

THE STANDARD

Bearer

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

VOLUME XXXIV

SEPTEMBER 15, 1958 — GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

NUMBER 21

MEDITATION

JERUSALEM! JERUSALEM!

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"
Matt. 23:37

Here is a text which is often used to prove (?) that Jesus, at least, wants to save all men that come under the preaching of the Gospel!

And they say further: if Jesus wants to save all men, then God does too.

Well, let us see.

First of all we should know who is meant by Jerusalem.

I think that all my readers will agree when we define Jerusalem as the city of peace. That is a mere translation of the name.

Its further significance must be found in two things: the temple and the royal palace.

The temple on mount Zion, or Moriah which is one of its foothills, is the embodiment of an idea, namely, Covenant communion with Jehovah. The temple means that God and His people are dwelling together in love and friendship.

That this is so is plain from the fact that in the Holy of holies God dwelled in the cloud suspended above the mercy seat. And God's people dwelled there, first of all, in the blood that was shed and sprinkled on the mercy seat. And, secondly, in the fact that once each year the High Priest entered that Holy of holies as the representative of Israel in the cloud of incense which symbolized the prayers of all saints.

And the royal palace typified that God was the Sovereign-Friend of Israel, who were His servant-friends and served him in the obedience of love.

And so Jerusalem is the City of Peace.

It is the regeneration of the earth; it is the spot where God touched the earth with His touch of love and loving-kindness.

That is Jerusalem.

* * * *

But that poses a problem too.

City of Peace?

We would be inclined to denominate it the city of rebellion.

By far the greatest part of history this Jerusalem rebels against God, turns away backwards from Jehovah, and worships Baal and Ashteroth, and is consequently destroyed. A careful count tells us that this city was twenty-three times sacked, pillaged, and captured.

Jerusalem was the very opposite of its name during very long periods of history.

Let us take the period of the fulness of time, for instance. Some wise men travelled from the East in order to see the King of the Jews. Naturally, they go to Jerusalem. Arriving there, they want to see the representatives of Jerusalem. First they are brought to wicked King Herod. And when he is at a loss about the heart of history, and knows nothing about the King who should be born there, he, in turn, wants to see the representatives of that great city Jerusalem. And . . . he turns to the chief priests and the scribes of the people! They were Jerusalem!

And as it was then, so it was during most of the periods of the 2000 years of its history. Most of the time that city was in the power of reprobate men, scribes, priests, kings, prophets, pharisees, sadducees, lawyers, etc.

Today, if you want to see the representatives of America, you try to meet Eisenhower, the nine supreme court justices, the members of congress.

Jerusalem, through the corruption of its generations, comes into the power of carnal, sensual, devilish Israel.

Jesus has described them in the context: they sit in Moses' seat: listen and do their words, but do not follow

their corrupt example. They take the chief rooms, that is, they are a proud lot. They love the salutations: Rabbi! Rabbi! They are a vain lot.

Their sins are enumerated by Jesus.

And in this enumeration we see clearly that Jerusalem has reverted to its very opposite.

They have an external show, but deny the substance.

They are full of hypocrisy.

They trample under foot God's honor which they should uphold.

They do not enter the kingdom of heaven, and they hinder those who would enter.

They are full of missionary zeal: they sent them into all lands to make proselytes, but when they have made them proselytes they turn them into children of hell.

They strain at the gnat but swallow a camel.

They show outward beauty to men, but inwardly they are full of filth and uncleanness.

In that light stands the text.

The text clinches this point. Listen: Jerusalem kills the prophets of God and stones them that are sent unto them from God!

But . . . if one would ask: where can I find Jerusalem? You would be sent to the selfsame murderers. You would be introduced to a solemn assembly: the Sanhedrin!

That is the Jerusalem of Jesus' age.

* * * *

Well, this Jerusalem still receives the prophets of God.

Listen to Jesus: "Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets!"

What is a prophet?

The answer, the usual answer is easy: a prophet is a man that foretells the future. Well, that belongs to prophecy, but it is not the most important, essential part of true prophecy.

A prophet is a man that speaks relative God.

Literally, a prophet is a man who boils over.

He is so full of the knowledge of God that he must speak or burst asunder.

What is the reason for their sending?

God wants praise and adoration. And when it is lacking, He sends prophets to His people who instruct, teach, lead the people of God Godward with outspread hands in song and speech and life, always telling Jehovah how wonderful and good He is.

That's why you have prophets sent to you.

In one word: God is exalted through the work of the prophets.

That is the same thing as the gathering of God's people.

Now Jesus Christ stands at the very pinnacle of prophecy.

And even so I do not say it quite correctly. I should say: Jesus Christ is really the only Prophet whom God sent to His people of all the ages.

He was the prophet of God who did His work in Adam, Noah, Abraham, David and all the Old Testament prophets.

Attend to the Heidelberg: "We receive of His anointing." That was true from earliest times, and that is true today.

Through all God's prophets from the beginning of the world Christ prophesied of God, His glory, honor and works.

When you boil over of the knowledge of God and must speak of Jehovah, it is Jesus boiling in you.

Hence, prophecy was fulfilled by Jesus' advent, His suffering, death, resurrection and exaltation.

And all this coming, suffering, and so forth, was contained in just one message: and that is true prophecy: "This is the message which we have heard of Him that God is a Light and that there is no darkness in Him!"

And that Jesus laid the foundation of Jerusalem the true, the new world, the regeneration of the earth.

And that true Jerusalem has many children, and it is Jesus' mandate from the Father to gather them through all the ages.

And in the final age of the ages this great Prophet shall stand in the midst of the great congregation, and in their midst He shall sing praises to God. Psalm 22.

* * * *

Now then, Christ has been hindered in this gathering of the children of Jerusalem wherever He appeared in history, chiefly when He was on earth.

Not that this hindering ever kept Him from folding His sheep and lambs to His bosom.

Oh no, the very opposite is true.

We may put it this way: the hindering of the false Jerusalem was an integral part of the gathering. Christ could not have gathered them if there had not been this hindering by the false prophets.

Here is the classic example: the hindering Jerusalem crucified the great gathering Christ, and lo and behold, it is exactly through this Cross that the children of Jerusalem go to heaven!

Do you not see that Jerusalem of my text, and the children whom Jesus would gather as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings are *two*?

Jesus' work was to gather the children of Jerusalem, and they are the elect of God. And when He set about to do this work of ingathering He found the Pharisees, scribes, elders and lawyers in His way. *They would not!*

The builders always rejected the great Stone of the corner upon which the whole city and temple is built.

It was that way in Jerusalem and Galilee while Jesus walked upon the earth. Wherever you saw Jesus spreading out His arms to the publicans and sinners, there you also saw the bands of pharisees and elders of Israel, murmuring, threatening, lying, obstructing, etc.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets! Yes, and thou that ultimately killed the great Prophet!

* * * *

But the children are nevertheless gathered.

They were in Jesus' day. Witness the 11 disciples, the Marys, the Marthas, the Lazaruses, the Zacheriahs, the Bartimauses, the shepherds, and the others.

And so it is today and every day.

The hindering goes on also today.

Even as Paul said: we are still killed all the day long and accounted as sheep for the slaughter. They still hate the prophets that speak TRUTH OF GOD.

But the children are gathered.

Jesus is still calling, is calling with great sweetness of speech.

The children of Jerusalem listen to the silvery speech of Jesus.

And hearing they follow Him.

And go Home to God! Amen.

G.V.

Sunday School Teachers' Mass Meeting

Teachers and friends are reminded of the Mass Meeting to be held Thursday evening, September 18, at 8 P.M. at Adams St. School assembly room.

Host church has arranged a nice program. Rev. J. Mc Collum will be guest speaker, whose speech will pertain to every teacher's church and Sunday School.

The Sunday School Teachers' Association

THE CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD

Within Thy temple, Lord,

We think on mercies past;

Let earth all praise accord,

Long as Thy Name shall last;

The righteous judgments of her King

Let Zion and her daughters sing.

THE STANDARD BEARER

Semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July and August

Published by the REFORMED FREE PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION
P. O. Box 881, Madison Square Station, Grand Rapids 7, Mich.

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Rev. H. Hoeksema, 1139 Franklin St., S. E.,
Grand Rapids 7, Mich.

All matters relative to subscriptions should be addressed to Mr.
G. Pipe, 1463 Ardmore St., S. E., Grand Rapids 7, Mich.

Announcements and Obituaries must be mailed to the above
address and will be published at a fee of \$1.00 for each notice.

RENEWAL: Unless a definite request for discontinuance is received it is assumed that the subscriber wishes the subscription to continue without the formality of a renewal order.

Subscription price: \$5.00 per year

Entered as Second Class matter at Grand Rapids, Michigan

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EDITORIALS

The Declaration of Principles

We must remember that the Declaration of Principles emphasizes the absolute sovereignty and unconditionality of the promise of God unto salvation. It states that "the promise of the gospel is not a gracious offer on the part of God to all men, nor a conditional offer to all that are born in the historical dispensation of the covenant, that is to all that are baptized, but an oath of God that He will infallibly lead all the elect unto salvation and eternal glory through faith."

In this connection we were discussing the Canons of Dordrecht and, the last time, particularly chapter III, IV of that part of our Confessions.

In this chapter there is one article to which we must call more special attention. I am referring to art. 8. This article, in the version of it we have in our psalter, reads as follows:

"As many as are called by the gospel, are unfeignedly called. For God hath most earnestly and truly declared in His Word, what will be acceptable to him, namely, that all who are called, should comply with the invitation. He, moreover, promises eternal life and rest to as many as shall come to him, and believe on him."

We remark:

1. That this article refers to the external call of the gospel. Even this external calling does by no means come to all men, but to comparatively few. In the old dispensation it was for a long time limited to the nation of Israel. In the new dispensation the preaching of the gospel is, indeed, universal: the church is commanded to preach the gospel to all nations. But, in the first place, it is in the nature of the case that it takes a long time before this is realized and, in the meantime, many perish without ever having heard the gospel. And, secondly, even this outward preaching of the gospel follows the line of God's counsel, according to Canons II, 5: the gospel must be preached to all men promiscuously but then "to whom God in his good pleasure sends the gospel." This implies that the positive purpose of the preaching of the gospel is the salvation of the elect while the rest are hardened.

