of intelligence with ignorance, or religion with vice.

The theocratic system made religion the ruling factor in mediaeval Europe, and gave the Catholic Church an opportunity to do her best. Her influence was, upon the whole, beneficial. The enthusiasm for religion inspired the crusades, carried Christianity to heathen savages, built the cathedrals and innumerable churches, founded the universities and

scholastic theology, multiplied monastic orders and charitable institutions, checked wild passions, softened manners, stimulated discoveries and inventions, preserved ancient classical and Christian literature, and promoted civilization (all this, we understand, does not necessarily bear a Christian character. The Common Grace theorists would undoubtedly laud all these accomplishments, but these things can denote nothing more than a natural advance of civilization — H.V.). The papacy struck its root deep in the past, even as far back as the second century. But it was based in part on pious frauds, as the pseudo-Isidorian Decretals and the false Donation of Constantine.

The mediaeval theocracy was at best a carnal anticipation of the millennial reign, when all the kingdoms of this world shall obey the peaceful sceptre of Christ. The papacy degenerated more and more into a worldly institution and an intolerable tyranny over the hearts and minds of men. Human nature is too noble to be ruled by despotism, and too weak to resist its temptations. The State has divine authority as well as the Church, and the laity have rights as well as the clergy (the first half of this statement is certainly true, but I would surely dispute, on the basis of Holy Writ, the assertion that the laity as well as the clergy have rights. I do not like to speak of men having rights, equal rights with others. — H.V.). These rights came to the front as civilization advanced and as the hierarchy abused its power. It was the abuse of priestly authority for the enslavement of men, the wordliness of the Church, and the degradation and profanation of religion in the traffic of indulgences which provoked the judgment of the Reformation.

*Gregory VII as a Moral Reformer. Simony and Clerical Marriage.*

Gregory VII must be viewed not only as a papal absolutist, but also as a moral reformer. It is the close connection of these two characters that gives him such pre-eminence in history, and it is his zeal for moral reform that entitles him to real respect; while his pretension to absolute power he shares with the most worthless popes.

His Church ideal formed a striking contrast to the actual condition of the Church, and he could not actualize it without raising the clergy from the deep slough of demoralization to a purer and higher plane.

His reforms were directed against simony and Nicolaitism. What he had done as Hildebrand, by way of advice, he now carried out by official authority.

In the war on simony he was altogether right from the standpoint of Protestant as well as Roman Catholic ethics. The traffic in ecclesiastical dignities was an unmitigated nuisance and scandal, and doubly criminal if exercised by bishops and popes.

The Lord willing, we will continue Philip Shaff's description of the significance of Gregory VII in connection with the development in the supremacy of the pope. H.V.

## The Voice of Our Fathers

### The Canons of Dordrecht

PART TWO

EXPOSITION OF THE CANONS

THIRD AND FOURTH HEADS OF DOCTRINE

OF THE CORRUPTION OF MAN, HIS CONVERSION TO GOD,  
AND THE MANNER THEREOF

Article 10 (continued)

The question faced in this article is: how is it to be explained that, in distinction from the many who do not obey the call of the gospel, there are others, called through the same ministry of the gospel, who come to Christ and are converted?

And the fathers treat, first of all, the Pelagian answer to this question.

It might be asked: why do they refer to "the proud heresy of Pelagius" in this connection? Was not the Pelagian controversy a matter of the past, something which took place long before the time of our Reformed fathers of Dordrecht? And are not the fathers concerned rather with Arminius and his followers? The answer is that indeed the fathers are busy, also in this article, with the heresy of the Remonstrants. But in a parenthetical clause they insert this characterization of the Arminian doctrine as Pelagian, in order that the Arminian heresy may be known and recognized for what it is. It is nothing new in the history of the church. It had arisen long before the time of the Reformation already. And though in our fathers' time this heresy was promulgated by a new leader and under a different flag and with subtle and sinister modifications, it was the same old heresy of the British monk, Pelagius, and thus also a heresy which the fathers were not the first to condemn, a heresy which the church had condemned centuries before. And therefore, the implication is that he who would remain in organic unity with the church of all ages, with the one holy catholic church, he who would stand in the historical line of the true church in the world, must with the church of the past continue to condemn the Pelagian heresy, no matter what form it assumes, and no matter who promulgates that heresy and gives it his name.

