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MEDITATION

IN THE NATURE OF AN EPITAPH

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing." — II Tim. 4:7, 8.

We all die a little every day.

I will admit that such is not evident at all times; especially not when we are young and vibrant, healthy and well, full of ambitions and plans for the future.

And yet, even the youth who have the fear of God in their hearts, and, therefore, have the beginning of wisdom, even they nod their heads when God says: "So teach us to number our days . . ." (You realize that although this is spoken first by Moses, it is, nevertheless, the speech of God.)

And was it not Paul who said: "I die daily"?

Something of this truth is seen by every man. Witness the sad poems and stories at the occasion of the evening, the fall, death, or, for that matter, the last day of the year!

I have read somewhere that falling asleep is somewhat like dying.

And I have heard an old professor say to his class: Ladies and gentlemen: it is terrible to live! For the "living" are dying by inches!

But all see the dying of the day, the dying of the summer, when cold frost and snow replace the sunny, balmy weather, the dying of the year when the bells peal and another year is rung in.

They all see it; and some have wept a little. Their tears and sobs were perpetuated in some of the more melancholy "treasures" of literature.

It is very plain when the shadows lengthen at night, when the crops are harvested and the earth waits for the thick blanket of snow and ice, when the man or the woman walks so slowly and painfully, only to stumble into the grave, when clocks strike twelve and the year is dead!

But yet, we die every day — a little.

* * * *

In the evening, the fall, the deathbed, Old Year's eve, we stand at some kind of brink, edge, border, verge, threshold.

And at such times we look both backward and forward. Paul did.

Just read the immediately preceding verse, and the last clause: "and the time of my departure is at hand."

And at that juncture he both looked back and ahead. And what he saw and knew and wrote is my text for this occasion: a comforting thought when we see the Old Year die, and the New Year ushered in.

There is another purpose I have with this text and little meditation, but of that I will tell you at the end.

* * * *

Paul looked back, and what he saw must have made him glad. He is not of those that weep at midnight of the dying year.

"I have fought the good fight!"

I do not know why our English fathers substituted the indefinite article for the definite. It is not: I have fought *a* good fight; but: I have fought *the* good fight!

That change is important: there is only one great fight: hence: the definite article.

Oh yes, there is all kind of conflict, but only one great war.

That war is so great that it includes heaven, earth, and hell. Yes, and all creatures: all the hosts of the heavens, the earth and hell.

It is the war which God began in Paradise with the words: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her Seed . . ."

I suppose you noted the capital letter in the latter word SEED? That is Christ!

That's what Paul is talking about when he stood at the threshold.

That fight is the good fight.

But wait a minute!

This fight is only good if you are on the side of the Almighty and His Christ.

If you are on the side of Lucifer (Isaiah 14:12) your fight is a bad, a very bad fight. For you are already conquered; you are already fallen in the battle, and will fall deeper; you have struck out!

But if you are on the side of the Almighty and His Christ you are more than conquerors. I admit that we are all of us still fighting, even as Paul in his day, but your fight is a continuing victory. Imagine: Lucifer and his devils, and his vassals of the earth can do nothing but help you on the way to glory! Who would not sing?

When the bells toll and the clock strikes twelve and the year 1957 dies, be sure and say triumphantly: I have fought the good fight!

For these sayings are true!

God inspired them in Paul, and did and does inspire them in all the soldiers of Jesus Christ.

* * * *

Paul saw more when looking back.

"I have finished my course."

You might explain this figure a little by saying: I have run the race. Paul was thinking of the Olympian games.

There is a certain course set for us. It begins at your birth and ends with your death.

It is you, soul and body, wife and children, possessions and place, name and calling in the midst of this important strife.

Paul was an important runner. He is one of the greatest heroes, one of the brightest stars in the firmament of the church of the ages. He ranks with Abraham and Moses, with Isaiah and Jeremiah.

But everyone of God's beloved children are in the race.

And they all finish their course.

And the end of that man is peace, glory, and eternal triumph. At the end is unspeakable bliss. Later more about this.

Yes, the running is beset with hindrances, obstacles, sweat and, sometimes, blood and tears. But they all finish. God sees to that.

* * * *

But there is still more in the Apostle's glance backward. Listen to him: "I have kept the faith."

Is Paul perhaps overly bold?

Is there a Pelagian tinge here? Perish the thought! God forbid! Paul is speaking through the Holy Ghost. These sayings are faithful and true!

He *did* keep the faith, even as all God's people do. Not one of them will ever forsake the faith.

Jesus prayed for Peter that his faith might not fail, and

it did not. Even after his terrible denial of Jesus, his faith reasserted itself upon the prayer of Jesus, and he left the hall of murderers: weeping bitterly. He had seen the loving eye of Jesus!

What is the faith?

It is the very powerful eternal life which inhabits all God's children.

It is the power to see the New World, and that World's God and Christ. It is the heavenly vision. It sees all that God has revealed in His precious Word. And that faith cleaves to all of that Word. It deems that Word better than life itself. Because of that faith they did not count their lives unto death.

What means it to keep the faith?

It means that you embrace it and count it dearer than life itself. You keep that which you treasure.

Faith is in reality the love of God which cleaves to His promises. No one can take it away from you. If you believe, you must go to heaven. You can never be lost. You will surely step across the threshold of the DOOR and enter heaven.

Let me add here that both the fighting of the good fight, the running and finishing of the race, and the keeping of the faith is God's wondrous work of salvation within us.

Salvation is of the Lord!

* * * *

Shall we follow the Apostle's glance forward?

You will see a beautiful vista of glory.

Here is what he saw: "Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day."

Here again, it is not *a* crown, but *the* crown of righteousness, for there is but one crown of righteousness.

At this juncture I will further say something which I had in mind above when I promised to return to it. There I was speaking of the Olympian games which Paul used as the simile of the course to be run by every Christian.

Here he has in mind the same course.

Every winner of this course received a garland of flowers which was pressed upon his brow.

Well, beloved reader, every Christian receives the laurel crown of righteousness in that day.

But here I must say something of Jesus, my Lord.

In reality, essentially, He was the only One who ran this course, fought the good fight, and kept the faith.

Do you remember how I spoke of the "hindrances, obstacles, sweat, blood and tears" attendant to this course?

Well, Jesus did centrally run this course, and I do not think it necessary that I remind you of His sweat and toil, the hindrances and obstacles which He found in His way. The time would fail me. I would have to speak of hell and

damnation, of sin and guilt, but not His Own, of the devil and devils, of wicked men and faithless servants, of hunger and thirst, of an unspeakable forsakenness which made Him cry. Will you look at a terrible verse in the Bible? Read Heb. 5:7, and tremble.

And what is left of this suffering, that is, insofar as wicked men and devils are concerned, it is given you of grace to suffer for Him and for God in this course.

And the end was glory for Him. He received the crown of righteousness. His glory will glitter throughout all eternity.

And when He returns He tells us that with Him is *His* reward to give unto everyone according as his work shall be: a reward of grace even as the work was.

And not only to Paul, "but to all them also that love His appearing."

What a wondrous New Year to look forward to!

What a light into death and the grave!

* * * *

And here is the added incentive to write on this text, which I would divulge at the end according to my promise.

I wrote those lines in memory of a beloved brother who began to die during my sermon yesterday, and finished his death a few hours later in the hospital.

While we still weep, he is singing. He will celebrate Christmas in heaven.

G.V.

NOTICE!

Office-bearers Conference will be held January 7, 1958, at our Creston Protestant Reformed Church at 8 o'clock.

The speaker for the evening will be our Rev. G. Vos. The topic, "What place should formality hold in our churches."

Henry Veldman, Sec.

SUBSCRIBERS NOTICE

Beginning January 1958 a charge of \$5.00 per year will be made to meet the increased cost of publishing *The Standard Bearer*.