2. That this external call of the gospel is serious for all that hear the gospel. It is unfeigned. The ground for this assertion, according to the article, is that God earnestly declares in His Word that it is acceptable to Him that the called should come unto Him. In other words, no one has the right before God to refuse to come to Him and remain unconverted. This the gospel declares to all, elect and reprobate alike. This, however, does not imply that we may ever preach a conditional gospel, as is so often heard over the radio in our land. We may never preach that God will save the sinner on condition that he will come to God. If we do, we preach an impossible salvation. Fact is that no sinner is able to fulfill such a condition. He cannot and

will not and cannot will to come unto God. He is dead in trespasses and sins. He hates God and will not be converted. Hence, a conditional gospel is an impossible one. And that the Canons do not mean this is evident from Art. 10 of the same chapter where we read: "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 conversions, as the proud heresy of Pelagius maintains; but it 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 own Son, that they may show forth the praises of him, who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light, and may glory not in themselves, but in the Lord according to the testimony of the apostles in various places."

What does this mean?

It means that salvation is all of God.

It means, too, the even under the preaching of the gospel He saves only His own and no one else.

And it certainly means that we may not ever present the gospel as conditional, so that it depends upon the will of man whether or not he will be saved.

This is still more emphatically asserted in Art. 11 of the same chapter of the Canons.

For in that article it is emphasized that the external preaching of the gospel is by no means sufficient unto salvation, but that it requires nothing less than the sovereign and efficacious grace of God to bring a man to conversion.

3. That the translation of this article 8 of Canons III, IV as we have it in our psalter is not very correct: the clause "should comply with the invitation" should read: "should come unto him." It is true that even Schaff favors the translation "should comply with the invitation." Nevertheless, this is incorrect. The Latin has "ut vocati ad se veniant," i.e., "That the called should come unto him," and this is also the Dutch rendering: "dat de geroepen tot hem komen." This may not seem very important but it is, nevertheless, a serious error. The gospel is not a mere invitation but it is a call of God. An invitation is merely a message requesting or asking someone to do something. One is at liberty either to accept or to reject it. If he rejects it, there can be no penalty imposed on him. But the gospel is not a mere invitation but a call of God. This may not be rejected. It is a sovereign and unconditional call. It is true that the sinner, by nature, always rejects this call. But a heavy penalty, the penalty of greater damnation, will be imposed upon him if he does not obey the call. Hence, the error in the translation of this article is rather important.

4. The close of this article speaks of the promise, and as we emphasize in the Declaration of Principles, this promise is not a conditional offer, but an unconditional oath of God

assuring those that believe in Christ of everlasting life. Nor is this different in this article of the Canons. It states that God "seriously promises eternal life and rest, to as many as shall come to him, and believe on him." Those that come to him and believe on him are those that, according to art. 11 of this chapter, are not only called externally by the gospel, but are also internally called by the efficacy of the Holy Spirit. They are, according to the same article, those whom God has chosen from all eternity. Hence, to them the promise of God is sure and unconditional.

This, then, is the meaning of art. 8 of Canons III, IV.

The last chapter of the Canons speaks of the preservation and perseverance of the saints.

It emphasizes preservation rather than perseverance as we might expect of the Canons. Preservation is the work of God, perseverance is the calling and work of man. But they do not stand next to each other in coordinate relation. On the contrary, perseverance follows preservation, the former is the fruit of the latter, the latter is the cause of the former. Without preservation man, the child of God, could never persevere.

This is expressed in the Canons. In art. 3 we read: "By reason of these remains of indwelling sin, and the temptations of sin and of the world, those who are converted could not persevere in a state of grace, if left to their own strength. But God is faithful, who having conferred grace, mercifully confirms and powerfully preserves them therein, even to the end."

From this it ought to be clear, too, what is the relation between this preservation and perseverance, on the one hand, and the unconditional promise of God on the other.

Preservation is that work of God whereby He faithfully, sovereignly, and unconditionally, realizes and confirms His promise to the elect even to the end.

God does not say to His people that He will preserve them unto the end on condition that they will be faithful and fight the battle to the end, or on condition that they will persevere. That would be the conditional promise of God. But such a promise would be impossible, for the simple reason that believers could never remain in a state of grace if they were left to themselves or if they had to be first, if they would have to fulfill the condition of perseverance before God would preserve them.

But God is faithful!

And God is first, always first in the whole work of salvation. Conditional theology in any form denies exactly this. It always makes man first and God second, it makes God dependent on man.

This is the principal reason why we emphasize that the promise of God is unconditional.

The fact that God's preservation of His people is the continued realization of His faithful and unconditional promise is also beautifully expressed in art. 8 of Canons V which we here quote:

"Thus, it is not in consequence of their own merits, or strength, but of God's free mercy, that they do not totally fall from faith and grace, nor continue and perish finally in their backslidings; which with respect to themselves, is not only possible, but would undoubtedly happen; but with respect to God it is utterly impossible, since his counsel cannot be changed, nor his promise fail, neither can the call according to his purpose be revoked, nor the merit, intercession, and preservation of Christ be rendered ineffectual, nor the sealing of the Holy Spirit be frustrated or obliterated."

No, God's promise can never fail!

And why not?

Because of the faithfulness and strength of the believers? God forbid! In their own strength they would undoubtedly fall from faith and grace and fail to inherit the promise. But it is only because the promise and its realization is wholly of God and, therefore, unconditional.

The assurance of this sure and faithful promise of God, which is also wrought by God in the hearts of the believers, is the only comfort of the children of God. And of this sure and solid comfort those that proclaim a conditional promise would deprive them. This is expressed in art. 10 of the same chapter of the Canons:

"This assurance, however, is not produced by any peculiar revelation contrary to, or independent of the Word of God; but springs from faith in God's promises, which he has most abundantly revealed in his Word for our comfort; from the testimony of the Holy Spirit, witnessing with our spirit that we are children and heirs of God, Rom. 8:16; and lastly, from a serious and holy desire to preserve a good conscience, and to perform good works. And if the elect of God were deprived of this solid comfort, that they shall finally obtain the victory, and of this infallible pledge or earnest of eternal glory, they would be of all men the most miserable."

Thus it is indeed.

Of this solid comfort those that proclaim a conditional promise would deprive the believers.

In conclusion, we may still ask and answer the question whether this emphasis on the unconditional promise does not make men careless and profane.

But this must wait till next time, D.V.

H.H.

AS TO BOOKS

Faith and Perseverance, by G. C. Berkouwer; translated from the Dutch by Robert D. Knudsen. Published by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. Price \$4.00.

This is a very good book written by the well-known professor of Systematic Theology in the Free University of Amsterdam. On the whole it is written in sufficiently clear language and style so that not only theologians but also laymen who are interested in doctrinal works of this nature

may well be able to study it. This is, no doubt, partly due to the nature of the subject: Faith and Perseverance. To this subject eight chapters are devoted. There is an introductory chapter on the importance and timeliness of the subject. Then follows a chapter on the question of perseverance and faith in the Confessions, and this is followed by a discussion about three controversies, the controversy with the Arminians, that with Rome, and that with the Lutherans. After that the subject itself is treated. The professor discusses perseverance in relation to prayer, to admonition, to temptation; he points to the comfort of this doctrine, and closes with a chapter on the reality of perseverance.

This brief review of the contents must suffice.

I heartily recommend this book to our readers.

H.H.

The Greatest of these is Love, by A. A. Van Ruler; translated by Lewis B. Smedes from the Dutch. Published by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Price \$2.00.

This book contains a series of expositions or meditations on I Cor. 13, the well-known chapter on love. On the inside of the cover of this book we read that this book is a "beautiful and illuminating essay on Paul's classic hymn of love." With this I can hardly agree. That it is beautiful in a way I may admit, although clarity is, to my mind essential to beauty. And many passages of the book are, to my mind, not clear but dark. I will quote just one passage to show what I mean. On p. 62 we find the following: "When truth is obeyed, God and man find each other. It is then that man acquires a taste for God's will. And it is then that God looks with great pleasure on men. The medium for this is the world. God wants more than a human soul. He wants the world. It is His world; it is the truth. And God wants men to experience true reality. Therefore man can never come to God merely by himself. He must come with the world. He has to experience God's great and beautiful world, making his experience a service of praise to God whose world it is. Only then is he a full participant of redemption. Only then does he come into the Kingdom of God."

I profess that the thoughts of the writer are strange to me. Nevertheless, I wish to recommend this book to the reader because of the many worthwhile passages in it.

H.H.

Pastorale Adviezen (Pastoral Advices) by C. H. Spurgeon; translated from the English by the Rev. W. De Graaf. Published by J. H. Kok, N.V., Kampen, the Netherlands.

This is a translation of part of Spurgeon's lectures to his students. It is, to my mind, a book of great value which every minister ought to have in his book case, and which even common members, in as far as they are able to read the Holland language, may well enjoy reading. The book contains what may be called homiletical lectures in very popular style. It treats such subjects as the calling to the ministry, the choice of a text, the preparation of and for the preaching

of a sermon, the use of the voice, etc. The book presents very interesting reading. When once you start reading you can hardly quit till you have finished it.

Of course, this does not mean that I would agree with every part of the contents of the book. To my mind, for instance, he overemphasizes the so-called internal calling of anyone to the ministry of the Word at the expense of the external calling by the church, which is most important. But this does not detract from the value of the book.

Heartily recommended.

H.H.

Tact en Contact (Tact and Contact), by the Rev. P. Overduin. Published by J. H. Kok, Kampen, the Netherlands.

Also this book I gladly recommend to the reader who is able to read the Holland language. It is a treatise on the work of Evangelism. In a preface the author writes (I translate): "With all kinds of different people the minister comes into contact, with farmers and people in the city, with people out of work and rich business-men, with imbeciles and intellectuals, with non-social people and neat citizens, with artists and officials, with rich and poor, people of different descent, heritage, circumstances, character and convictions. And Jesus Christ came for all these sorts of people. He seeks behind all these differences: man, the sinner, God's creature. The question is how to get contact. Tact signifies to touch, not to collide, nor to float alongside of each other, or simply to pass each other."

Now this book is designed to teach how to exercise tact in order that contact may be established in the work of Evangelism, which, according to the author is very often lacking for various reasons.

Also in respect to this book I must remark that I cannot agree with everything. Thus I would criticise what the author writes on pp. 59, 60; 73-75; 77-78, etc. I doubt whether all this is the correct, the Christian way of getting contact.

Nevertheless, I heartily recommend this book.

H.H.

The Deeper Faith, by the Rev. Gordon Girod; published by Reformed Publications, 1819 Newton Ave., Grand Rapids, Mich. Price \$2.50.

This is a book after our own heart. It is an exposition of the Canons of Dordrecht in the light of Scripture.

Let me just give you a taste of the contents of this book. On the fifth head of doctrine, that of the Perseverance of the Saints, the author writes in a few introductory sentences: "It is not the perseverance of man but the perseverance of God which is assured us in the Scriptures. It is not the faithfulness of man which is assured but the faithfulness of God. It is not the changelessness of man which is assured, but the changelessness of God."

But you better read the book. It is thoroughly Scriptural and Reformed.

H.H.