What is the Pelagian heresy referred to here? The *Canons* tell us in this article that the proud heresy of Pelagius is that the coming and conversion of some in response to the call of the gospel is to be ascribed to man, who through a free will distinguishes himself from others, furnished with equal or sufficient grace for faith and conversion. We may note the following elements in this doctrine:

1) All receive equal or sufficient grace to believe and be converted. This grace consists herein, that God gives them

His Word, speaks to them of His Christ, and thus bestows upon them benefits which are not shared by those who have not the preaching of the gospel. This grace is general. All men receive God's grace equally, in so far that they all have sufficient grace to come to faith and conversion.

2) All have a free will. By this the Pelagian means that the will of the natural man is free to choose either the good or the evil. Man's will is not under the dominion of sin and in the bondage of corruption, so that he is able only to choose the evil and always does choose the evil; but he is still capable of choosing the good. In the specific instance under discussion, the natural man, according to the Pelagian, is capable either of accepting or rejecting the grace of God.

3) Some men by the exercise of this free will accept and make proper use of the grace sufficient for faith and conversion that is bestowed, and thus they obey the call of the gospel, come to Christ, and are converted. By this exercise of their free will they distinguish themselves from others.

4) These others, gifted with the same grace sufficient for faith and conversion, reject and resist this grace, and thus do not obey the call of the gospel, do not come to Christ, and are not converted.

An analysis of this view will reveal immediately a three-fold error. In the first place, the entire view is based upon the fallacy of a common, or general, grace. In the second place, the view involves the error of free-willism. And in the third place, it maintains the heresy of resistible grace. These three hang together: it is impossible to maintain one of the three without maintaining the other two. A common grace must needs be a resistible grace, unless, of course, one wishes to involve himself in the folly that God arbitrarily bestows grace and then withdraws it. And a resistible grace compels one to maintain the error of free-willism. Furthermore, we should not fail to note that the underlying heresy here is that of the denial of sovereign predestination. If the latter is strictly maintained and applied, there is simply no room for the entire Pelagian-Arminian view of the gospel-call and its effect.

A *proud* heresy this view is denominated by the fathers. And the reason for this is not difficult to see. First of all, it is evident that even as one man distinguishes himself above another by the exercise of his free will, so he exalts himself in haughty conceit above that other. After all, is he not better than his unbelieving and unrepentant fellow? And is not his excellence to be ascribed to himself alone? Did not both he and his fellow man share the same grace of God? And was it not he who by his own free will accepted that grace, while his fellow man, with equal opportunity as himself, rejected it? We may go a step farther. On the Pelagian basis, this pride is justifiable, not sinful. There is no possible basis left for the condemnation of such pride. In the second place, however, — and what is still worse, — this Pelagian heresy is proud because it exalts man above the living God. From this point of view, it is not at all amiss to denote this doctrine as the

prize lie of the devil! For after all, it is the very same lie that was first proposed in paradise, "Ye shall be like God." Only now this lie is dressed in a religious garb, surrounded with an aura of piety, disguised with the name "gospel," and delivered supposedly upon the authority of God Himself by those who claim to be accredited ambassadors of Christ.

And be not deceived! This is no out-dated doctrine. It is the fashion of the day in the majority of our pulpits. Nor need we imagine that this very same proud heresy has been forever removed from the pulpits of Reformed churches. The *Canons* as a creedal document could not accomplish this. No confession can ever succeed by itself to eliminate heresy. If the church is not minded by the grace of God in Christ Jesus to live by its confessions and maintain them, she soon is victimized by the very heresies which her confessions condemn and which they were designed to shut out. And thus it has been that this proud heresy of Pelagius-Arminius has made its inroads today as easily as though the *Canons* had never been composed, and, in fact, by an appeal to the *Canons* themselves for proof and support. For this is fundamentally the heresy involved in such a theological inanity as the First Point of 1924 and in the preaching and teaching of a general, well-meant offer of salvation that is so rampant in Reformed and Presbyterian circles today. And it seems that men do not realize that they have forsaken the very strong point of the Reformed faith, and that they have abandoned the very element in the preaching of the gospel that is of inestimable comfort for God's sinful people in the midst of a world of sin and death. They foolishly prefer that which appeals to man's sinful pride and which bestirs the wicked conceit that originally moved man when he rebelled against his Creator in paradise. How is the gold become dim!