IN MEMORIAM

The Choral Society of the Protestant Reformed Churches of Hull and Doon, Iowa, expresses its sincere sympathy to our member, Mrs. Peter Vander Top, in the loss of her father,

MR. FRED BUMA.

May the God of all grace give the comforting knowledge that all His doings are for the good of His own.

Mr. Hib Kuiper, President
Mrs. C. Klein, Secretary

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EDITORIALS

Forgotten That He Was Purged

The Men's Society of Oak Lawn sent me the following question:

"The Oak Lawn Men's Society would appreciate it very much if you would please explain II Peter 1:9 in *The Standard Bearer*."

In the text above referred to we read:

"But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins."

The Men's Society of Oak Lawn does not indicate exactly what difficulty they had in interpreting this text. Hence, I better interpret the entire verse. I can surmise, however, that it was especially the last part of the text that was the cause of their difficulty as I also indicated in the heading of this article. Nevertheless, I will give an explanation of the entire verse.

The apostle introduces this verse by the statement "but he that lacketh these things," that is, he that does not have them, that is completely without them. The things to which the apostle refers are found in the context, particularly those mentioned in vs. 3-8. They are the exceeding great and precious promises that are mentioned in vs. 4. These promises are that God hath given us all things that pertain to life and godliness, the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ our Lord, our calling unto glory and virtue. These promises contain the unspeakable glory and blessing that we become partakers of the divine nature and, in principle, have already become partakers of that nature, even as we have escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But the apostle admonishes the believers that they must now live in the midst of the present world from the principle of all the things God has given us, the things that pertain to life and godliness, the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus, the divine nature of which we have, in principle, already become partakers. They must reveal in their entire walk and life that they have, indeed, escaped from the corruption of the world through lust. Hence, they must diligently strive to add to their faith virtue, that is, to reveal their faith by a walk in virtue; and add to their virtue an increase in the true spiritual knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Again the apostle continues that they must add to knowledge temperance, which refers to the control of all sinful lusts and desires that may arise and do arise from the "old man" of the believer; and to temperance patience which is the strength to resist and remain faithful in all temptations; and to patience godliness which here refers to a walk and life in the fear of God. Again, in vs. 7, the apostle once more continues: and to godliness brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness charity or love; the former refers to the actual relation of believers to one another; the latter, perhaps, to the manifesta-

tion of the love of God in all the life and walk of the Christian in the world and every sphere of life.

To the enumeration of all these virtues the apostle adds in vs. 8: "For if these things be in you, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." And vs. 9 stands in direct contrast with vs. 8. If these things, which the apostle has enumerated, are not in any man, even though he may call himself a member of the church, he is absolutely fruitless and barren, is blind and cannot see afar off and has forgotten that he was purged from his old or former sins.

Now, let us ask the question: what sort of a man is he in whom these things are not found? And we must also ask the second question: were these things ever found in him?

To the first question we answer: a man in whom these things are not found at all is a carnal, a mere natural man. He is not regenerated, for he has not the life of God in him and he is not a partaker of the divine nature, nor has he escaped from the corruption that is in the world through lust. He cannot, will not and does not heed the admonition of the apostle to add to his faith virtue and all the other virtues, for the simple reason that he has no faith. He is nothing but a mere natural man. And to the second question we reply with a most emphatic no. For that would mean that there would be a falling away of the saints and that is impossible according to John 10:27-30: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one." And this is the current teaching of all the Word of God.

But, if this is true, how must we then explain the last part of this text: "and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins"? Our answer is as follows:

1. Negatively, this cannot mean, as we have shown above, that he was ever by faith in Christ and he ever was one of His. For Christ holds those whom the Father has given Him in His hand, and the Father holds them in His mighty hand, and they can never perish. Once a believer is always a believer. This also implies that he was never really purged from sin. They that are in Christ are justified and sanctified. They have the forgiveness of sins and are delivered from the corruption of this sin. But his man never belonged to Christ and, therefore, was never purged from sin.

2. Positively, this can only mean that, for a time, it was his own confession and, perhaps, also his own imagination, that he was purged from his sins. It is very probable that the person to whom the apostle refers was baptized as an adult and, in that baptism he himself confessed that he was purged from sin. But soon after his baptism he revealed that he was still deliberately walking in sin and that, therefore, his confession which he made at the moment of his baptism and his baptism itself, which signifies the washing away of sins, was

not true. His sins, therefore, never were really forgiven and he was never really purged from his sins although he confessed this. There is no falling away of saints. H.H.

Our Second Church

The Lord caused our Second Church to lose its case in the supreme court as He did also in the circuit court.

He so operated in the hearts and in the minds of the judges of the supreme court that their final decision was against our Second Church and in favor of those that denied the Protestant Reformed truth, separated themselves from our churches, and are willing, presently, to sign the "Three Points" of 1924 and become amalgamated with the Christian Reformed Church.

They did so, not on the basis of the Protestant Reformed truth, nor even on the basis of the Church Order, which is all in favor of the Second Church, but only on the ground of a mere technicality. That technicality is that we did not meet, as continued synod, in the building of the First Church of Grand Rapids but in the building of the Fourth Church. On this basis the supreme court decided that not we but those that left us were the legal synod. And because our Second Church did not recognize the synod of the opposition the supreme court gave the right of property to the latter and turned its decision against the former.

They did so, in spite of the fact that the calling church was deprived of its church property so that they could not call the synod in the First Church; in spite of the fact that it had placed an announcement in *The Standard Bearer* to **the effect that the place of meeting had to be changed**; and in spite of the fact that there is nothing in the Church Order that determines the place of meeting and that denies the calling church the right to change the place of meeting if it should prove to be necessary.

But let this be.

Our Second Church is not dismayed. They know that, although the supreme court rules against them, the Lord is for them. For, as one of its members expressed it, they have the truth and, principally that is all that matters.

We will probably discuss the decision of the supreme court a little more in detail in the future. In the present editorial we have no space for this.

Nevertheless, to one item we wish to call attention even in the present editorial.

Repeatedly the supreme court designates the true and only consistory of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Mich., as "the so-called reorganized consistory."

This simply is not true. And even though the court does not say directly that the consistory of the First Church is the re-organized consistory, but only that it is so-called, it is contrary to fact.

Fact is that, in 1953, and ever since, there was only one consistory, and this consistory was not re-organized but is the original consistory of the First Church. This consistory, with the advice of Classis East, legally deposed some of its elders and suspended DeWolf. And when DeWolf ignored this legal suspension and deposition and, with his elder, claimed the right to be seated in the next meeting of Classis East, he was denied this right and the minister and elder of the only proper and legal consistory of the First Church were recognized.

The court is, therefore, in error when it repeatedly speaks of the only proper and legal consistory as "the so-called reorganized consistory." The consistory of the First Church was never reorganized.

Moreover, the supreme court knew this and recognized our consistory as the only legal consistory of the First Church when in 1956 it supported the decision of Judge Taylor.

We quote from that decree:

"At a meeting held June 23, 1953, these matters, including the action to depose Reverend DeWolf and certain others, were considered, followed by a meeting June 25th, presided over by Reverend Hoeksema. Reverend DeWolf and several elders who supported him were suspended or deposed from office. Two of the deposed elders who supported Reverend DeWolf notified the Consistory of the refusal to recognize of what they claimed to be illegal suspensions and depositions. The Consistory was notified by the suspended members that they claimed to be the legal Consistory of the church entitled to possession and control of the church and other properties."

Then, after the entire case had been reviewed, the court proceeds by referring to the decision of Judge Taylor in the case as follows:

"The trial judge hearing the case, and relying upon those decisions, concluded that the plaintiff First Protestant Reformed Church, under its articles and constitution, and the Church Order, was dedicated to the discipline, rules and usages of the Protestant Christian Reformed Churches of the United States and authorized and declared from time to time by the Classis of said churches. The court concluded that the Church Order became the constitution of the church, to which every member subscribed, and that the court was bound to recognize it as controlling the issues."