OUR DOCTRINE

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

PART TWO

CHAPTER V

The First Four Trumpets

Revelation 8:7-12

7. The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.

8. And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood;

9. And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed.

10. And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters;

11. And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.

12. And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise.

The seventh seal, so we found, is revealed as seven trumpets. The first four of these trumpets we wish to discuss in the present chapter.

We must remember and bear constantly in mind that we are discussing the last of the seven seals. Because this seventh seal reveals itself as seven trumpets, we are apt to lose sight of the fact that after all we are discussing the seven seals. And it is necessary that we bear this in mind for a correct understanding of the entire book. The whole history of this dispensation is implied in these seven seals. But the seventh seal is divided into seven trumpets, while the seventh trumpet is again divided into the seven vials of wrath. We must also remember that the relation between the seals and the trumpets is not to be conceived of as strictly successive, but rather as contemporaneous, while we bear this in mind, however, that the judgments and the forces that are thus represented by the seals and the trumpets become more emphatic and more severe as the time draws near for the coming of the Lord Jesus, and that they finally assume the character of clear signs, to be witnessed by all that live upon the earth.

Coming now to the discussion of the passage we quoted above, it is not difficult to see that the first four trumpets, even as was the case with the first four seals, form one group and belong together. The first four seals, we saw, were very clearly distinguished from the last three especially by the fact that they all came with the figure of the four horses. The same is true of the first four trumpets. There can be no doubt about it that they form a distinct group. This is clear, in the first place, from their very contents. As we hope to see more clearly presently, they all refer to the visible universe, and that too, to the world outside of man, — to creation, to nature, — though it stands to reason that man, standing in close touch with this visible universe, is also affected. But in the second place, that these first four trumpets form a separate, distinct group is also plain from the fact that in the text they are separated from the last three by the outcry of the eagle in mid-heaven, announcing a three-fold woe upon the inhabitants of the earth because of the three trumpets that are still to be sounded. Hence, also in regard to the trumpets it is to be noted that there is a division into four and three. This division and distinction is undoubtedly intentional, plainly indicating that the number *seven* does symbolize the union between the world and God, between the human and the divine, — if you please, the covenant relationship between God and His people.

We will readily admit that the interpretation of the trumpets in the Book of Revelation is very difficult. That this is true is not because the text itself is difficult to read, that there are many dark sayings in it: for that is not the case. If we had nothing else to do than merely to explain the words of the text, it would be rather easy. Little explanation would then indeed be required. But that is not the purpose of the Book of Revelation, nor of our interpretation of the book. We must not merely try to understand the text as such, but we also must try to learn the historical reality represented by and referred to in the text. If we do not attempt to do this, the book does not become real to the church of Christ, and can offer little or no consolation. Yet this is evidently the chief purpose of the book. Two questions, therefore, must always be before our minds when we interpret the Book of Revelation, namely: first, what is the literal meaning of the text? And secondly, where do I find the things that are thus revealed in the history of our present dispensation?

To find the answer to these questions it may be well to limit from the outset the sphere of our investigation by first of all discarding the results of many allegorical interpretations also in connection with the first four trumpets. You understand that the question is: must we conceive of the facts mentioned in the text quoted above as real, or symbolical, or allegorical? Does the earth mean the earth, or something else? Do hail and fire mean hail and fire literally, or do they represent something spiritual? Do the sun and moon and stars that are mentioned in the text mean the heavenly

luminaries, or do they represent realities in the spiritual world? Those that prefer the allegorical method of interpretation apply this method throughout. For instance, this allegorical method comes to the conclusion that the first trumpet reveals upheavals either in the church or in the Roman empire. According as interpreters adhere to the one or to the other explanation, they make of the hail and fire erroneous teachings, while the trees that are hurt by them are preachers and teachers in the church and the grass represents the common Christians, or they interpret that the earth represents the Roman empire, and the hail and fire destructive forces of enemies that destroyed a third part of that empire immediately after Constantine the Great. According to the same method of interpretation, the burning mass that falls into the sea according to the second trumpet is allegorized into the devil, raging with fury because of the progress of the church and the kingdom of God in the world. Or again, the whole is referred to great naval exploits and battles at the time when the Vandals devastated Rome. The star falling from heaven, that is mentioned in connection with the third trumpet, represents either heretics, apostatized from the church and poisoning the fountains of the truth and thereby killing many spiritually; or again, it is made the symbol of Attila, the Hun, invading the Roman Empire. The darkening of the sun and the moon and the stars, mentioned in connection with the fourth trumpet, is very readily spiritualized into the apostasy of the false teachers and the preachers of the church. Or again, by those that think of the Roman empire, it is made to refer to the rulers whose glory was eclipsed at the time of its downfall. Such are a few examples of the interpretations that have been offered by those that are of the opinion that they must always spiritualize, that the allegorical method must be applied to the Book of Revelation. It would seem, then, that the Book of Revelation was purposely written in such unintelligible form

that the church could never understand its real meaning.

We cannot accept this mode of interpretation. We believe that whenever the text is to be taken in the symbolical, or allegorical, sense of the word, the context or even the very contents of the verses will plainly indicate this. When, for instance, John is said to swallow a book, it is evident in itself that this is not reality, but symbolism. But in this connection there is absolutely nothing that compels us to such an interpretation. It is true that there are portions in the text that may be taken in the symbolical sense. There is one part in which John himself plainly indicates that it cannot be taken in the literal sense, namely, when he says that a burning mass, as it were a great mountain, fell from heaven. But this gives us no reason to depart so radically from its literal interpretation as to spiritualize and allegorize everything. There is nothing strange in hail and fire falling from heaven, nor in the disturbance caused by the mass from heaven in the sea, or in the poisoning of the waters, or the partial darkening of the heavenly bodies, sun, moon, and stars. In fact, the text is plainly in favor of the literal interpretation. For you will notice that by these four trumpets the whole physical universe is involved, — the earth, and the sea, and the rivers, and the heavens, — thus presenting one whole, which can never be obtained by any allegorical interpretation. Even as the first four seals refer to every sphere of human activity and relationship in the present dispensation, so the four trumpets evidently refer to every sphere of the visible universe, together constituting the whole of the world, as is also indicated by the number *four*. In the second place, the allegorical interpretation gives no satisfaction. It is conducive to all kinds of arbitrary questions, demanding just as arbitrary an answer. And the result is that after all is said, you are not sure whether you have attained to the right interpretation or not.

H.H.

NOTICE OF

ANNUAL MEETING

REFORMED FREE PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION

To be held Thursday Evening, September 25, 8:00 o'clock
... at First Prot. Ref. Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan

SPEAKER: The Rev. H. C. Hoeksema of South Holland, Illinois

The Board of the R.F.P.A. invites all our Prot. Ref. men to join with us in this work of witnessing for the truth and urges all our members to attend this important meeting.

Selection of three new board members is to be made from the following nomination:

Messrs. R. Bloem, D. Engelsma, C. Kregel, C. Kuiper,
H. Vander Wal, H. Veldhouse.

TRANSCRIPT OF ADDRESS AND QUESTION HOUR

held under the Auspices of the Committee for Protestant
Reformed Action, Hull, Iowa, July, 1954

Speaker: Rev. H. Hoeksema

(Continued)

But he also said this, and this he does not deny: "Some of you carry Protestant Reformed truth on the lapel of your coat. You are proud of being Protestant Reformed. Don't think you go to heaven because you are Protestant Reformed." These statements he admits to have made. I insist that in a sermon that contains these statements, the rest of a sermon cannot possibly be Protestant Reformed. I claim no Protestant Reformed man can possibly say, in the first place: "God promises everyone of you that if you believe, you shall be saved." That's not Protestant Reformed. Let me analyze that a moment. God promises. Remember that that sermon was preached on the evening of April 15, 1951, that is, immediately after the Classis East adopted the Declaration of Principles, in which it was maintained, strongly maintained, that the promise of God is unconditional, and is for the elect only. That was April 15, 1951. What does it mean? Let me analyze it. Mind you, the Rev. De Wolf did not say: "I preach to you the promise that if you believe, you shall be saved." That would have been not quite clear, but it would have passed muster. He didn't say that. He didn't mean to say that either. He said: "God promises." *God* promises. Now the promise of God is, in the first place, an oath. What God promises He fulfills. In 1924 we opposed the doctrine of the Chr. Ref. Churches that maintained that God is gracious in the well-meaning offer of salvation to everybody. This is worse. This is not the question of a well-meaning offer of the gospel. This is the question of God's promise. God promises. What God promises He swears by Himself to fulfill. Moreover, what God promises to anyone He surely promises in His grace. When God promises salvation, He certainly is gracious to the one to whom He promises. There's no question of that. Even the Liberated, — the Liberated is very similar to that doctrine as far as the covenant is concerned. Prof. Veenhof in his Appel, as you probably know, insists that the promise of God is for every child that is baptized. And, moreover, he is consistent. He also writes that that promise of God to everyone that is baptized is given to every child in God's grace. But this is stronger yet. God promises, that is, He swears with an oath to everyone of you? That was the idea. That was not the idea. That was the statement. God promises to everyone of you, in the audience, everyone of you, that is, everyone that was in his hearing, whether members of the church or outsiders, — he didn't know — whether carnal seed or spiritual seed, whether elect or reprobate, — he didn't know, — everyone of you, he said, "God promises everyone of you." And, he added to that the conditional clause: "if you believe."

You say, perhaps: that limits that statement? It does not. It does not limit the statement as far as God's promise is concerned. God promises that everyone of you . . . that is the general promise . . . if you believe. I say again: if the Rev. De Wolf had said, "I proclaim that if you believe, you shall be saved," that's something else, something entirely different. Or even if he had said: "I proclaim that God promises to everyone that believes," that would have been still Reformed, even according to the Canons. But he didn't say that. He said: "God promises everyone of you that if you believe you shall be saved." I put that in connection with the sermon, and I claim, — I was not the one that protested against the sermon, let me repeat that; I didn't; others protested; others than the consistory even. I didn't even know what was going on in the consistory for a long, long time. But when I came in contact with it through a committee, I wrote my opinion black on white on the sermon which the Rev. De Wolf preached, and I sent it to the Consistory. It was not a protest at the time, but I wrote my opinion about the sermon. That was the first sermon preached.