God! That is the keynote of this article. That others who are called through the ministry of the gospel come and are converted is to be ascribed not to man, but to God. Always this must be both the deepest motivation and the content of the ministry of the gospel. Never may in any wise the door be left open for any element of man and his work. Never may the impression be left that the obedience to the call of the gospel is to be ascribed to man. For the end must be humility, true and complete. The end must be that those who are called and who are obedient to that call of the gospel show forth the praises of the God Who called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. The end must be that they glory not in themselves, but in the Lord. And how shall this possibly be as long as there is a single element in all this wonderful work that can be ascribed to man? And how shall the people of God be instructed in His praises, be instructed to glory not in themselves, but in the Lord, if they are taught a doctrine which ascribes this work to man?

For God does not merely call through the gospel, and then leave it to the whim of man's sinful will to obey or to disobey that call. No, He calls efficaciously. He is the God Who speaks and it is done. Who commands and it stands

fast. How this calling is accomplished belongs to the following articles. But now let us understand that it is *efficacious*, first of all. Sometimes, especially over against those who maintain the error of resistible grace, we speak of an *irresistible* calling. The latter term emphasizes that God through the calling overcomes the stubborn rebellion and hard impenitence of the sinner. And in this sense the term may certainly be used. However, it must be admitted that there is a certain mechanical connotation in the term. It might be understood as meaning that a man resists God's calling all the way, but that his resistance is in vain, that God drags him in spite of himself into His kingdom. And it is this connotation that is avoided by the term *efficacious*. God's calling is powerful in the sense that God by His calling effects that which He speaks, and does so without fail. God Himself says "to some through the ministry of the gospel, "Come!" And he whom God thus calls surely comes. God Himself says, "Repent!" And he to whom God thus speaks surely repents. God Himself says, "Believe in My only begotten Son, Jesus Christ!" And when God thus speaks, the sure fruit of His speech is a living faith in Christ. Such is the efficacious calling. But in this sense the term *efficacious* is more apt than the term *irresistible*, because by God's calling the resistance is destroyed. There is no question of any resistance. God produces by His calling a loving and willing obedience.

The effect of this calling is described in the further language of the article: "confers faith and repentance, and translates them, having been torn out of the power of darkness, into the kingdom of his own Son." The idea here is not to describe further acts of God, in addition to the efficacious calling. But this is a description of the calling from the point of view of what it effects. The fruit of God's calling is faith and repentance, Even as the call of the gospel is unto faith and repentance, so when God calls efficaciously through the gospel, the effect of that calling is entirely in accord with the demand of the serious gospel-call, namely, that men repent and believe. And when faith and repentance are bestowed on a man, that man is by that very act torn out of the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. Thus in these last words is described the total effect, the end result, of the efficacious calling.

And the key to all this is sovereign election. For the question must still be answered: whom does God thus call? And: who determines who shall be effectually called? Very exactly the fathers draw the line here. The obedience to the gospel-call is to be ascribed to God, "who, as he has chosen his own from eternity in Christ, thus he calls them efficaciously . . ." The standard of the calling is God's sovereign election. Unless this be maintained, and unless the absolute sovereignty of this election from eternity in Christ be maintained, it must be conceded that after all man is the decisive factor. And therefore, it is not thus, that God foresaw in eternity who would obey the call of the gospel and who would

(Continued on page 382)

## DECENCY and ORDER

### Only Ecclesiastical Matters

Not infrequently matters are presented to ecclesiastical assemblies which do not properly belong there or concerning which a question may be asked as to whether or not the material can be properly treated. This question may arise with reference to the "legality" of the material presented as, for example, a case where a consistory is asked by a member of the church to treat a certain brother for the committal of a personal sin against him. The consistory must know, before treating the matter, whether the grieved party has complied with the law of Matthew 18. If he has not, the consistory cannot proceed to investigate and decide the matter. It is not "legally" before them.