This opinion was supported by the supreme court, for we read:

"We are in accord. We decline to hold with the defendants, that the Hoeksema Consistory had departed from the doctrine and practices of the Protestant Reformed Churches."

We have more to say about this matter. All I wish to bring out at present is that, according to the decree of the supreme court in 1956 the consistory of the First Church was never reorganized, not even "so-called reorganized," but always was and still is the only legal consistory.

H.H.

THE DAY OF SHADOWS

The Prophecy of Zechariah

Israel's Conflict and Victory

Chapter 12:1-9

Jerusalem is going to be a besieged city. All the nations will be gathered against her. But it will all be in vain. For they will be overthrown of the Lord. This is the prediction of verses 1-3. The working of the Lord in behalf of the holy city, announced in figurative terms in verses 2, 3, is more minutely described in verse 4. The Lord will take action against the horse and the rider, the cavalry. It here represents the entire military force of the enemy. The Lord will smite every horse with terror and with blindness, every horse of all the peoples without one exception. And every rider He will smite with madness.

The Old Testament Scriptures contain several reports of such workings of the Lord in behalf of His people. When the people of Israel were passing through the Red Sea with the Egyptians in hot pursuit, the Lord looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud and troubled the host of the Egyptians, so that they fled from before the face of Israel. The spies hear of Rahab that the terror of the Lord was fallen upon all the inhabitants of the land and that they fainted because of Israel. Their hearts melted and no courage remained anymore in any man because of God (Jos. 2:2ff). When Gideon's three hundred blew the trumpets, the Lord set every man's sword against his fellow throughout all the hosts of the Midianites (Judg. 7:22). In reply to Elisha's prayer the Lord smote the Syrians with blindness, so that they could not discern that they were being led of the prophet to Samaria. After that He made the Syrians hear a noise of a great host, so that they fled for their lives (II Ki. 7:8).

So will the Lord smite with blindness and madness and terror the vast military force of all the nations when it will be laying siege to Jerusalem. The entire host will be thrown into hopeless confusion, so that it will rush headlong to destruction. Unable to distinguish between friend and foe, the soldiers will turn their sword each against his fellow. Meanwhile the Lord will open His eyes upon the house of Judah in love, so that no harm will befall it.

Also this prophecy has reference first of all to the earthly Jerusalem. All the nations in their combined military force will gather against the holy city as activated by the purpose to destroy it. But as smitten of the Lord they will be seized by terror, blindness and madness. In this state of mind they will lay off from Jerusalem and go to making war the one against the other and thereby bring themselves to nought as kingdoms. So will the Lord set Jerusalem a cup of trembling and a burdensome stone to all the nations. It means that the

nations are smitten of God because of the injuries they do to Jerusalem His dwelling place.

This prophecy was fulfilled concerning the earthly Jerusalem when it was still the city of the living God representing the church. It was fulfilled in the period that intervened between the utterance of this prophecy and the beginning of the new dispensation. As had always been the case so also during this time, the nations of the earth as represented by the world powers of that day — the Persian, the Macedonian, the Graeco-Roman world powers — were gathered against Jerusalem always in spirit and as to attitude and posture of heart, if not always literally. As dwelling in the midst of the nations, all of which were hostile, Jerusalem was a besieged city. Apparently it was at the mercy of the nations and in danger of being destroyed. Finally it was destroyed and vanished away forever as the city of God representative of the church on earth. That this calamity did not strike sooner was because as smitten with blindness and madness of the Lord the nations were fighting each other. For it was an age of empire building and thus of conflict between the nations.

Though the church is no longer represented by the earthly Jerusalem and is now spread over the whole earth and sown among all the nations, it is still just as true of her as it ever could have been that she is a city besieged, seeing that she dwells in the midst of a hostile world that would like nothing better than to remove her out of the way. And the church is a little flock and the world is mighty. From a human standpoint she is doomed to extinction. But she has the promises. The Lord will make her a cup of reeling, a burdensome stone. All who lift her as wanting to remove her out of the way will come away with sprains and dislocations and ruptures. As smitten of the Lord with terror and blindness and madness, the nations of the world will make war upon each other. And the world will be too much occupied with these conflicts to give much attention to the church. These wars will only add immensely to the sufferings of this present time with which mankind is afflicted and in which God's people must also share. But in the midst of all these troubles the church dwells safely in a spiritual aspect. For as He always had done through all the ages of the past the Lord will open His eyes in love upon His church. In His power she shall be kept.

5. This is here the word of promise to Jerusalem, the church. It means that the church is strong, invincible and will overcome the world and not be overcome by it. With this word of promise dwelling in them, blessed unto their hearts, the chiefs of Judah, the heads of the tribe and with them their spiritual kin in the tribe, shall say in their heart, The inhabitants of Jerusalem are my strength in Jehovah of Hosts, their God.

But how can the inhabitants of Jerusalem, being but mere men, be the strength of the chiefs? They may express themselves as they do because they see the glories of God reflected in Jerusalem's inhabitants, and it is this God and

none other who is their strength. Not the glass but the Christ seen through the glass is their strength—the God revealed in His face. But it is because in this case the glass and what is seen in it cannot be separated the one from the other that the chiefs say that the inhabitants of Jerusalem will be their strength yet not the inhabitants but their God. Not the church is strength. Not the teaching ministry is strength, but the Gospel alone is strength, the Christ of the Gospel, the God revealed in His face. Only as loving, holding and faithfully proclaiming the Gospel and thus as identifying itself with the Gospel, is the church strength, are the inhabitants of Jerusalem strength. Then only can the chiefs of Judah rightfully say, The inhabitants of Jerusalem are my strength.

A distinction is made in the text between the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the chiefs, the members of the tribe of Judah. In the old dispensation Jerusalem was the visible city of God. And it was this as the center of the typical-symbolical revelation of the kingdom of God on earth. Here dwelt God in the holiest place of the temple behind the veil. Here burned His altars. Here covering for sin was made. Here God's people were blessed of Him through the priest as His organ. Jerusalem is now above essentially. The holy city is now in heaven having been set there with Christ its King at the time of His ascension into heaven and His sitting down at the right hand of the throne. But Jerusalem comes to manifestation in the church on earth, in the preaching, confession and practice of the Gospel by the church institute. The instituted church is for the believers on earth the visible Jerusalem. And the instituted church is the church with its officebearers. It may be said to represent the Jerusalem which is now above.

As to Judah, all the members of the tribe must be thought of as included in the inhabitants of Jerusalem. For Jerusalem's God was also their God. His mercy was also upon them and Him they served. The blood of the continual burnt-offering covered also their sins. Jerusalem was their place of worship. Only they did not dwell in Jerusalem but in the country regions where they would be the first to encounter the enemies.

With a view to the distinction that is made in the text between Jerusalem and Judah, it is correct to say that Jerusalem is the church in its center as it may be seen when assembled with its officebearers about God's word and testimony for the public worship of His name, and that Judah is the people of God living their lives in the family, state and society and thereby thrown in every way in contact with the world that lies in darkness.

Let us now once more look closely at what the chiefs of Judah will do. They will say in their heart. This is significant. For from out of the heart are the issues of life in a spiritual-ethical aspect. Thoughts are from out of the heart, volitions, feelings, actions. It is in the heart that a man chooses Christ or Belial, life or death, heaven or hell, de-

pending upon whether the heart he possesses is one of flesh or one of stone. The chiefs of Judah say in their heart. They choose. What they choose is known from what they will say in their heart, namely, The inhabitants of Jerusalem are my strength. What they say is peculiar. It would be understandable were they to say, The Lord is our strength, or, The enemy approaches. We will flee to Jerusalem and seek safety behind its walls. But they will say in their heart, The inhabitants of Jerusalem are my strength. The implications of the saying as one that will rise from out of their heart is clear. Implied in the first place is that the inhabitants of Jerusalem are strong and second that the chiefs are strong only as arrayed on the side of Jerusalem's inhabitants. Also this is implied, namely that they will make Jerusalem's cause their own and as standing shoulder to shoulder with Jerusalem's inhabitants fight the good fight of faith, proclaim, confess and practice the Gospel of Christ and vindicate it against all heresy.