The second sermon I heard. And if anything, that, to my mind, was still worse. That was preached in September, 1952, a year and a half after this sermon. I was in church then; I heard the sermon. And the essence of the whole sermon, — not only a statement or two, — but the essence of the whole sermon, except the last few sentences, maybe 2, 3 sentences, was this: our act of conversion is a prerequisite, or condition, to enter into the kingdom of God. He made that statement literally in connection with the sermon on Matthew 18:1-4. He made that statement literally. But he also emphasized it throughout his sermon. "Our act of conversion is a prerequisite to enter into the kingdom of God." You know what that means. Prerequisite means something that is required of us beforehand. That's a prerequisite. In other words, we must convert ourselves before we enter into the kingdom of heaven. Not only is that contrary to all that the confessions ever teach us, — I refer you to Canons III, IV, 10-12 etc., — it is contrary also directly to Scripture. The Word of God teaches us that we are translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. God's translation into the kingdom of God's dear Son is first, it stands to reason. "Verily, verily I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." How, then, can our conversion, our act of conversion be something that God requires of us before we enter into the kingdom of God. That was his sermon. That was the sermon throughout. Let me say too: it was a preparatory sermon, supposed to be. There was no Christ and no cross in it. I emphasized that in my protest. I protested against that sermon. I made a protest against that sermon. And I protested at the Consistory that there was no cross in that sermon. One of my elders remarked that he nevertheless had mentioned the cross once. I was present; I don't believe it; but even that certainly cannot possibly be sufficient for a preparatory sermon on that text. The cross is

the entrance into the kingdom of God, the entrance through which we enter only as we are regenerated before. Christ is the entrance into the kingdom of God. In this connection I cannot refrain from issuing to all of you a word of warning. I'll do it. You know, we talk about so much in our day, and in our churches, — we talk about responsibility. We talk about the activity of faith. And similar things. I'll warn you that on that basis and in that line we're going to lose the gospel. We're going to lose the gospel. We're going to lose election. We're going to lose reprobation. We're going to lose the gospel, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. O yes, we must preach the activity of faith. But by the activity of faith I mean not something that you and I must do, except that first of all, by the activity of faith we cling to Christ, and embrace Him and all His benefits. That is the activity of faith. Responsibility? Don't you ever forget that the accusation that Reformed people cannot maintain responsibility has always been brought against, — Reformed people have always been accused of denying responsibility by those that are Arminians and moderns. We do not deny responsibility. We do not deny the activity of faith. Of course not. But I warn you that with the emphasis that is laid upon these things, upon conditions, upon activity of faith, and upon responsibility, you're going to lose the gospel. That's my warning.

Well, those were the sermons preached. I protested. For a long time the Consistory treated the case. For a long time. You must not think that it was easy for our Consistory, or that they were eager to take action against one of their ministers. It was not. For over two years this case has been pending. For over two years. We asked the Rev. De Wolf to apologize. We asked him to make up his own apology, and publish it from the pulpit as he pleased, in his own words. Personally, in the meeting of the Consistory, I even suggested that he should make a sort of an apology in his sermon, in the course of his sermon. Nothing availed. I have a suspicion, that's my suspicion, for which I have pretty good basis, that if the Rev. De Wolf had been alone, he would probably have apologized. He didn't now. He had supporters in the congregation. Then they finally had a motion in the Consistory, — I wasn't present at that time either, — to suspend him. That motion was carried by the majority of the Consistory, to suspend Rev. De Wolf. That suspension must, of course, be carried out with the advice of a neighboring consistory. The neighboring consistory was Fourth Church. We called in the Fourth Church. And the Fourth Church objected that our Consistory had not first decided formally to suspend the Rev. De Wolf. They had made a motion that he should be suspended, but they had not definitely and formally decided to suspend the Rev. De Wolf before they asked the Fourth Consistory. That should be done, of course. So it was decided to meet apart for a minute, or a while, and carry out that decision of Fourth Church. At that meeting we once more postponed the suspension. We were reluctant. The Consistory did not mean

to suspend the Rev. De Wolf. They were reluctant. Hence, we sent the Fourth Church home, and decided that the Rev. De Wolf should put an answer black on white of the protests that had been lodged against him on both sermons. That was done. The answer was in no wise satisfactory. Then the Consistory decided, — and there I was present, — to let the Rev. De Wolf submit himself to an examination on the basis of the Formula of Subscription. That was done. And in the answers the Rev. De Wolf stated that he still maintained both the statements and the doctrine contained in them. That was the substance of the answers. There's more. The questions and answers, of course, were all recorded. I have a copy of it. If necessary, I'll publish the whole thing, from beginning to end. I have a copy of all my protests, of all the other protests, a copy of the questions and answers; and if necessary, I say, I'll publish the whole thing. It should be done, probably, as an addition to the history of the Prot. Ref. Churches. In the meantime, you must not forget, the Consistory changed, that is, the personnel of the Consistory changed. It was January. New elders were installed. And the Consistory became weaker because new persons entered into the Consistory. One of the elders, moreover, that was newly installed was one of our strong Prot. Ref. elders, Mr. van Ellen. The Lord took him away soon after he became elder. So we were crippled. You must not forget that, in order to understand the rest of the action of the Consistory. I was not present very often. The Consistory changed personnel. The result was that the meeting finally decided to approve of the answers to the questions given by the Rev. De Wolf in which he plainly stated that he maintained the statements which were made in the two sermons. I say I was not present; otherwise they could not even have a majority. So slim, and so tense was the relation between the so-called minority and majority. If I had been there, and my vote had been cast, they would not even have had a majority for that motion. But they did, and I was glad they did, because I thought it would be better that the case would go in the open, and would go to the classis. And so I did. At that time, after they decided that, I sent the following document to my Consistory. This was February 2, 1953.

“Esteemed Brethren:

“I am very sorry that in his reply to the questions with which he was confronted by the Consistory the Rev. De Wolf fully maintains the heresy implied in the statements: a. God promises everyone of you that if you believe, you shall be saved. b. Our act of conversion is a prerequisite to enter into the kingdom of God.

“I had indeed hoped that he would see and acknowledge the error of these teachings, so that we might again have fellowship with one another in the light, something which I earnestly desire, and without which I cannot live. But in this I was deeply disappointed.

(To be continued)

FROM HOLY WRIT

Exposition of Matthew 24 and 25

VI.

(Matthew 24:29-31)

a.

The text to which we call attention in this essay reads as follows: *"But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send forth his angels with the great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heaven to the other."*

In our former articles we have drawn the following line of thought as being traceable in this chapter up till this point.

1. The issue, the question in the minds of the disciples is really twofold. a. *When* shall these things, depicted in the destruction of the earthly temple in Jerusalem, take place. b. *What* will be the *sign* of Christ's Parousia (His ever abiding with His people in glory) be and of the consummation of the ages! Verses 1-3.

2. Jesus warns against any expectation that this will be soon. Much must take place. It will be a long history of wars and rumors of wars. Men will come with their panaceas for the world's ills. But do not believe them. The Counsel of God shall stand and He will perform His good-pleasure. All these things must come to pass. In its deepest essence history is *church*-history, the Son of God gathering his church, it spite of and through the opposition of the gates of hell! The world's ills are the beginning of the birth-pangs which shall issue in the coming of the Son of man with the clouds to be revealed the First-born of all creatures. Verses 4-8.

3. The church in the world will be hated of all men. Mostly by those who are in the church, yet who are not of her. It will be great trial. The love of many, who confessed to be Christian and really were not, shall wax cold. However, they who endure to the end shall be saved. The Word of the Cross shall be preached and shall be efficacious to the end. Verses 9-14.

4. The time will come at the end of history, when the birthpangs will be intensified in the world of the coming of the Son of man, when Satan shall have his hour. The abomination of desolation shall be seen in the holy place, as spoken of by Daniel the prophet. Then instituted worship

shall be impossible. If these days should not be shortened even the very elect of God would not stand. For the elects' sake they shall be shortened. It will be like in the days of Noah. Verses 15-28.

Now in the passage under consideration (verses 29-31) Jesus portrays and foretells his disciples and us more particularly *what* will be the Sign of His PAROUSIA and of the CONSUMMATION (sunteleias tou aionos) of the ages! It should be noticed that even so the exact hour is not given, the date foretold. It still is prophecy. It calls for watchfulness and prayer. The "when" these things will come to pass is only made known unto us by observing the signs in the sun, moon and stars. We know where to look, and what to notice, but just *when* this will be seen God has in pedagogical wisdom not disclosed to us.

However Jesus does tell us that this Sign of the Son of man shall be seen "immediately after the affliction of those days." In our humble opinion "those days" refers to the days of the great tribulation spoken of in the former verses, 15-28. They are the days of which Daniel spoke, having been instructed by the angel in answer to his prayer, which he uttered giving heed to the prophecy of Jeremiah. These are the days when the Man of Sin shall be revealed, the anti-Christian world-powers, both political and religious. Compare Rev. 13.

The "Immediately" refers to the fact that there shall be no long season intervening between "those days" and the Parousia of Christ. That will mark the consummation of the ages! That will be the final birth-pang in history. Then shall the Son of man, of whom God speaks in Psalm 1, be openly revealed as both Lord and Christ. God will then say openly before all the world, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee; ask of me and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost part of the earth for thy possession!" No birth-pangs can then follow. The child of God's choice is then exalted fully, visibly and rightly at God's right hand, Lord over all. The days are then shortened for the elects' sake. The elect are then manifestly heirs of God and with Christ. It will be the everlasting PAROUSIA of Christ with His own. Then shall the tabernacle of God be with man; Immanuel, God-with-us! The Stone in Zion will be the chief corner of the temple, not made with hands!

There is in this "immediately" the fundamental truth of the "behold I come quickly" of the book of Revelation. It is more than a dogmatical statement. It is really the answer to the prayer of the souls under the altar: "How long, O Master (Lord, Despotees), the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" It is an answer to the impatient cry, the holy impatience of the patient saints. Then shall the time, the "little time" that must be waited until "fellow servants, who should be killed as they were, have fulfilled their course," be ended. No more blood needs to flow. Rev. 6:10, 11. The measure of the suffering of Christ in His saints shall have been filled up.

Col. 1:24. See also Rev. 22:20, where the Lord assures the waiting saints of His speedy return. It is the last Word of the Son of man to His church, the fitting close of the Canonical Scriptures.

Wherefore the signs in the sun, moon and stars shall be a welcome sight to the waiting church. They can then "lift up their heads, knowing that their redemption is nigh." But the wicked, who dwell upon the earth, shall be terrified.

Of this Christ speaks here in this passage.

Christ speaks of this when he depicts the catastrophic signs which shall be seen in the "firmament" and in the sun, moon and stars; the powers of heaven shall be shaken.

In attempting to understand the meaning of these "signs in the sun, moon and stars" (Luke 21:25), it should be borne in mind that God created these heavenly bodies on the fourth day of the creation week. And it should be borne in mind that he gave to these bodies a certain "normal" function. They are such creatures that without them life cannot go on orderly. For we read in Gen. 1:14-17 the following: "And God said, let there be lights in the firmament of heaven to divide the day from the night: and let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years: and let them be for lights in the firmament of heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. And God made the two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of heaven to give light upon the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day."