But the question regarding the propriety of matters presented to ecclesiastical bodies may also arise with reference to the "content" of the material itself. All matters are not for consistories, classes and synods to decide and these ecclesiastical assemblies may not involve themselves in things that do not pertain to their specific calling before God. To do so is not only to act unlawfully but certainly the fruits of such labors cannot be conducive to the welfare and promotion of the cause of Christ in the world. On the contrary, any ecclesiastical assembly that does not comply with the sound rule of the 30th Article of the Church Order respecting this matter, is inviting endless trouble and is doing damage rather than good to the spiritual cause of Christ. Evidence of this we can see in many churches today that no longer concern themselves with "ecclesiastical matters" but are constantly engaged in "non-ecclesiastical affairs." It is no wonder that there is such a wide-spread spiritual ignorance and decline among church members. However lamentable the fact may be, the church has only herself to blame. She has neglected her principle duty, busied herself with secular matters, and consequently, need not be alarmed at the fruit of her labors.

The churches of Reformed persuasion even in the post-reformation era did not always limit the scope of their labors to what might be called strictly ecclesiastical matters. This was probably due to the fact that at first it was rather difficult to break loose from all the wrong influence and bad example of Romanism. The Roman Catholic Church seeks to put the church in a position where she can control every domain of life,—the social, political, industrial as well as the religious. The Pope is not only supreme ruler of the church and has the final say in all ecclesiastical affairs but he is supposedly also the supreme ruler of the State and all temporal affairs within the state are under his province. To this influence may be added also the fact that circumstances, especially in France where persecution was most bitter, may have had much to do with the church's dealing with non-ecclesiastical matters in the early post-reformation times.

However, this situation did not prevail very long. The Reformers soon realized that this practice was contrary to the Word of God for the Word clearly defines the calling of the church as spiritual and not secular and so in the very first redaction of our Church Order provision similar to that of our present 30th Article is already found: "In Ecclesiastical Assemblies none but ecclesiastical matters shall be transacted." And as early as 1571 the Synod of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands through Marnix van St. Aldegonde refrained from acting upon the request of William the Silent who sought the aid of the churches in the bitter, oppressive, struggle with Romish Spain. They acted on the principle: "Only Ecclesiastical Matters."

The wisdom of this principle is not difficult to understand. That the church, as the body of Jesus Christ, should concern herself only with those things that pertain to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments and in a broader sense with all that pertains directly to the coming of Christ's Kingdom follows from the very nature of matters. How absurd it would be to even consider calling a surgeon to repair your automobile or going to a garage mechanic to have your tonsils or appendix removed. Just as ludicrous is it when the church, a spiritual organism, begins to meddle in matters political, social, economic, etc. She has neither the ability nor the right to deal with these things. When she nevertheless attempts to do so, acting outside her proper domain, she does so only to her own detriment. That many churches fail to realize this today is evidence of the fact that there is general ignorance concerning the nature and calling of the church.

We should understand that we are not at present concerned with the calling of christian individuals and christian organizations in relation to the various spheres of life in this world. That the church in her assemblies is limited to the transaction of ecclesiastical matters only does not exclude the fact that her members, either as individuals or through organization, may or may not be active in the social, political, industrial, and economic spheres of life. That is something altogether different which we will not at present discuss. We are concerned only with the calling of the church in her official assemblies. With respect to these ecclesiastical assemblies there are various matters which, in the very nature of things, may not be treated. They do not belong there.

#### *Matters not to be Acted Upon*

It is not so easy to simply classify all matters into two categories, ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical, and conclude that all that appears under the second heading cannot appear in any form or manner on ecclesiastical gatherings. If it were possible to do this our problem would be greatly simplified. But this is an impossible and impractical way of dealing with the question before us. Life is simply not made up that way. There is an interweaving and overlapping, a very involved and intricate intercommunion of the various spheres of human life. As a result of this there are many matters which you might classify as non-ecclesiastical but which none-

theless are related to the church so that she cannot avoid or escape dealing with them. We will come back to this presently. On the other hand there are ecclesiastical matters that really have nothing to do with the spiritual essence of the church (Word and Sacraments) but which involve solely material and mundane things. Yet they may be classified as ecclesiastical. Matters of real estate are an example of this. Though a question concerning ownership of certain properties, rentals, leases, etc. may be considered and treated by the ecclesiastical assemblies as an ecclesiastical matter, yet, really there is nothing ecclesiastical about it. We can agree with the "Church Order Commentary" on the matter of what should not be treated in the ecclesiastical assemblies when it states: "Thus, e.g. political issues and the question regarding the government of State and nation are non-ecclesiastical and cannot be acted upon in our assemblies. Furthermore, matters social and economic are also non-ecclesiastical. Discussion and action pertaining to these spheres cannot take place at our Consistory meeting, Classes, or Synods."