These are the implications of what the chiefs of Judah and their divisions say and will say in their heart. Others to save their soul and for the sake of their position and name may go over to the side of the enemy, but not so these chiefs. On the contrary they say to Jerusalem's inhabitants, Your people shall be our people and your God our God. What it all means is that the chiefs of Judah choose Jerusalem and its inhabitants and reject the world.

Apparently an absurd choice. For judging from the things that are seen, Jerusalem is weak. This was particularly true of Jerusalem at the time of the utterance of this prophecy. It was still a long ways from having recovered from the great injury that had been done the city by the Chaldeans, the world power by which the tribe of Judah had been transplanted to 'Babylon. Its population was small. Its palaces were still in ruins. It had no army. Certainly there were no chariots and horses found there. It was under the dominion of Persia and all the nations round about were hostile. It was a far cry from this Jerusalem and the Jerusalem of David's and Solomon's day. And according to the voice of prophecy all the nations of the earth would one day be gathered against it. And it is no different with the church today. She is a little flock surrounded by wolves. This is the visible Jerusalem of today. Its inhabitants see their calling, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. The city today is completely without physical defences. Owing to the fact that its warfare is spiritual, its only weapon of defence is the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.

Yet the choice of Judah's chiefs is anything but foolish. It is a wise choice, a choice of true wisdom. For it is a choice that is the expression of a living faith in Jehovah of Hosts, Israel's God. As has already been explained, these chiefs put all their confidence alone in Israel's God. For they do not say in their hearts, The inhabitants of Jerusalem are my strength, and put the period here. They add the words

that make what they say in their hearts right—the words, In Jehovah of Hosts their God. It is in Him that they believe. It is His promises that they hold and by which they are living—the promises contained in this section and that can be summed up in that one word of Christ, “Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Positively expressed, hell shall be overcome by it. What a remarkable thing faith is—the redeeming faith of God’s people, of these chiefs of Judah. It sees Him the invisible God and endures. It cleaves to promises that, judging from things seen are impossible of fulfilment, promises that apparently are always being slain by these seen things. How can the church survive with all the nations of the earth gathered against her? How can Christ’s little flock overcome an opposition so vast? It does survive. It has overcome. For the inhabitants of Jerusalem are strong. For their faith does not originate with them. It is given them of God. They are not their own, but they belong to Christ Jesus who by His blood blotted out all their sins and delivered them from the power of the devil. They are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus. All their fruit is of Him. He has engraved them in the palms of His hand. They were ever before Him. Such is here the teaching of our prophet. For let us take notice, “The chiefs of Judah shall say in their heart . . .” So reads the text here. Observe the tense of the verb. It is future, “*Shall say* in their heart . . .” The Lord is here telling His people what they shall say in their heart. That He knows can have but one reason. It is He that will put what they will say in their mind and write it in their heart. What can this mean but that all their salvation is of Him. How then can they perish through the loss of the life that was once given them? They cannot. How can He not do all that He said—make Jerusalem a cup of reeling and a burdensome stone for all the people, smite the forces of the enemy with madness? He can certainly. In a word, He can, and will and shall save His people to the uttermost. For He is Jehovah, the I am, the eternal and unchangeable God, faithful to His promises. The Lord of hosts is He, the God of all the earth. There is none else beside him.

6. Let all the nations of the earth gather against His people. They will do so only to their own destruction. For in that day He will make the chiefs of Judah as a pan of fire among sticks of wood, and as a torch of fire in a sheaf. And they shall devour on the right hand and on the left, all the people around. And Jerusalem shall yet sit in her own place in Jerusalem. Through this imagery the Lord promises deliverance and overwhelming victory to be wrought of Him not apart from but through His people. Judah will utterly destroy the hostile nations as fire devours wood or dry leaves. The promise was centrally fulfilled by Christ. By His suffering and death on the cross he vanquished every foe. By His atonement Christ merited the destruction of the wicked. Prophecy effects it. For being the Word of God.

it always accomplishes what it says. By the mercy of God the chiefs of Judah—God’s believing people—make His prophecy their own. It is also true of them therefore that in the imagery of the text they “devour all the people round about,” yet not they but the Word of prophecy that He makes to dwell richly in them and that by His grace He empowers them to proclaim. As what Christ wills and also works—the salvation of Zion through the overthrow of the world powers—His people also will and proclaim, it may be truly said of them that they reign with Christ. Let us take notice how that here again the text brings out that all credit is due to God alone. “In that day I will make the chiefs of Judah a pan. . . .” So the text reads. And let us observe, too, that the only abiding entity is Jerusalem, the holy city, the kingdom of Christ. For when, according to the text, the hostile nations shall have been devoured, the world and all that is of the world shall have passed permanently away, Jerusalem shall yet sit in her own place in Jerusalem. In Christ the church is immovable and imperishable. With a view to the distinction that is here drawn between *Jerusalem* and *Jerusalem*, it may be said that the first reference is to the inhabitants of the holy city and the second to the city as the place of abode of God’s people. Ultimately the place of abode will be the new earth and the inhabitants the church in glory.

G.M.O.

IN MEMORIAM

The Lord took unto Himself, last Sunday, December 22, our beloved Husband, Father, and Grandfather,

JOHN VANOVERLOOP, aged 63 years.

The knowledge that his life was Christ and his death gain assuages our deep grief at his passing: II Timothy 4:7, 8.

The sorrowing relatives:

Mrs. John VanOverloop—Molenkamp
Mr. and Mrs. Harold John, VanOverloop
Mr. and Mrs. Gordon VanOverloop
Mr. Donald Bruce VanOverloop
and six grandchildren.

IN MEMORIAM

The Consistory of the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church wishes hereby to express their sympathy with one of our members in the loss of his Father,

JOHN VANOVERLOOP.

We desire greatly for our brother and his relatives to read through their tears the wonderful testimony of Paul in I Cor. 15:55-57. It will comfort their hearts, and will make them wait patiently for the glorious resurrection.

For the Consistory:

Rev. Gerrit Vos, President

Peter J. Lubbers, Secretary

FROM HOLY WRIT

Exposition of I Corinthians 7

II.

(I Corinthians 7:1-7)

The subject which Paul deals with in this seventh Chapter of I Corinthians is as delicate as it is practical. We shall needs have to bear in mind the dictum of Paul in Titus 1:15, 16, where we read, "Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure: but even their mind and conscience is defiled. They profess that they know God: but in works they deny him, being abominable, and unto every good work reprobate!"

Bearing this in mind we shall with propriety and good taste follow in the foot-steps of Paul in this Chapter, and explain the meaning of the Spirit. May our exposition ever be read in this light. When this is impossible remember that in our flesh there dwells no good thing, not even in understanding the very real directives for a life of purity in Christ Jesus, so that we may serve God with a good and quiet conscience.

Let us remember that we live in an adulterous and fornicatious world. We are to keep our conscience pure and undefiled. The straight and narrow way for young and old, married and unmarried, is held before our believing eyes in this Chapter. Few there are that find this straight gate and narrow way that leads to life as is here mapped out by Paul, who ends this Chapter by asserting, "And I think also that I have the Spirit of God."

I believe that both the writer of these lines and the readers have the Spirit of God so that we can put spiritual things with spiritual.

With the foregoing considerations in mind let us turn to the exact wording of this passage, which reads, "*Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: it is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise the wife also unto the husband. The wife hath not power over her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath no power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourself to fastings and prayer: and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency. But I speak this by permission and not of commandment.*"

When Paul asserts that it "is good for a man not to touch a woman" he approaches the entire question not only

from the *masculine* viewpoint, but also from the viewpoint of those who look at marriage from the viewpoint of marriage being such a relationship that it involves "touching" a woman. The latter cannot do this in good conscience. Paul says: He that does not touch a woman, is not dishonorable in not doing so.