Now it is not the intent of this writer to go off on a tangent, and give a detailed exposition of this passage, quoted from Gen. 1:14-17. Rather we would point out the following salient points, which we believe ought to be kept in mind, in order to understand the meaning of the "signs" spoken of by Jesus in Matthew 24:29. We refer to the following:

1. It is the evidently divine intention that the creation be the medium of revelation; it is God's speech to man. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Psalm 19.

2. That when all things are "normal" in these heavenly bodies, which God placed in the firmament on the "fourth day," the speech of God is such that it speaks of exactness, faithfulness of God in maintaining the universe. It speaks of an orderly life. It speaks of God's power and divinity. Rom. 1:18ff. There is nothing of the chaotic in the sun, moon and stars. Nothing is so unchanged by time and sin as the world, the powers of heaven. And seemingly nothing so loudly proclaims the stability of the universe and continued existence of all things as the sun, moon and stars. Do we not call the blue sky above us "firmament"? The German calls it "Feste"! They are the "beams of (God's) chambers in the waters!" (Psalm 104:3). All about us may seem to

move out of its place, in wars and rumors of wars. But the firmament stands unmoved and untouched by this all.

3. The firmament with the sun, moon and stars, somehow proclaims that our life is ruled from on high! Does not the "sun," in its rising and in its setting, divide the light from the darkness on earth, dividing the day from the night. And is the sun, in so doing, not like a strong man going forth from his tent to run a race? And when this is done "normally" there is something sure and strong in life. The sun also "rises on the evil." It gives the evil a feeling of security to see the sun rise and set!

4. And does not the moon proclaim in her silent, silvery light, which she casts upon the earth, that the sun is still shining, and that it is fundamentally not darkness on the earth but light, even in the darkest night. And when the moon is not visible to us in our night, do not the stars break forth before our eye in greater multitudes and in bolder relief? How beautiful is not our night in all its wondrous glory?

Life has a steady pulse to it when sun, moon and stars shine! Man feels safe under the canopy of the heavens. Even the heathen, changing the glory of the incorruptible God in the likeness of the corruptible creature, sought a measure of reassurance from the heavens — when all appeared "normal"!

But, oh, when the "powers of heaven are shaken," then all is so very different. When days, months and years are affected — so that the calendar events cannot go on, then it is another story. When God will roll up these heavens as a scroll, then the wicked are terrified. For then there is another speech in these heavens. Then they too are the medium of revelation — but then they reveal the Great Day of the Lord as being at hand.

It is of this that the prophets often speak in the Old Testament Scriptures. We find in our text both exact quotations and allusions to such prophecies as Isaiah 13:10 and 34:4; Ezekiel 32:7 and Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15, not to forget Zephaniah 1:15. And always in the prophecies the signs in sun, moon and stars, and in the shaking of the powers of heaven there is an "announcement" of the great Day of the Lord, a "day" which shall be fully His!

And since it is the day of the "LORD," it is always a day of doom for the wicked and of salvation for the righteous.

(to be continued)

G.L.

Announcement

The Classis East of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet Wednesday, October 1, at 9 A. M. in the First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Consistories of this Classis will consider this an official announcement.

REV. M. SCHIPPER, *Stated Clerk*

IN HIS FEAR

Jehovah, The God of Arithmetic

Before these lines of this typewriter are reset by linotype and appear upon the printed page which you have taken from your mailbox, another school year will have begun.

Already your children and my children find themselves in the weekly routine of going to school, applying themselves to the lessons at hand and then returning with their home work. The one child delights in it and drinks in the added knowledge with joy. The other child finds it boring. And for him it is hard to keep his mind on the matter at hand. For the one it comes "naturally." For the other it comes only with hard labor.

There is a far more important difference of which we can speak between the instruction the one child receives and that which is given to another child. The one child is taught all things in the fear of the Lord. To the other child the things of God's creation and the works which He performs therein are taught in bold denial of God and of His glory. However, when He is ruled out of His own creation and the creature is examined as though it stood apart from the Creator, that which is taught is utter folly. Since "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" that which is taught outside of His fear cannot be wisdom but must be utter folly. Even though the things presented may be factually correct, it is folly that is taught when the God Who stands behind these facts and causes them to be realities is ignored and denied. For that reason we have decided to write a few lines at this beginning of this school season concerning this matter of instruction in His fear.

It is a fact, well-known to all who have given even a superficial consideration to the matter, that the one subject does lend itself more easily to a truly Christian presentation to the mind of the child than another. It is unhesitatingly conceded that in the subject of history it is a comparatively easy task to trace the finger of God as He "turns the hearts of kings as the rivers of water" (Proverbs 21:1). But it must also be conceded that without tracing His finger in all historical events the child is deceived and taught utter folly. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity also in the realm of history unless in it we begin and end in God. History repeats itself. But it gets nowhere when it is viewed in any other way than in His fear. The world passes through one cycle after another with boring monotony. War follows peace; and peace follows war. But where do these wars and periods of peace bring us? Only to more dreadful wars. Both war and peace serve that same dreadful end. It brings one to vanity. A war to end war has only set the wheels turning more rapidly in motion towards a war to end peace. And without

seeing the kingdom of God, without seeing the stone cut out of the mountain without hands of Daniel 2 all history brings the world no advancement, no deliverance outside that evil circle of vanity of vanities. Who would ever expect to teach history by taking a few chapters out of the textbook, somewhere in the middle and utterly disregard the first chapters and the last? Who would ever read a novel that way? Why you might find yourself taking sides against the principal character and hero of the book and cheering the villain. It might make interesting reading, those chapters in the center of the book which you have lifted out of the book itself. But could you expect a child who was told to do that to give a good and correct book report on that novel? Much less, indeed, very much less can you take a piece of that which transpired in ancient, medieval, European or American history and understand it when you have first ruled out God and His work of creation and God and His Kingdom of Christ for which all the other kingdoms exist that they may — though unconsciously and very unwillingly — serve the purpose of its final and glorious realization in the day of Christ.

We confess, do we not, that we believe that there is "an holy catholic church"? And we believe also, do we not, that this church will one day inherit the new creation and that all her enemies shall be cast into the lake of fire? We believe that this church is the salt of the earth, the apple of God's eye, the bride of Christ. And shall we then explain world history as though this church does not exist and does not amount to anything? Shall we have our children taught in the history class in such a way that the kingdoms of the world are the important groups of people and that the church serves their good? Of course not! But it certainly is the other way. The church is engraven in the palms of God's hands (Isaiah 49:16), and not the kingdoms of the world. Do we really understand the things that transpire in this world and among the nations of this world, then, if our viewpoint is not exactly that viewpoint of the God Who with these hands turns the hearts of kings and causes every single historical event to take place? Surely in the history class there is abundant opportunity found and a God-given calling to be recognized to explain and to teach all history in His fear.

But at the moment we wish to speak about the subject of arithmetic, which does not lend itself as easily to a presentation that clearly breathes the fear of God. And yet there are some beautiful truths that even this abstract subject teaches us and that ought not be kept from the covenant child. The child ought early to learn and to know that his God, Jehovah, is the God of arithmetic as well as of history and geography.

And first of all we would have you consider with us that the whole field of arithmetic or of numbers reveals Him to be an All-Wise God. What wisdom, what unsearchable wisdom is displayed in the whole world of numbers! The inner beauty and harmony between the numbers speaks of the

Creator's everlasting praise. This we wish to make plain to you at this time. But first of all let us note how that Jehovah, the God of arithmetic uses these numbers Himself in the works of His hands.

First of all, then, we have reference to those numbers which He set aside and used to symbolize various truths of Himself, His creation and His covenant. These numbers are the numbers one, three, four, six, seven, ten, twelve and the multiples of these numbers by the number ten, such as forty, seventy, one hundred, one thousand, one hundred forty-four thousand and the like. God Himself is one; and the number one symbolizes God in His oneness. He reveals Himself to us in the Scriptures as a triune God, Father, Son and Spirit dwelling in that one divine essence. And therefore the number three is symbolic of God in His triune existence. Gothic architecture has made much use of this as well as of the symbolic number four — which is the number of this earth in its extent: four corners, four winds of heaven, four seasons. The gothic arch has characteristically its three distinct parts; and its circular windows have their four distinct inner arcs. The number six has been reserved and designated by God as the number of man. See Revelation 13:18. Seven is the covenant number, ten the number of completion or perfectness and twelve the number of God's people. It is not, therefore, a mere coincidence that when Israel comes to Elim that this oasis has exactly twelve wells and seventy palm trees. It is not a mere cold, mathematical fact that God gave Jacob twelve sons in whom he would inherit the land of Canaan and that Jesus chose exactly twelve apostles. Jehovah as the God whose wisdom brought forth the wonderful world of numbers makes use of these numbers to speak His Own message to His Church.

Nor is it only in the sphere of these spiritual things that He makes use of the numbers His wisdom has produced. In every earthly thing, we may say in every creature, He makes use of numbers; and these creatures exist according to a definite numerical scheme. All are, no doubt, acquainted with the most popular of chemical formulas: H_2O . Spelled out in the letters of the alphabet this is water. To the mind of the chemist who deals with the elements in this world it spells two parts of hydrogen combined with one part of oxygen. To the common man that is water. But the point we make is that so God has made all things according to such a mathematical formula. H_2O_2 represents another work of God. When two parts of hydrogen are combined with two parts — instead of one part — of oxygen, God has made not the refreshing, life giving water which we crave, but a deadly poison called hydrogen peroxide. With that very little difference of composition God has made the one material to differ so very greatly in taste, effect and power. We are in no position, nor is it needful to continue, to show how all that which God has made can be expressed according to some such formula with its mathematical equation. All we need to do is to remind the reader that so God works in all

the things which He has made and which He upholds by the word of His power.

There are, however, other ways in which the wisdom of God is displayed in His employment of the system of numbers which have come forth from His infinite mind. Examine His snow flake. The number six is so noticeable here. There is an endless variety to the shapes of these little pieces of divine artistry. Yet the number six is so plainly evident. Or again think of those numbers with which the scientist has learned to deal in recent centuries but wherewith God has been dealing ever since He spoke those momentous words, "Let there be light!" Indeed, we have in mind the speed of light and the speed of sound. These are expressed by cold, definite, exact numbers; but they speak the praise of Him Whose wisdom determined their exact speed. You have likewise the exact numbers which express that degree of temperature at which water, at sea level, will freeze and will boil. And so one could continue. It all adds up to this that Jehovah is, indeed, the God of arithmetic as well as the God of history and that our children should not be taught His numbers, His arithmetic and mathematics as divorced from and in ignorance of Him but as that which He designed and as that wherewith He still works today in all that which is round about us.