With the last statement we agree provided it is understood to mean that no ecclesiastical assembly can "decide upon" these matters. That is true, indeed! The church does not declare war. She does not levy taxes. She does not legislate over social and economic conditions. These things lay outside of her jurisdiction. However, this does not mean that the church cannot in any way be concerned with certain political, industrial, and social questions but rather, insofar as these often vitally effect the lives of her members, it may be the church's calling to speak out loudly and boldly with respect to the world's evils in these various spheres. Take, for example, legislation by the government that affects the position of both the christian and non-christian workingman in the sphere of labor and industry. It is strictly not an "ecclesiastical matter," and, yet, it is a thing that vitally affects the church. In the past our Synod and Classes have spoken out with respect to laws regarding Sunday employment, labor unions, etc. We should continue to do so. The voice of the church must be heard and the Gospel of Christ so preached that the will of God may be clearly manifest in every sphere of life whether men will conform themselves to the pattern of that will or not. Very careful must the church be in dealing with some of these things. She must not be carnally and materialistically motivated. Her objective must never be the material advancement of her members. Then her gospel degrades into the common "social gospel" which is no Gospel. She may not take things into her own hand even if she had the power to do so. She must let government remain government and she must remain church. As church she must speak the truth with regard to the many problems of life in this sin-torn and cursed world. She must testify of judgment and repentance. She must demand that her members conform to the truth in all of life even if the cost is deprivation and death. And, insofar then as political, social, economic and other prob-

lems also affect the lives of those who are of the body of Christ, the church may be concerned with these things.

Dr. F. Rutgers cites another example of a case which is really not ecclesiastical but which nevertheless the church in her minor and perhaps even major assemblies may be compelled to treat. A certain Mr. A. owes Mr. B. a certain sum of money. Mr. B. has difficulty collecting the debt. He, like the man in Luke 12 who asked Jesus to make his brother divide the inheritance with him, brings the matter to the consistory and requests them to make Brother A. pay his debt. The consistory cannot go into this. It is simply none of their business. Consistories are not collecting agencies. Where naught but material matters are involved the consistory may well say to Brother B., "And who made us judges or dividers over you?"

However, if in the same example Brother B. approaches Brother A. and shows him that his refusal to pay his debt is sin against the ninth commandment and admonishes the brother again and again to repent, the case is an altogether different one when it gets before the consistory. The principle is a spiritual one. Brother B. is not as much concerned about the material side of the question as he is about the spiritual welfare of Brother A. When then he informs the consistory of the sin for which Brother A. refuses to repent and requests the consistory to labor with him to convince him of his evil, she cannot refuse. It is an ecclesiastical matter. She would have to investigate and if she found Brother B.'s charges true, brother A. must needs be disciplined. Such things are very difficult because the consistory must be careful not to involve itself in the matter of collecting the debt and yet one easily see that this is intricately interwoven into the spiritual aspect of the case with which the consistory must be concerned. So this and many other cases show that life cannot simply be divided into certain classifications but each experience and question must be determined in light of its own circumstances and only where there are matters ecclesiastical involved may the assemblies of the church act. If from the basic level of consistories this is borne in mind constantly, many consistories will be spared much grief and misery that is consequent to their dealing with matters that lie outside of their scope.

#### THE VOICE OF OUR FATHERS

*(Continued from page 380)*

not, and that He chose the former, and that these in time make God's counsel come true. But it is thus, that God sovereignly chose His own in Christ, that He sovereignly realizes His own counsel of election in time, efficaciously calling His own, and that thus God's eternal election is revealed in time as the fountain and cause of every saving good, producing in the elect objects of His good pleasure the obedient response to the gospel-call of faith and repentance.

Where is boasting then? It is excluded by the principle of free and sovereign grace.

H.C.H.