The term "touch" employed in the Greek is "Aptoo." It is also employed to indicate sexual relationships, whether in the marital state or outside of it. Thus we read in Genesis 20:6 ". . . therefore I suffered thee not to touch her." And, again, we read in Proverbs 6:29, "So he that goeth in to his neighbor's wife: whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent." As was said Paul is here speaking of this one aspect of marriage here overagainst the tendency of a false celibacy. Hence, he is speaking of the touching of a woman in the marital relationship. Any other interpretation would not fit this construction. Paul would not need to state that anyone who does not touch one, who is not his wife, doeth well. That was understood by heathen moralists as well as by christians.

Over against the notion that it is universally necessary for every christian to marry, Paul holds that there can be exceptions to this rule. And they, who are the exceptions, need not feel that they are living a dishonorable life from a moral view-point in so doing. We should notice that Paul employs the term "kalos" and not "agathos" in the text. The former means: sound, hale, whole. He is well adapted to his particular goal in life. Had he written that such a man is "agathos" it would mean that he is ethically good in so doing and that to do otherwise would be evil. However, as we wrote in our former article, Paul is not contrasting what is *good* and *evil*, but rather what is honorable for certain christians under given circumstances, when they *have received* the gift of continence from the Lord!

However, this matter of being "good for a man not to touch a woman" has its severe limitations. It is by no means to be elevated to a universal rule in the church for a certain class of people, nor is it to be viewed as being necessarily a higher form of godliness and ethics. The latter is done by the Romish church when it forbids marriage to the priests. How this imposition was placed upon the priesthood can be clear to anyone who reads the history of the Hildibrandian popes during the eleventh and twelfth centuries of our christian era. Howbeit, such is not the teaching of Paul, nor is it a proper conclusion from his instruction.

The reason why some *ought* to seek marriage, both men and women?

Paul states that such is proper and necessary because of "the fornications." The plural here is evidently due to Paul's viewing the multitudinous phenomena of fornicators in the world. Such the christians are not to be. The term "fornication" must not be confused with adultery. Adultery is the corruption of the marriage relationship by introducing a third party or more. Fornication is unlawful sexual relationship generally. A fornicator is an unchaste person in

general, apart from the marriage relationship. Howbeit, fornication may also be adultery when it disrupts the marriage relationship between two people, man and wife, in the marital tie.

We must not understand Paul as simply *permitting* marriage because of the fornications. For those who have not the power and the gift from God of continency, marriage is a *duty*. It is a duty rooted in the creation ordinance, and, further, follows from the calling of walking in a good and quiet conscience in the midst of the brethren. That marriage is a "calling" and not simply a permissive necessary evil has always been held by the Reformed churches. In the Marriage Form we read:

"But that you may live godly in this state, you must know the reasons, wherefore God has instituted the same.

"The *first* reason is, that each faithfully assist the other, in all things that belong to this life, and a better.

"*Secondly*. That they bring up the children, which the Lord shall give them, in the true knowledge and fear of God, to his glory and their salvation.

"*Thirdly*. That each of them, avoiding all uncleanness and evil lusts, may live with a good and quiet conscience."

Certainly the last reason could not have been the reason in paradise, when God made Adam and Eve, prior to the fall. Yet, in the divine foreknowledge, such is certainly the purpose too of marriage since marriage is sanctified by Christ and set in the service of His people in the midst of this world. And if marriage serves such a purpose in the world, it is the christian's calling to enter into the marriage state for the very reason of avoiding living in fornication.

Marriage "helps" the sanctified christian to live "piously" and "godly" in the midst of this world!

If such is the very design of marriage in view of our weakness of the flesh, this purpose should not be defeated by those who would live a pious and godly life in the marriage state. This is done when the husband or the wife fails to understand that his or her marriage partner has power over his or her body. They are one flesh. Thus God has made them. They must not practice celibacy within the marriage state, except it be by mutual consent for a season. They must do this not because it is sinful to live together, but because they will need times of "fasting and prayer" to fight against sin and the devil and his whole dominion! In view of this battle to "always give strong resistance" they will need times of prayer for the spirit. Yet, a prolonged state of this "fasting and prayer" will needs lead to being tempted of Satan. Such is the history of the monastery, monks and priests. And such will be the case with the man and wife who will live a prolonged life of celibacy. And, now, lest Satan tempt them to fornication, both in thoughts and deeds, Paul says they should not defraud one another.

Such is the life and battle of the christian in this world.

And in view of this reality a minister should instruct those who contemplate marriage concerning this aspect of the marriage state. Many a tender conscience has not understood this aspect of marriage, and due to this failure, fell head-long into the very fornication he so passionately desired to flee. That is maladjustment. We do not need Dorothy Dix with her natural understanding, but we need Paul with his spiritual understanding to teach our youth — and ourselves! Let us not try to be wiser than God. Here is a field of which many a psychiatrist speaks. Pray, what can a psychiatrist say to the tender and anxious conscience that an understanding and wiser minister or elder cannot teach the flock? And whom hath God appointed to do this? Must we have psychiatrists call the ministers together to teach them? I will rather sit at the feet of Paul! Let mothers learn to teach their daughters to love their own husbands and their children. There will be fewer frustrations. Let ministers understand their calling, and not be squeamish about teaching young and old the basic position of the christian, in and outside of the marriage state, at the proper time and place! Let parents use christian candor in instructing their children; the mothers in instructing their daughters, and let fathers teach their sons. Let them do so in the consciousness that they too have the Holy Spirit!

Paul adds that he tells the married this matter of proper conduct not by "commandment" but by "permission."

What Paul refers to is, evidently, that this does not need to be followed in all its exactitude. Each will need to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling. Yet, it is good advice to those who are weak. It is a certain indulgence. They can thereby at least see some of the principles of working out one's salvation within the marriage state, so that each may know how to possess his vessel in purity.

It is, at least, the word of one with great spiritual understanding and utmost spiritual sensitivity.

Paul had the power and gift of continence. Would that all had it. But each will needs have to fight the battle in prayer, through the power of the Holy Spirit, whether in or outside of the marriage state!

G.L.

Announcement

Classis East of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet the second Wednesday in January, January 8th, at 9:00 A. M. in the Creston Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Consistories residing in this Classis will please take note.

M. Schipper, Stated Clerk

IN HIS FEAR

Spiritually Sensitive

(4)

In the realm of the worldly entertainment of the day and age in which we live the movie has a strong competitor.

The outdoor drive-in theatre threatened strongly to bring financial ruin to many movie houses. But what served even more to draw away from the movie house—and for that matter also from the outdoor drive-in theatre—was the television set.

This fact may be seen and be proven in many ways. An interesting one which we found in an article on television in the December 7, 1957 *Saturday Evening Post* on page 150 is the following, "A recent trend, however, suggests that American audiences are looking for programs of better quality. Sets-in-use figures for the mid-evening hours have not changed during the past year, but there has been a sharp increase in viewing at midnight when most channels carry full-length movies. This increase is approximately 30 percent in the Northeast, 15 percent in the Midwest, and 50 percent on the Pacific Coast. It is significant that the major movie companies began releasing pre-1947 films to TV about a year ago."

Why, we ask, are not films of more recent date released for the television audience? It is not last year's films. It is not the movie of five years ago which is no longer shown on the movie screen in the theatre. It simply is not to be denied that the movie must today compete with the television studio for the attention of the entertainment-mad world in which we live.

But what this paragraph also brings to mind and underlines is what we wrote before that there are those today whose spiritual sensitivity is so altered that what they might not see and enjoy for entertainment before 1947 now becomes an enjoyable and wholly permissible thing in 1957. The pre-1947 films which are now released for the television audience were before 1947 condemned by those who now seek them.