Surely there is room, much room in the arithmetic class to speak of God's wisdom and praises as well as in the chemistry room, the science room and the Bible class. Let your child — in a Christian school, a school wherein the instruction is based upon the word of God — understand that these numbers are designed by an all-wise God. What folly to present these numbers as though they assembled themselves in the order in which they come. This will become abundantly plain — this folly — when one considers nothing more than that which we call the "time tables." There is an inner harmony and beauty to be seen just in the numbers themselves. For this we have no room at present; but the Lord willing we shall treat this matter next that we may marvel at the wisdom of our God and may see the beauty of the truth expressed by the psalmist. Speaking his word of thanks to God he declares of Him, "That thy name is near thy wondrous works declare," Psalm 75:1.

J.A.H.

Deacons' Conference

A Deacons' Conference of the churches in Classis East will be held at Creston Church, Thursday evening, October 2, at 8 P. M.

All deacons, ministers and ex-deacons, being out of office for not more than one term, are invited to attend.

Rev. Bernard Woudenberg will introduce for discussion the topic, "Should we support or take collections for such institutions as the Bethany Home?"

Contending For The Faith

The Church and the Sacraments

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

THE SUPREMACY OF THE POPE

THE DECLINE OF THE PAPACY AND THE AVIGNON EXILE.

A. D. 1294-1377.

The next year, 1325, Lewis suffered a severe defeat from Leopold of Austria, who had entered into a compact to put Charles IV of France on the German throne. He went so far as to express his readiness, in the compact of Ulm, 1326, to surrender the German crown to Frederick, provided he himself was confirmed in his right to Italy and the imperial dignity. At this juncture Leopold died.

By papal appointment Robert of Naples was vicar of Rome. But Lewis had no idea of surrendering his claims to Italy, and, now that he was once again free by Leopold's death, he marched across the Alps and was crowned, January 1327, emperor in front of St. Peter's Sciarra Colonna, as the representative of the people, placed the crown on his head, and two bishops administered unction. Villani expresses indignation at an imperial coronation conducted without the pope's consent as a thing unheard of. Lewis was the first mediaeval emperor crowned by the people. A formal trial was instituted, and "James of Cahors, who calls himself John XXII" was denounced as anti-christ and deposed from the papal throne and his effigy carried through the streets and burnt. John of Corbara, belonging to the Spiritual wing of the Franciscans, was elected to the throne just declared vacant, and took the name of Nicolas V. He was the first anti-pope since the days of Barbarossa. Lewis himself placed the crown upon the pontiff's head, and the bishop of Venice performed the ceremony of unction. Nicolas surrounded himself with a college of seven cardinals, and was accused of having forthwith renounced the principles of poverty and abstemiousness in dress and at the table which the day before he had advocated.

To these acts of violence John replied by pronouncing Lewis a heretic and appointing a crusade against him, with the promise of indulgence to all taking part in it. Fickle Rome soon grew weary of her lay-crowned emperor, who had been so unwise as to impose an extraordinary tribute of 10,000 florins each upon the people, the clergy, and the Jews of the city. He retired to the North, Nicolas following him with his retinue of cardinals. At Pisa, the emperor being present, the anti-pope excommunicated John and summoned a general council to Milan. John was again burnt in effigy, at the cathedral, and condemned to death for heresy. In 1330 Lewis withdrew from Italy altogether, while Nicolas, with a cord around his neck, submitted to John. He died in

Avignon three years later. In 1334, John issued a bull which, according to Karl Muller, was the rudest act of violence done up to that time to the German emperor by a pope. This fulmination separated Italy from the crown and kingdom — *imperium et regnum* — of Germany and forbade their being reunited in one body. The reason given for this drastic measure was the territorial separation of the two provinces. Thus was accomplished by a distinct announcement what the diplomacy of Innocent III was the first to make a part of the papal policy, and which figured so prominently in the struggle between Gregory IX and Frederick II.

With his constituency completely lost in Italy, and with only an uncertain support in Germany, Lewis now made overtures for peace. But the pope was not ready for anything less than a full renunciation of the imperial power. John died in 1334, but the struggle continued through the pontificate of his successor, Benedict XII. Philip VI of France set himself against Benedict's measures for reconciliation with Lewis, and in 1337 the emperor made an alliance with England against France. Princes of Germany, making the rights of the empire their own, adopted the famous constitution of Rense, — a locality near Mainz, which was confirmed at the Diet of Frankfurt, 1338. It repudiated the pope's extravagant temporal claims, and declared that the election of an emperor by the electors was final, and did not require papal approval. This was the first representative German assembly to assert the independence of the empire.

The interdict was hanging over the German assembly when Benedict died, 1342. The battle had gone against Lewis, and his supporters were well-nigh all gone from him. A submission even more humiliating than that of Henry IV was the only thing left. He sought the favor of Clement VI, but in vain. In a bull of April 12, 1343, Clement enumerated the emperor's many crimes, and anew ordered him to renounce the imperial dignity. Lewis wrote, yielding submission, but the authenticity of the document was questioned at Avignon, probably with the set purpose of increasing the emperor's humiliation. Harder conditions were laid down. They were rejected by the diet at Frankfurt, 1344. But Germany was weary, and listened without revulsion to a final bull against Lewis, 1346, and a summons to the electors to proceed to a new election. The electors, John of Bohemia among them, chose Charles IV, John's son. The Bohemian king was the blind warrior who met his death on the battlefield of Crecy the same year. Before his election, Charles had visited Avignon, and promised full submission to the pope's demands. His continued complacency during his reign justified the pope's choice. The struggle ended with Lewis' death a year later, 1347, while he was engaged near Munich in a bear-hunt. It was the last conflict of the empire and papacy along the old lines laid down by those ecclesiastical warriors, Hildebrand and Innocent III and Gregory IX.

To return to John XXII, he became a prominent figure

in the controversy within the Franciscan order over the tenure of property, a controversy which had been going on from the earliest period between the two parties, the Spirituals, or Observants, and the Conventuals. The last testament of St. Francis, pleading for the practice of absolute poverty, and suppressed in the bull of Nicolas III, 1279, which granted the Franciscans the right to use property as tenants, while forbidding them to hold it in fee simple. With this decision the strict party, the Spirituals, were not satisfied, and the struggle went on. Coelestine V attempted to bring peace by merging the Spiritual wing with the order of Hermits he had founded, but the measure was without success.

Under Boniface VIII matters went hard with the Spirituals. This pope deposed the general, Raymond Gaufredi, putting in his place John of Murro, who belonged to the laxer wing. Peter John Olivi (died 1298), whose writings were widely circulated, had declared himself in favor of Nicolas' bull, with the interpretation that the use of property and goods was to be the "use of necessity," — *usus pauper* — as opposed to the more liberal use advocated by the Conventuals and called *usus moderatus*. Olivi's personal fortunes were typical of the fortunes of the Spiritual branch. After his death, the attack made against his memory was, if possible, more determined, and culminated in the charges preferred at Vienne. Murro adopted violent measures, burning Olivi's writings, and casting his sympathizers into prison. Other prominent Spirituals fled. Angelo Clareno found refuge for a time in Greece, returning to Rome, 1305, under the protection of the new Colonna.

The case was formally taken up by Clement V, who called a commission to Avignon to devise measures to heal the division, and gave the Spirituals temporary relief from persecution. The proceedings were protracted till the meeting of the council in Vienne, when the Conventuals brought up the case in the form of an arraignment of Olivi, who had come to be regarded almost as a saint. Among the charges were that he pronounced the *usus pauper* to be of the essence of the Minorite rule, that Christ was still living at the time the lance was thrust into his side, and that the rational soul has not the form of a body. Olivi's memory was defended by Ubertino da Casale, and the council passed no sentence upon his person.

In the bull *Exivi de paradiso*, issued 1313, and famous in the history of the Franciscan order, Clement seemed to take the side of the Spirituals. It forbade the order or any of its members to accept bequests, possess vineyards, sell products from their gardens, build fine churches, or go to law. It permitted only "the use of necessity," *usus arctus or pauper*, and nothing beyond. The Minorites were to wear no shoes, ride only in cases of necessity, fast from November 1 until Christmas, as well as every Friday, and possess a single mantle with a hood and one without a hood. Clement ordered the new general, Alexander of Alessandra, to turn over to Olivi's

followers the convents of Narbonne, Carcassonne and Beziers, but also ordered the Inquisition to punish the Spirituals who refused submission.

In spite of the papal decrees, the controversy was still being carried on within the order with great heat, when John XXII came to the throne. In the decretal *Quorumdam exegit*, and in the bull *Sancta romana et universalis ecclesia*, Dec. 30, 1317, John took a positive position against the Spirituals. A few weeks later, he condemned a formal list of their errors and abolished all the convents under Spiritual management. From this time on dates the application of the name Fraticelli to the Spirituals. They refused to submit, and took the position that even a pope had no right to modify the Rule of St. Francis. Michael of Cesena, the general of the order, defended them. Sixty-four of their number were summoned to Avignon. Twenty-five refused to yield, and passed into the hands of the Inquisition. Four were burnt as martyrs at Marseilles, May 6, 1318. Others fled to Sicily.

The chief interest of the controversy was now shifted to the strictly theological question whether Christ and his Apostles observed complete poverty. This dispute threatened to rend the wing of the Conventuals itself. Michael of Cesena, Ockam, and others, too, held the position that Christ and His Apostles not only held no property as individuals, but held none in common. John, opposing this view, gave as arguments the gifts of the Magi, that Christ possessed clothes and bought food, the purse of Judas, and Paul's labor for a living. In the bull *Cum inter nonnullos*, 1323, and other bulls, John declared it heresy to hold that Christ and the Apostles held no possessions. Those who resisted this interpretation were pronounced, 1324, rebels and heretics. John went farther, and gave back to the order the right of possessing goods in fee simple, a right which Innocent IV had denied, and he declared that in things which disappear in the using, such as eatables, no distinction can be made between their use and their possession. In 1326 John pronounced Olivi's commentary on the Apocalypse heretical. The three Spiritual leaders, Cesena, Ockam, and Bonagratia were seized and held in prison until 1328, when they escaped and fled to Lewis the Bavarian at Pisa. It was at this time that Ockam was said to have used to the emperor the famous words, "Do thou defend me with the sword and I will defend thee with the pen" — *tu me defendes gladio, ego te defendam calamo*. They were deposed from their offices and included in the ban fulminated against the anti-pope, Peter of Corbara. Later, Cesena submitted to the pope, as Ockam is also said to have done shortly before his death. Cesena died at Munich, 1342. He committed the seal of the order to Ockam. On his death-bed he is said to have cried out: "My God, what have I done? I have appealed against him who is the highest on the earth. But look, O Father, at the spirit of truth that is in me which has not erred through the lust of the flesh but from great zeal for the seraphic order and out of love for poverty." Bonagratia also died in Munich.

H.V.