## ALL AROUND US

### *Congregational Meetings and Woman Suffrage.*

Sometime ago we made the prediction that the committee appointed in the Christian Reformed Church to study the matter of woman suffrage in the church would eventually come with advice to their synod to act favorably upon it. It appears now that our prediction is coming true.

Rev. Martin Monsma, professor in Calvin Seminary, and co-author of the Church Order Commentary (Van Dellen and Monsma), again writes on this subject in the April, 1957, issue of *torch and trumpet*. He is, I believe, an advisor on the above mentioned committee. The committee, Professor Monsma tells us, is finished with its investigation and has formulated and sent on its report to the synod of the Christian Reformed Church which will meet in June of this year. We are also told that the committee is advising the synod "to declare in effect that there are no valid objections against the introduction of woman suffrage at our congregational meetings."

Well, there you have it. It's exactly as we predicted it would be. And if Professor Monsma goes along with the committee in its advice, as I conclude he does, it means he has changed his mind on the subject. It also means that he will have to revise his commentary on the Church Order.

In the latter he writes on page 25 "The question whether or not women should take part in congregational elections we would answer negatively. Voetius, the great expert in Reformed Church government, excludes women from Church elections in as much as congregational elections are church governmental in character. And women, according to Holy Writ, are not to teach in the churches nor to help govern the same. (I Cor. 14:34.) Bouwman judges likewise. So does Jansen."

Professor Monsma is treating the subject "Our Congregational Meetings" in two successive articles. He informs us that the study committee gave thorough consideration to especially two questions: "What is the character of our congregational meetings among our ecclesiastical assemblies? And, would it be in harmony with the Bible to let our women vote at congregational meetings?" These two questions he begins to elaborate on in the April issue of *torch and trumpet* and he plans to treat the last question in the May issue.

We will anticipate with interest his next article in which he will discuss the "crucial Scriptural passages which refer directly to the woman's place in the church." He purposes then "to show why, in the opinion of the committee, these crucial passages do not require us to condemn those churches which permit their women members to vote at congregational meetings."

In the present article he discusses "the nature and place of our congregational meetings in our church governmental system." As far as I was able to discern, much of what he says about this subject is expressed also in his commentary.

Briefly, his views on this subject may be summarized as follows:

1. Congregational meetings are not governmental assemblies in the sense that consistories, classes, and synods are.

2. Congregational meetings are gatherings of believers, at which gatherings the consistory informs the congregation regarding matters of interest pertaining to the church and its activities, consults with the membership as to its opinion and preferences, and submits certain matters to a vote, such as the election of office-bearers, the purchase of properties, or the construction of buildings.

3. Though it is true that no consistory may treat the membership of the church as if they are minors, and it is also true that what is decided at the congregational meeting is settled and binding, it is nevertheless true that congregational meetings partake of a dependent character. The consistory decides what is to be discussed, and it presents the matters to be voted upon.

4. We may add here as our conclusion of what must no doubt also be the conclusion of Monsma, that since congregational meetings are what is said above, therefore it is perfectly in agreement with the nature of congregational meetings that woman should have suffrage in them.

### *Getting Past the Preacher.*

In paging through the *Christian Herald*, an independent and interdenominational magazine edited by Daniel A. Poling, we came upon an article with the above title. Generally we are not favorably impressed with the contents of this magazine. When our subscription runs out, we will not re-subscribe.

However, when we saw the above title in the April, 1957 issue our curiosity was aroused and we read the short article which we will quote in its entirety, not because it was so rich in content, but because it aroused other thoughts we felt we would like to express. The article, written by Dallas M. Roark, appeared as follows:

"The SERMON was finished. I had pronounced the benediction. As the organist pulled out the stops for the postlude, I walked to my customary place by the door of my little church. Planting myself so as to intercept all leavers, I was open for the business of handshaking my people out of church and on their way to Sunday dinner.

"For the pastor, it's an opportunity to greet his congregation, feel the warmth of their personalities, meet visitors to the service. But I think sometimes that the old Protestant custom of Shaking Hands with the Preacher is a little rough on the worshipers. I'm afraid that some of them regard it as a gantlet which must by necessity of custom be run, and

often with embarrassment or at least an uncomfortable feeling about what to say when the fatal moment arrives.

"There are any number of approaches to take. For example, there is the Noncommittal Approach.