Originally we had not intended to write more than a few lines concerning spiritual sensitivity and television. This was intended to be but an observation made in passing. But in a department such as this one, correspondence, both for and against the observations made therein, has a way of making it advisable and worthwhile to lengthen and broaden out on certain details. We were, therefore, also strengthened in our convictions concerning the danger and evil of this thing concerning which we are writing, upon receiving a letter from a saintly couple who have spent many, many years in this wicked world, whose spiritual senses have not

become dull through failure to exercise them and whose love abounds into all knowledge and judgment, so that they do approve things excellent and desire sincerely to live in His fear. It is for them a source of grief that those of the Reformed faith, members in good standing in the church are glued to their television sets till one o'clock in the morning. When one reads from the testimony of the world itself that these pre-1947 movies are released for use at this time of the evening, one cannot refrain from asking whether these people are not now enjoying what ten years ago they would have condemned as being of the devil?

But read on in that *Saturday Evening Post* article. In the very next paragraph after the one which we quoted above you read this, "It is unfair, of course, to compare the quality of a weekly TV show hastily put together on a restricted budget with a movie that cost several million dollars and was in preparation for three or six months. Yet the customers are not concerned with technical limitations. They are only interested in the finished product, and old movies evidently are gaining more favor than new TV shows. It is a wry commentary on the times that the movies, once everybody's whipping boy, are the white hope for raising the level of TV, but as Jimmy Durante is fond of saying, these are the conditions that prevail."

We were not far off, were we, when last time we wrote that there is so *much* to be seen on television today besides these movies themselves that must be avoided and which we must keep from our children. Note that in the above paragraph the world speaks and indicates its dissatisfaction with the level of present day television programs. In fact the whole article, which by the way was written by Stanley Frank and is entitled, "*Television's Desperate Numbers Game*," centers around the question expressed in the subtitle, "Do Trendex, Nielsen, et al, really prove what kind of entertainment you want?" The article lists the various leading programs to be seen on television and what ratings they are given by various research experts such as Trendex, Nielsen, A.R.B. and Pulse. The continual shifting of programs in the choice hours—listed here in this article as being from 7:30 P. M. and 10:30 P. M.—to avoid competition for viewers is presented as one of the things that show the sensitivity of the sponsors of these programs to the ratings given to their programs by these research experts listed above.

Here is another interesting paragraph in that article, found on page 147, "It is axiomatic that the pressure of competition improves the quality of a product. Has this principle, which applies to every other field, held true in TV? Steve Allen casts a loud, vehement negative vote. 'TV is the only thing I know that doesn't conform to the rule. Emphasis on ratings forces us to cater to the lowest common denominator in public taste. It would be diplomatic for me to say there is a growing appreciation of good stuff, but I honestly don't see any evidence of it. The better the program is, the lower

the rating is. We seem to be a nation of artistic illiterates.'"

The author continues, "Before investigating the validity of Allen's indictment, it is imperative to ask a question that goes to the heart of the matter. Do ratings reflect what audiences really want to see or what they merely accept because TV is free and convenient? This proposition is profoundly important to everyone concerned with the intellectual climate of the country."

But now link this up with that quotation that the movies "are the white hope for raising the level of TV." We have maintained and quoted from the pamphlet of the Rev. Veldman that the movie is desperately wicked—and not the innocent thing that some in the church like to have us believe. And from the world itself we are told here that this desperately wicked thing is the hope of raising the level of present day television programs. These other programs cannot be much then, can they? The world admits that!

And you, a believer in Christ, a covenant father or mother who has promised before God to bring up your child in His fear to the utmost of your power, what do you say? Are you even less sensitive than the world? What rating do you give these programs that the world gladly sees replaced with pre-1947 movies? And the world does not rate these other programs lower than the movies because of their spiritual character. The world rates truly Christian entertainment as too low for their attention. A program singing God's praises, a discussion of the Word of God, a sermon on the Sabbath will soon be turned off by the world. It is not because of its religious character that these other programs of entertainment on television receive such a low rating. No, but they do not satisfy the flesh sufficiently. They are too tame. And movies are the hope of raising the level of television entertainment.

You bought your set for entertainment!

Let us not deceive ourselves. Let us be honest with ourselves. I have yet to meet a man that dares honestly to say that he bought his television set for any other reason. One does not spend two hundred dollars, more or less, simply to see the news he can hear over the radio, or read in his newspaper tomorrow, or to see the pictures that will appear in his home edition of his newspaper or news magazine. You bought it for entertainment.

Nor will we say that entertainment in itself is wicked and that seeking it is a work of the devil. But we do insist that even in our entertainment, we must live in His fear. That makes it a pretty narrow field. That limits very severely the things which we may seek for our recreation and entertainment. And it goes without saying that we must not turn to the world for this entertainment. The world cannot possibly supply any entertainment that assists or enhances our walk in His fear.

Therefore we wish to make one more quotation from the pamphlet of the Rev. R. Veldman and have you apply it not only to the movie which is the hope of the world for a

raising of the level of its television programs but also to those other programs put on by the world for worldly, carnal entertainment and that has for its purpose the satisfaction of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.

The Rev. R. Veldman quotes from the book *What Is Wrong With The Movies* by a friend of many movie stars and a movie writer himself, Dan Thomas, "In those days Hollywood wasn't exactly a moral community—and it isn't today, if one accepts the customary standards of morality. The celluloid colony doesn't. That's where it differs from the world at large. Oh, everyone here recognizes the fact that certain standards exist. But they exist for the outside world. Social standing is based almost entirely on success. A girl with a lover is just as welcome anywhere as one with a husband

"Compare Hollywood with any average town for example. There if a boy or girl wanted to have an affair they must be most furtive. And if it was found out, mothers would prohibit their daughters from having anything to do with the girl in the case.

"In Hollywood that's all different. The boy or girl would make no bones about their affair, make no effort to keep it secret. Either the girl would go openly and boldly to the man's apartment, or he would go to hers. And while the affair might furnish a choice morsel for gossip, it would in no way reflect upon either party."

The Rev. Veldman asks, "Read this quotation again, and carefully, and you have an inkling of what Hollywood is morally and spiritually.

"Shall such people provide our entertainment and shall they be the teachers and examples of our children? Would we want such teachers in our schools? Would we want our sons and daughters actually to associate with such people?"

Yes, let us ask ourselves those questions *also* in regard to the entertainment that the advocates of Hollywood, the worshippers of these godless actors and actresses manufacture and make available in your home for your sons and daughters.

By turning on a switch we can get Hollywood and all its friends and worshippers in our homes and let our children associate with them. Shall we?

In His fear we will never do that.

Do you?

The words of John in his second epistle are of force here, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house," II John 9, 10.

That means let him not in your house through the television screen as well as let him not in personally. And let your children know that these ungodly are not to come into your home for entertainment because your home must be a sphere where all walk in His fear.

J.A.H.

Contending For The Faith

The Church and the Sacraments

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

THE SUPREMACY OF THE POPE

INNOCENT AND THE PAPACY (1198-1216 A.D.)

The Fourth Lateran Council, 1215.

The Fourth Lateran, otherwise known as the Twelfth Ecumenical Council, was the closing act of Innocent's pontificate, and marks the zenith of the papal theocracy. In his letter of convocation, the pope announced its object to be the reconquest of Palestine and the betterment of the Church. The council was held in the Lateran and had three sittings, Nov. 11, 20, 30, 1215. It was the most largely attended of the synods held up to that time in the West. The attendance included 412 bishops, 800 abbots and priors, and a large number of delegates representing absent prelates. There were also present representatives of the emperor Frederick II, the emperor Henry of Constantinople, and the kings of England, France, Aragon, Hungary, Jerusalem, and other crowned heads.