The Voice of Our Fathers

The Canons of Dordrecht

PART TWO

EXPOSITION OF THE CANONS

FIFTH HEAD OF DOCTRINE

OF THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

Article 2. Hence spring daily sins of infirmity, and hence spots adhere to the best works of the saints; which furnish them with constant matter for humiliation before God, and flying for refuge to Christ crucified; for mortifying the flesh more and more by the spirit of prayer, and by holy exercises of piety; and for pressing forward to the goal of perfection, till being at length delivered from this body of death, they are brought to reign with the Lamb of God in heaven.

The following corrections should be made in the translation given above: 1) "spirit of prayer" should be "Spirit of prayer." 2) "and for pressing forward to the goal of perfection" should be "and for longing for the goal of perfection." 3) "delivered from this body of death" should be "freed from this body of death." 4) "they are brought to reign . . ." should be simply "they shall reign . . ."

This article continues the description of a saint and of the life of a saint in this life which is begun in the previous article. A correct understanding of the foregoing is of utmost importance for the understanding of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, as we indicated before. It must certainly be evident that the Reformed doctrine of perseverance has nothing in common with the proud and at the same time superficial view of the perfectionist. But it must also be plain that the Reformed doctrine of perseverance has no similarity to the view of sin and the attitude toward sin which is entertained by the antinomian and the libertine. And in a defense of the truth of the sure preservation and perseverance of the saints these matters must be made clear, and that too, over against the slanders of Arminianism. What is a saint, and how does a saint live in this present world, and particularly, how does a saint that is surely preserved and that surely perseveres manifest himself in this life, — these are all matters of concern in this Fifth Head of Doctrine. And it is within the scope of these questions that the wonder of God's preserving grace must be considered and can best be understood by the persevering saint.

In this second article, therefore, the fathers draw a conclusion from the first. There, that is, in Article 1, they called the attention to the fact that while the Christian, called according to God's purpose into the fellowship of His Son

Jesus Christ, is regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and therefore delivered from the dominion and slavery of sin, yet he is not delivered, as long as he is in this life, from the body of sin and from the flesh. He has but a small beginning of the new obedience. And that small beginning is a principle of the new life. Furthermore, this means that he is principally free from sin, so that he assumes a radically different attitude over against sin. Yet, while he is dead to sin, sin is by no means dead in him. He still has his flesh, in which are the old roots of sin. And that flesh is the source in him of all kinds of sin and lust. "Hence spring daily sins of infirmity, and hence spots adhere to the best works of the saints."

By this expression the sins of the saints are put in a two-fold classification: sins of weakness or infirmity and spots which adhere to the best works of the saints.

By "sins of infirmity" are denoted all the sins of the saints. We must remember that when the children of God fall into sin, this does not arise out of the fact that they love sin according to the new man. The new life has the tendency and the striving to manifest itself in perfection and to oppose and put down all that stands over against it. This is in the very nature of that new life: it will not sin, and it cannot sin, because it is born of God. The saints are partakers of the life of Christ. And that life of Christ which is in them through the Spirit, which dwells in Christ as the Head and in the saints as His members, is victorious over sin and death. How is it, then, that this perfection is not attained? Whence spring the sins which the saints still go on committing? Not from that new life itself, for it cannot sin. But that the new life never attains perfection in the saints in this present existence stems from the constant influence of the flesh. Because of the power of the flesh, the beginning of the new life, which is but a small beginning, is weak, and it can never come to the full manifestation of its power. It is always hindered and obstructed by the influences of the old sinful flesh. And it is that weakness that is the reason why the saints do not do what according to the new man they will, and do that which according to the new man they will not. To will is present with them, but how to perform that which is good they find not. These, then, are the sins of infirmity, — sins which arise not from the new life itself, but from the *weakness* of that new life which is caused by the power of the flesh which is still present with them.

In the same light are to be explained, in the second place, the spots which cling to the best works of the saints. Even apart from the sins of the saints, sins which can in no sense at all be called good works, it must also be said of all the works of the Christian, including his best works, that they are defiled and marred by sin. The Christian never performs a work that is perfect and undefiled. We must remember that the Christian is not two individuals, a new man and an old man, so that the flesh is something next to the believer and separate from him. The flesh is the power of sin, from which he is principally delivered certainly, but which still works

constantly in the same human nature in which also the principle of the new life operates. This accounts for it that there is never a single work of the Christian which has its spiritual source in his regenerated heart which is not defiled and marred by sin.

We may also remind ourselves in this connection that this presence of the old and the new man in the Christian by no means excuses his sin. The Christian cannot lightly pass off his sins by blaming the old man, as though that old man were someone apart from him. Sin, also the sin of the Christian, remains sin, horribly displeasing to God. In fact, it must be emphasized that the sins of the children of God are worse than the sins of the world. This also lies at the basis of the further truth that is emphasized in this article. The very fact that the sins of God's people are grievous, that they are very really sins also before the face of God, and that the children of God are conscious of this, explains the possibility of the further instruction of this paragraph: these sins of infirmity and spots that defile their best works "furnish them with constant matter for humiliation before God," etc.

In the second proposition of this article the fathers therefore call attention to the consequences of these sins of the saints. Before we consider the four items mentioned here, it is well to note that these consequences belong distinctly to the life of the *saint*. These can be the consequences of the presence of sin only because there is another principle operative in the saints, a principle which is victorious over the power of the flesh, namely, the principle of regeneration. If this were not true, sin could never be the occasion of humiliation before God, of fleeing for refuge to the cross of Christ, of mortifying the flesh more and more, and of longing for the goal of perfection. But it is through these that the new life of the Christian expresses its opposition to the power of the flesh. In fact, it is through these that the new life is victorious over the power of the flesh. Nor must we forget that this is already the operation of preserving grace. How wonderful is God's grace, that He turns even the presence of sin and evil in the Christian unto good. For not only does God use even our present imperfection unto the glorification of His name, but He also very really uses even our present sin and its operation unto our salvation and sanctification and preservation. Sin can never be victorious. The operation of the power of the flesh must itself serve as a means in God's hand unto our salvation. This is not to say that the Christian magnifies that operation of sin within him and morbidly blesses the presence of that old man of sin. Not at all; the very opposite is true, according to this very article. No, the Christian magnifies the power of God's grace which puts the very operation of sin into subjection unto the salvation of the saints and the glory of God's name.

For, in the first place, the saints are furnished here with constant matter for humiliation before God. This is not difficult to understand. By the fact that we are not delivered altogether from the body of sin, and by the daily sins which

spring from our flesh, God keeps us small. From the point of view of the flesh, there is no greater danger for one who has received grace than that he should become proud. And yet there is nothing that belongs less with grace than pride. And God through the very presence of sin in His children keeps them small, guards them against pride. For when through the weakness of the flesh they fall into sin, they must humble themselves, and they must acknowledge that they are by nature not one bit better than the biggest sinner. And not only does God keep His children small in relation to their fellows, but the emphasis in this article is upon humiliation *before the face of God*. The Christian's imperfection brings him to his knees before God. He is grieved because of his sins. He has true sorrow after God. He has no peace with his sin. He must be rid of it. This is exactly the distinguishing mark of the new life.

It follows, in the second place, that the Christian's very sin and imperfection drives him out to find refuge in the cross of Christ. His sin is not reason for doubt and despair. He has the victory. For all his sins, even the sins which he still daily commits, are blotted out forever in the blood of Christ. But he has that victory only in Christ. And therefore to Christ and His cleansing blood he must turn time and time again, in order to find in His cross a safe refuge.

In the third place, the effect of the Christian's imperfection and sin is that it becomes the occasion that he mortifies the flesh more and more. Concerning this we may make the following observations:

1) This mortification is the proof that the Christian does not magnify sin, and assume the attitude, "Let us sin that grace may abound." Even while it is true that God turns the sin and imperfection of the Christian unto his salvation, it remains true that in the consciousness of the child of God sin is horrible transgression against God. He does not assume the attitude that he should sin more in order that he may have more material for humiliation before God and for fleeing to Christ. Such would indeed be contrary to true humiliation before God and genuine flight to the cross of Christ.

2) This mortification does not imply that the Christian becomes steadily more perfect. He never has more than a small beginning of the new obedience. But the mortification of the flesh means that in regard to his sins, which always remain with him and which, in fact, become more numerous in the consciousness of the child of God as he progresses on the path of sanctification, the Christian becomes more and more sincerely sorry and more and more hates and flees sin.

3) This mortification takes place, according to the article, by the Spirit of prayer and by holy exercises of piety. The child of God, conscious of his weakness and infirmity, realizes, on the one hand, that he is ever in need of God's grace and Spirit; and he seeks that grace and Spirit in prayer.

(Continued on page 501)

ALL AROUND US

Report of Conference with De Wolf Group.

The Banner of August 22, 1958 presents a report to the synod of the Christian Reformed Church of the meetings of a committee of the Christian Reformed Church and a committee of the De Wolf group. Most of our readers no doubt were aware that such meetings were being held during the last year; and if they do not receive *The Banner*, they will be curious to read the report of these meetings.

The report in *The Banner* appeared under the following caption: "Conference with Protestant Reformed Churches." The report, however, makes clear that by "Protestant Reformed Churches" is meant the De Wolf group, i.e., the group of churches that separated themselves from us following the heresy of the Rev. De Wolf.

The reader is well aware that the synod of our churches has on more than one occasion addressed requests for conferences with the Christian Reformed Church, and that it was only this year that we received some semblance of a satisfactory answer. As the editor of *The Standard Bearer* expressed it, there is "a glimmer of hope that ultimately the Christian Reformed Church might recognize the Protestant Reformed Churches as Reformed." Though the reply was more favorable, it was not without restrictions. One striking condition was "we judge that such discussions must not be polemical rehearsals of past history." The editor of *The Standard Bearer* may desire to change the word "polemical" to "fraternal," all of which is well and good with us, but words have meaning. And in this case it can only mean that when we ask for a conference with the Christian Reformed Church to discuss our differences, we may not talk with them about the very thing that has divided us. Mind you when the De Wolf group asked for the same kind of a conference then the Christian Reformed synod is willing to talk about the past. Now everyone knows that there is not one of the ministers of the De Wolf group that had anything to do with the separation from the Christian Reformed Church. Most of them were mere youngsters in 1924 and came with their parents into the Protestant Reformed Churches. With these the Christian Reformed Church will discuss the history of 1924. But the men (Hoeksema and Ophoff) who were put out of the Christian Reformed Church in 1924 simply because they would not subscribe to the Three Points of Common Grace, and who still desire to discuss the history with a view to seeking unity, with these the Christian Reformed Church will have no polemical rehearsals. This can hardly be considered just and honest. It is our candid conclusion that before you can have a conference with the Christian Reformed Church on the matter of Common Grace you first must prove to them that you are not sure what the Christian Reformed Church means by the Three Points. This

is what the De Wolf group literally did. We read in the report "the Protestant Reformed brethren conceded that they might have misinterpreted the Three Points."