"The first old stalwart who came back that morning shook my hand as if he were pumping water out of a reluctant well, and said forcefully, 'Beautiful day!' I agreed with equal heartiness that it was. This, and other banalities.

"The second person to wander out used the Daydreaming Approach. You could tell his heart wasn't in it as he said, 'Fine sermon.' Mentally marking down the compliment by about 90 per cent, I responded, 'Thank you.' The only problem with the Daydreaming Approach is that it can sometimes get completely out of hand, as when the next parishoner said absentmindedly, 'Good sermon, wasn't it?'

"Most of the people who filed out shaking the hand of this country parson said the things that people think they ought to say — the Usual Things. 'Nice talk,' 'Good speech.'

"Or they took the Cheerleader Approach, 'You really gave it to 'em today.' I have found that 'em' is generally a member of some other church, probably in a distant city.

"A preacher of course accepts the usually well-intentioned small-talk of such circumstances and presently, his stint ended, goes to his own dinner, loving his people, loving his calling, but wondering if he is really getting to his parishioners.

"But sometimes the comments are different. Sometimes they lift him right up on his toes — send him out possibly a better pastor, and certainly a more devoted one. I remember my first such experience.

"I had been speaking in a church about 30 miles from my own parish, on the problem of sin in a Christian's life.

"As usual, after the benediction, I hurried to the door to greet the folk as they left, ready for the pleasantries. But when one man who came by said, 'We were talking about that at home, and the sermon really helped us,' my heart leaped.

"A few handshakes later, a young woman looked me in the eye and remarked, 'I never had thought of it that way before.' Well, at least I had made somebody think!

"A few cliches later, I heard a man say, 'I felt close to God this morning.'

"And there was the little old lady whose gentle last word meant a lot more to me than her first two, 'Fine sermon, son.'

"You don't have to pay off any preacher with a compliment — and particularly not with a phony compliment. The Sincere Approach is best of all. It calls for you to say whatever seems the thing to you to say — and not necessarily about the sermon. Just say, 'Good morning' — if it is a good one. And if isn't say it anyway, and with such a glow that it becomes a good morning — for you and for the preacher who's trying his best."

We have attended services in churches where this custom is in vogue and witnessed some rather amusing experiences. For instance, at one service we attended we were amazed at the agility of the preacher who, before the "Amen" of the benediction had passed his lips, had bounded from his pulpit and appeared at the rear of the auditorium with such speed that he left the impression he was in competition at a track meet. His athletic prowess was also much in evidence when he shook our hand. He was what one might call a bone-crusher.

On most of the occasions where we worshipped in churches where this custom is followed we can agree with the writer of the above article that it is "a little rough on the worshipers." Most usually we have been helped out of an embarrassing situation by the preacher himself who, having noticed that we were strangers, asked of our identity. Thus relieving us from making a remark about his sermon. It does not happen often that we visit churches other than our own. But I can recall only two instances where I would not have been embarrassed to speak to the preacher about his sermon.

Now I do not know any minister who does not like to be complimented on the "fine sermon" he preached. All of us are carnal enough that we are often pleased even with flattery. And it seems to me that the custom of handshaking the preacher after the service is bound to create a certain amount of hypocrites in the church.

Though we do not practise the custom of rushing to the exit after the service to greet the worshipers with a handshake, we do try as much as possible to greet our own people and especially the stranger who worships with us. Most usually I find that a simple "Good morning" is a sufficient remark to exchange on such occasion. The preacher generally knows whether he preached a "good sermon" or not. If he looks his audience straight in the eye while he preaches, he can know quite well whether the Word he preached has found favorable acceptance or not. Sometimes just a firm hand-shake, without remark, reveals enough.

Personally, I do not care to hear some of the remarks we often hear: "wonderful message," "nice sermon," etc. If one wishes to pass along to the preacher his comment, it were better, it seems to me, if the sermon was really good, that one would say: "I heard the Word of God this morning" or "I was edified under the preaching this morning."

That does not mean that the preacher does not occasionally need a lift. Not to be assured that God has sanctified the Word preached to the heart of His saint can bring trouble to the soul of the preacher. Compliment that does not become flattery or give evidence of hypocrisy the faithful preacher deserves.

M.S.