The sessions were opened with a sermon by the pope on Luke 22:15, "With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer." It was a fanciful interpretation of the word "passover," to which a threefold sense was given: a physical sense referring to the passage of Jerusalem from a state of captivity to a state of liberty, a spiritual sense referring to the passage of the Church from one state to a better one, and a heavenly sense referring to the transition from the present life to the eternal glory. (This interpretation or so-called interpretation of Holy Writ should convince any unbiased reader of the fact that the pope is anything but infallible in his interpretation of Holy Writ—H.V.) The deliverances are grouped under seventy heads, and a special decree bearing upon the recovery of Jerusalem. The headings concern matters of doctrine and ecclesiastical and moral practice. The council's two most notable acts were the definition of the dogma of transubstantiation and the establishment of the institution of the Inquisition against heretics.

The doctrinal decisions, contained in the first two chapters, give a comprehensive statement of the orthodox faith as it concerns the nature of God, the Incarnation, the unity of the Church, and the two greater sacraments. Here transubstantiation is defined as the doctrine of the eucharist in the universal Church, "outside of which there is no possibility of salvation."

The council expressly condemned the doctrine of Joachim of Flore, that the substance of the Father, Son, and Spirit is not real entity, but a collective entity in the sense that

a collection of men is called one people, and a collection of believers one Church. It approved the view of Peter the Lombard whom Joachim had opposed on the ground that his definition would substitute a quaternity for the trinity in the Godhead. The Lombard had defined the substance of the three persons as a real entity. Incidentally, the invitation to this Fourth Lateran Council included the prelates of the East and West, Christian emperors and kings, the grand-masters of the Military Orders, and the heads of monastic establishments.

Amaury of Bena, a teacher in Paris accused of pantheistic teachings, was also condemned by name. He had been accused and appeared before the pope at Rome in 1204, and recalled his alleged heresy. He or his scholars taught that every one in whom the Spirit of God is, becomes united with the body of Christ and cannot sin.

The treatment of heretics received elaborate consideration in the important third decree. The ecclesiastical and moral regulations were the subject of sixty-seven decrees. The rank of the patriarchal sees is fixed, Rome having the first place. It was an opportune moment for an array of these dignitaries, as Innocent had established a Latin succession in the Eastern patriarchates which had not already been filled by his predecessors. To avoid the confusion arising from the diversity of monastic rules, the establishment of monastic orders was thenceforth forbidden.

The clergy are warned against intemperance and continence and forbidden the chase, hunting dogs and falcons, attendance upon theatrical entertainments, and executions, duelling, and frequenting inns. Prescriptions are given for their dress. Confession is made compulsory at least once a year, imprisonment fixed as the punishment for priests revealing the secrets of the confessional. The tenure of more than one benefice is forbidden except by the pope's dispensation. New relics are forbidden as objects of worship, except as they might receive the approbation of the pope. Physicians are bidden, upon threat of excommunication, to urge their patients first of all to summon a priest, as the well-being of the soul is of more value than the health of the body. Jews and Saracens are enjoined to wear a different dress from the Christians, lest unawares carnal intercourse be had between them. The Jews are bidden to keep within doors during passion week and excluded from holding civil office. This was a repetition of the decrees of the synod of Toledo in 581.

The appointment of a new crusade was the council's last act, and it was set to start in 1217. Christians were commanded to refrain from all commercial dealings with the Saracens for four years. To all contributing to the crusade, as well as to those participating in it, full indulgence was promised, and added eternal bliss. Another important matter which was settled, as it were in a committee room of the council, was the appeal of Raymund VI, count of Toulouse, for redress from the rapacity of Simon de Montfort, the fierce leader of the crusade against the Albigenses in Southern France.

The doctrinal statements and ecclesiastical rules bear witness to the new conditions upon which the Church had entered, the Latin patriarchs being in possession in the East, and heresy threatening its unity in Southern France and other parts of the West.

Innocent III survived the great council only a few months and died scarcely fifty-six years old, without having outlived his authority or his fame. He had been fortunate in all his undertakings. The acts of statecraft, which brought Europe to his feet, were crowned in the last scene at the Lateran Council by the pious concern of the priest. To his successors he bequeathed a continent united in allegiance to the Holy See and a Church strengthened in its doctrinal unity. Notwithstanding his great achievements combining mental force and moral purpose, the Church has found no place for Innocent among its canonized saints.

The following are a few testimonies to his greatness. Gregorovius declares (Gibbon, after acknowledging Innocent's talents and virtues, has this criticism of two of the most far-reaching acts of his reign: 'Innocent may boast of the two most signal triumphs over sense and humanity, the establishment of transubstantiation, and the origin of the Inquisition.') that, although he was "Not a creative genius like Gregory I and Gregory VII, he was one of the most important figures of the Middle Ages, a man of earnest, sterling, austere intellect, a consummate ruler, a statesman of penetrating judgment, a highminded priest filled with religious fervor, and at the same time with an unbounded ambition and appalling force of will, a true idealist on the papal throne, yet an entirely practical monarch and a cool-headed lawyer . . . No pope has ever had so lofty and yet so real consciousness of his power as Innocent III, the creator and destroyer of emperors and kings."

Ranke says: "A superstitious reverence such as Friedrich Hurter renders to him in his remarkable book I am not at all able to accord. This much, however, is certain. He stands in the foremost rank of popes, having world-wide significance. The task which he placed before himself he was thoroughly equal to. Leaving out a few dialectic subtleties, one will not find in him any thing that is really small. In him was fulfilled the transition of the times."

Baur gives this opinion: "With Innocent III the papacy reached its height and in no other period of its long history did it enjoy such an undisturbed peace and such a glorious development of its power and splendor. He was distinguished as no other in this high place not only by all the qualities of the ruler but by personal virtues, by high birth and also by mind, culture, and learning.

And, finally, Hagenbach gives us the following: "Measured by the standard of the papacy, Innocent is beyond controversy the greatest of all popes. Measured by the eternal law of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that which here seems great and mighty in the eyes of the world, seems little in the kingdom of heaven, and amongst those things which call

forth wonder and admiration, only that will stand which the Spirit of God, who never wholly withdraws from the Church, wrought in his soul. How far such operation went on, and with what result, who but God can know? He alone is judge."

This concludes, in this article, our quotation from Philip Schaff as he writes on Innocent III. The appraisal of Hagenbach is surely conservative and sober. It is certainly true that, measured by the standard of the papacy, Innocent must be given a foremost place among the great popes who have sat upon the throne of Peter. However, this is not saying that also this high honour has been given him by the standard of the Lord. After all, earthly honour and power and glory cannot be said to characterize the Church of God and the kingdom of our Lord according to the presentation in Holy Writ. In the prophecy of Isaiah, verses 1-4 of chapter 63, we have a description of our Lord of glory as He treads the winepress of the wrath of the Lord alone, and as He tramples the peoples in His tremendous anger and fury. And there we read that there was none with Him as He treads that winepress and tramples the children of Edom, representative of the godless world throughout the ages. The popes' tremendous power, in the earthly sense of the word, is surely not the presentation of the Scriptures. And the apostle Peter, I am sure, would view in all amazement the great power to which his successors have attained. The strength of the popes, after everything has been said, simply lay in their ability to enforce their decrees by the use of the earthly sword. They had the power to dethrone and enthrone kings and emperors at their will. They did not rule through the power of the Spirit and the Word but simply in the earthly and worldly sense of the word. Of course, we must remember that they were children of their particular time in which they lived. But, even so, their tremendous power was not spiritual but earthly and worldly. And the Lord is the Judge. He will judge not by human standard but by His own spiritual standard. And only God knows to what extent He operated in the hearts of these men by His grace and Spirit. In an earthly sense Innocent III was a tremendous figure.

H.V.

IN MEMORIAM

The Ladies' Society of the Protestant Reformed Church of South Holland, Illinois, hereby wishes to express its heartfelt sympathy to one of its members, Mrs. Gilbert Van Baren, in the recent death of her brother,

MR. ANTHONY HOLLEMAN

on November 7, 1957.

May our Heavenly Father comfort the bereaved and may we at all times put our trust in Him.