But before we make any more comments we give our readers herewith the report in its entirety with synod's reaction.

"The following excerpts from the report of the committee to confer with the Protestant Reformed Churches are of interest:

'In response to a communication from the Protestant Reformed Churches (Rev. H. De Wolf group) requesting our Synod to appoint a broad committee (4 ministers and 3 elders) to discuss freely the differences and similarities between our churches, the Synod of 1957 appointed Rev. H. Baker, Rev. J. Weidenaar, Professor M. Monsma, Rev. A. Persenaire; and the Elders H. Bratt, C. Van Malsen, and C. Zylstra.

'The members of the Protestant Reformed Churches' committee are: Rev. H. De Wolf, Rev. J. Blankespoor, Rev. M. Gritters, Rev. E. Knott; and the Elders J. Kok, H. Knott, and E. Howerzyl.'

Procedure.

'We are happy to report that all the meetings were characterized by friendly, fraternal, free, and frank discussions. It was agreed by both committees that during the entire year nothing was to be reported either in their or our church periodicals concerning the content of our deliberations. We felt that our discussions together should be an on-going process and that publication of what this or that one had uttered on this or that point would be premature and might jeopardize the intent of the discussions, namely to work for the unity of the church of Christ.'

Similarities.

'There are basic similarities between the Christian Reformed Church and the Protestant Reformed Churches. Obviously we met as brethren in the Lord. We enjoyed our fellowship together and the discussion to such a degree that we can honestly say that we looked forward eagerly to our scheduled meetings. We felt increasingly that the barrier which has kept us apart for more than thirty years was in the process of being budged to the mutual gratification and delight of both groups.'

Differences.

'In order to achieve genuine unity we felt it obligatory to face squarely the differences which do exist between us. Only in this way is there hope of removing the difficulties, overcoming the obstacles, and leveling the barriers which keep us apart.

'The Protestant Reformed brethren favor unity on the basis of the Scriptures and the Three Forms of Unity. They consider the Three Points of 1924 to be the chief barrier. It seemed to them that the Three Points jeopardize the Bibli-

cal and Confessional doctrines of the eternal decrees, the antithesis, and irresistible grace; that the Three Points had been elevated to the position of a Dogma or a fourth creed on Common Grace; that this Dogma reduced the Christian Reformed Church to a sect; and that the Three Points therefore prevented the possibility of fruitful investigation and further exploration.

'It was made clear to them from the Acts of the Synod of 1924 that the Three Points were not intended to be the projection of a full-fledged doctrine of Common Grace and that the Synod of 1924 rejected an overture which sought to have the Synod appoint a committee to draw up a Dogma on Common Grace.

'At the same time the Protestant Reformed brethren conceded that they might have misinterpreted the Three Points. In our interpretation of the Three Points we were able to remove misunderstandings and give assurance that they did not undermine the basic doctrines to which we both are committed. The possibility of a "vervangingsformule" was canvassed but it became increasingly clear that we cannot turn back the clock nor abandon the Three Points of 1924.

'On the other hand we did feel that, without in the least rejecting the well-meant offer of salvation, which we believe to be both Biblical and Confessional, the placement of this item in the context of the favorable attitude of God to all men generally could and did give rise to a measure of confusion.

'These are instances of some of the matters which engaged our attention. We believe that certain difficulties have been removed and that an atmosphere has been created in which further discussion will indeed prove fruitful.'

"Synod decided to continue the committee which is to confer further with the Protestant Reformed Churches in order that the gains achieved may be preserved and furthered in the fond hope that we all may be one in the Lord. It was also decided to request the committee to consider giving some publicity to the discussions."

The above report satisfied our curiosity in two respects. It informed us as to the constituency of the two committees, and it also informed us as to the reason why the conferences held by the committees were kept so secret.

We knew, of course, of synod's favorable response to the request for a conference by the De Wolf group, and that a committee was appointed to confer with the De Wolf group, but who they were was a secret to outsiders. Now we know who they were who met with a view to seeking unity of the two groups. We are inclined to say something about the constituency of these committees, but will refrain for the present.

It is indeed interesting to note why their conferences were held in secret, and to note also that the synod apparently did not wholeheartedly approve of this tactic. Though synod favored the continuance of the conferences, synod also re-

quested the committee "to consider giving some publicity to the discussions." One can hardly refrain from questioning the reason given for this secrecy. Of whom were the committees afraid? That some one on either committee might speak prematurely on a given point we could conceive as possible. But how would this jeopardize the intent of the discussions? Were those on the Christian Reformed committee aware perhaps that there might be some Christian Reformed members, ministers included, who are not interested at all in taking under their wing the De Wolf group? We have reason to believe this has a strong possibility. Or, was the De Wolf committee afraid perhaps that they have members who would rather return to us than subject themselves to the Three Points of Common Grace which they have condemned since 1924? Or, were the two committees as a whole afraid perhaps that if we got a hold of their minutes or knew of what this one said on this or that point, that we might make the whole thing look ridiculous before the eyes of the public and thus jeopardize the intent of the discussions to seek unity of the two groups? To say the least, the reasoning of the conference is not beyond questioning. The amusing factor in all this is the apparent fact that both sides of the conference were so intent on getting together that they would brook no interruptions.

What the basic similarities between the Christian Reformed and Protestant Reformed Churches of the De Wolf group were the report does not state. What is emphasized was the very friendly and brotherly atmosphere they enjoyed at their meetings. The impression is left that they were so friendly and brotherly that before any differences were discussed they felt that they were already one.

When we read the report of the differences discussed at the conferences, we concluded that they were satisfactorily removed. The Christian Reformed committee answered all the objections of the De Wolf committee. The Three Points do not jeopardize the Biblical and Confessional doctrines of the eternal decrees, the antithesis and irresistible grace. They have not been elevated to the position of a Dogma or fourth creed on Common Grace. They do not as a Dogma reduce the Christian Reformed Church to a sect. In fact the conference proved from the Acts of 1924 that the synod in 1924 did not intend at all to make a Dogma out of Common Grace. And the De Wolf committee willingly conceded that they might have misinterpreted the Three Points, while the Christian Reformed committee showed them that they did. Thus the conclusion must be that though the Three Points are no established Dogma, they must nevertheless never be abandoned. Perhaps they could be stated a little differently so that no one could again accuse the Christian Reformed Church of embracing Arminianism in the First Point. For it was admitted that "the placement of the well-meant offer of salvation in the context of the favorable attitude of God to all men generally could and did give rise to a measure of

confusion." But even this concession should satisfy the De Wolf group. So we conclude finally that there really is no need for further conferences. That the synod nevertheless decided that the conferences continue is perhaps due to the fact that final arrangements must be made to officially take the De Wolf group as a whole into the Christian Reformed Church.

M.S.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Missionary Notes

Should the undersigned ever find time and interest to write his "memoirs" of his experience as Home Missionary he would not omit, a chapter at the most, or a large footnote at the least, of "A Fourth of July in South Dakota."

It should be understood that South Dakota abounds in Rodeo events "around the Fourth." Mobridge, a city some 60 miles east from Isabel, makes it a three day event. It goes somewhat in the "spirit of the West." Many a young aspirant tries out his spurs! The purse is not high—but there is glory and fun! And possibly a young admiring maiden on the sunny bleachers! That alone might make his heart beat just a bit faster or cause it to "skip a beat"!

However, some thirty miles eastward from all this fanfare, there is a State Park of South Dakota. There were no crowds present. It was a blessed quiet in that beautiful park. Mirabile dictu! Here the two congregations met on July 4, 1958. Not all were able to attend. One family remained at home in the Forbes group to welcome visitor-relatives from Michigan; they arrived in late afternoon at the paternal home in Leola, South Dakota. Those who did attend drove about ninety miles to get there. It was at the Hidden Wood Lake Park, situated almost half way between Isabel and Forbes. There were about thirty-five present.

It was a good day.

At 10:30 C.S.T. (Isabel has M.S.T.) nearly all arrived at the Park. There was horse-shoe pitching, ball-game before dinner. Since it "almost rained" all that day tables were somehow put through the drop doors at the sides of the pavilion. At noon all gathered for a bountiful repast. "No one went hungry" was the under-statement of the day!

At 1:30 a program was rendered. There was community singing of various Psalter numbers. Mr. (elder) Enoch Hauch from Forbes led in opening prayer. The little children from both congregations sang Psalter No. 69. It was all without accompaniment of music. The three Hauch sisters sang in harmony two Psalter numbers. The undersigned gave a forty-minute speech on "Christian Freedom in Democracy." We had some more community singing from the Psalter. The undersigned explained the purpose of the "Reformed Free Publishing Association" and suggested that a

collection be taken for *The Standard Bearer*. After this a written Bible Quiz was conducted by Miss Jannet Hauck. This program was concluded by elder Jacob Reichert leading in closing prayer. The latter is one of the elders in Isabel.

A few games and contests planned by the Hauck sisters were held afterwards. These were enjoyed and participated in by young and old. All too soon the time came to wend our way homeward once more.

Since the undersigned was halfway to Forbes from Isabel he and Mrs. Lubbers went to Forbes and preached there the following Sunday morning to return that Sunday (July 6) to Isabel for the evening service.

Upon requesting the deacons of both churches as to the amount of the collection I was informed that the collection was just a bit over \$50.00.

Ultimately we can get along without the \$50.00 I am sure. However, we cannot get along without the love and devotion which account for this collection. It still is true that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Giving is living! Otherwise the waters of life become stagnant.

That memorable Fourth was ended for Mrs. Lubbers and the undersigned in a home in Leola, where once more an evening of singing was enjoyed both from the Psalter and in the German language.

With joyful weariness we fell asleep that night in sweet repose.

It was a good and blessed Fourth!

G.L.

THE VOICE OF OUR FATHERS

(Continued from page 498)

And on the other hand, he realizes that God's Spirit and grace equip him and spur him on in the battle of faith. Hence, praying the Christian fights, and fighting he prays, prays that by the power of grace he may have the victory over sin.

Finally, the effect of the Christian's present sin and imperfection is that through the consciousness thereof he is brought to long for the final perfection. Then, when he is finally delivered from this body of death, and reigns with the Lamb of God in heaven, he shall have attained the full victory over sin. And in the midst of his present sin, his present humiliation, his present prayer for forgiveness through the blood of Christ, his present praying battle against sin, he longs hopefully for that ultimate perfection. Then the battle will be finished; then he shall no more daily have to seek forgiveness; then that small beginning of the new life shall no more be small and weak, but shall have full sway in his whole being and life; then the victory shall be complete.

H.C.H.

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