Rev. H. C. Hoeksema, President
Mrs. S. Vroegh, Secretary

THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS

As we pass from the old into the new year we are once more forcefully reminded that the end of the ages is upon us.

Particularly now it is significant for us that faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Therefore the church of Jesus Christ is encouraged to live by faith in blessed anticipation, and even in eager longing for the day of the Lord. She is urged to be alert and waiting, to watch unto prayer. As our Lord expressed it on one occasion, "Take ye heed, watch and pray . . . And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch." Mark 13:33, 37.

Sometimes this encouragement is motivated by the proximity of the end. As the apostle Peter warns, "But the end of all things is at hand," or as the exalted Lord declares in the last chapter of Revelation, "And, behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give unto every man according as his work shall be."

Again, as in the parable of the ten virgins, it is motivated by the fact that the day and the hour of Christ's return is unknown to us. Matthew 25:1-13. He comes as a thief in the night.

It was on the evening of the last day of Jesus' public ministry, Tuesday of the Passion Week, that Jesus was teaching and warning His disciples concerning the things that must come to pass before His final return. He spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem and of the final judgment, and pointed to the various signs that would announce His coming. In this connection He also spoke this well-known parable which He concludes with the warning, "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh."

In our thoughts we are transferred to the period preceding and including Christ's coming. In its broadest sense, this includes the whole new dispensation, for ever since Christ ascended to heaven we are living in the last days, even the last hour; that final period characterized by His coming. Therefore this parable applies in that broadest sense **to the church at any given time during this present dispensation.** She is always the waiting church, which must always watch. But in its limited sense, the reference is to the period just preceding and including the final arrival of our Lord in judgment. Therefore it applies to us today more than it ever has to the church of the past.

The parable carries us through three phases in the coming of Christ. There is, first of all, the waiting of the virgins for the coming of the Bridegroom. There is, secondly, the tarrying and final arrival of the Bridegroom. And there is, finally, the closed door, enclosing the five wise virgins, and excluding the five foolish ones.

The waiting virgins

To understand the virgins in the parable our attention must remain focused on the central figure, the Son of man in His coming, pictured here as the Bridegroom.

We cannot linger long over the beautiful symbolism expressed here, but we must note that the Bridegroom is the King's Son, for Whom the Omnipotent God of heaven and earth has prepared the kingdom. Moreover, for this Son God has chosen His church as His Bride, to show forth the glory of her Husband, her Head, and to live with Him in the most intimate relationship of fellowship and love conceivable. The Bridegroom is constantly busy preparing for that great wedding feast, and has promised His Bride that He will come as swiftly as possible to take her unto Himself.

You will see at once that we have lost much of that symbolism in our present day wedding ceremonies, where, through the influence of the world round about us, we place far more emphasis on the bride than on the bridegroom. The bride is always mentioned first, for it is her wedding. Her dress, her wedding march, her attendants are the center of attraction. And the impression is often left that the bridegroom is an ornament that somehow cannot be entirely ignored at this occasion. Not that I begrudge the bride this exciting experience in her life. But the fact remains that if marriage among believers is to be a symbol of Christ and his church, the bridegroom must have his rightful place in the ceremony, and ever after.

Only because of the Bridegroom do the virgins have any significance at all in the parable. He is about to lead His bride into His own home for the wedding feast. And the virgins are waiting to join the procession, so that they may bestow honor upon the Bridegroom as He goes along the way with His bride, accompanied by strains of music and glittering lights.

These virgins are the church as she has been spiritually separated from the world and lives in anticipation of the coming of the Lord. They are ten in number to express the fulness of the church as she manifests herself at any given moment here upon earth. The number ten always expresses a certain fulness in Scripture, as, for example, the ten plagues of Egypt or the ten commandments of the law. In this case it refers to the entire church including men and women, young and old, righteous and unrighteous, true believers and formal Christians.

The fact that they are divided into two groups of five cannot have any other significance than that there are always present within the church both wise and foolish virgins, true and false believers. The idea is certainly not that the proportion is always half of each, since the times and circumstances must often determine which are in the majority. Nor must any specific significance be attached to the fact that they are virgins, except in as far as they serve very well in this instance to represent the church.

What is important is the fact that some are wise and some are foolish. The wise are the spiritual wise, who possess the grace of prudence and foresight. The foolish are the indolent, who are careless and indifferent.

This becomes evident from the parable itself, for "they that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:

But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps."

Opinions vary as to whether the foolish virgins took no oil at all along with them, or whether they did not take an extra supply for such an emergency as arose through the delay of the bridegroom. Actually it makes very little difference, for the point in the parable is exactly that they had no oil at the moment when the bridegroom came. And surely no one can use this parable to show that there can be a falling away of saints, since the evidence is far too meager for that. In fact, there is every reason to take it that the foolishness of the five virgins consisted exactly in this that they took no oil with them whatever. The Lord simply states that they "took their lamps, and took no oil with them." This is not changed by the fact that they say, "our lamps are gone out," for that can well mean that they never did have their lamps lighted. They await the coming of the bridegroom with empty lamps. That is their foolishness.

That raises the question, What must be understood by the oil? Some have said that the lamps represent the individual member of the church, the wick represents the heart, and the oil the Holy Spirit within the heart. In that case appeal is made to the fact that Scripture more often uses the symbol of oil to represent the Holy Spirit, as was obviously the case in the candlestick of the old dispensation. Our objection must be, that not the lamps, but the virgins represent the individual members of the church.

Others say that the oil represents the grace of the Holy Spirit. They like to visualize the figure by saying that the bowl is the heart, the lamp is the outward profession, and the oil is the grace of the Spirit, which causes the lamp to burn. Again our objection is, that the virgins, not the bowls, represent the individual believers. We could also mention those who make the lamps faith and the oil good works, so that by way of good works the believer remains prepared for the coming of the Bridegroom. But then, how about the fact that they were all slumbering and sleeping while the Bridegroom tarries?

Against all these interpretations the one objection must be raised, that they are too general and lose from sight the one central thought of the parable. That one central thought is the preparedness of the church for the arrival of the Bridegroom. The wisdom of the five wise virgins became evident from the fact that they were prepared when the bridegroom came. The foolishness of the foolish virgins became evident in the fact that they were not prepared. And therefore the oil represents the preparedness of the believer for the coming of the Lord. Now it is true, that preparedness is an essential part of the hope of the believer, and hope is faith. Moreover, it is just as true, that faith is the gift of grace, and that this grace is wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit. But the point of the parable remains, that the oil represents preparedness for the coming of Christ.

The wise virgins possess this oil of preparedness. They believe in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, Who "sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from

thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead." They love Him and desire to pay Him homage as their Lord. The foolish virgins are devoid of all love, and have no desire whatever to honor the King. Selfishly they want a place in the church for whatever advantage that might prove to have for themselves. They live along with the church, make the same profession of faith and hope in the public worship and in private devotions. But they lack the grace of a true and living faith wrought by the Spirit in the heart.

The Coming of the Bridegroom

The Bridegroom tarries long in His coming. The sun has dropped below the western horizon, the shadows have grown long and deepened into the darkness of the night. Even the night grows late as the weary minutes and the long hours creep by.

What a perfect description of these last days from the point of view of the church. For almost two thousand years the Lord has delayed His coming. And in the meantime it has grown late, and the night has darkened. The night is already far spent, and our Lord still has not returned.

We read that all the virgins were dozing and slept. This is evidently not intended as a criticism upon the wise virgins, but is rather expressed as a fact. Maybe the idea is that the wise fell into a fitful, restless sleep, which they were fighting constantly, and that the foolish virgins first nodded and finally were completely overpowered with sleep. In any case, the figure certainly applies. Where today do we find that eager anticipation for the coming of Christ that characterized the early church of the new dispensation? Where in this day of luxurious ease and temporal prosperity do you hear the complaint that the Lord is slow in realizing His promised coming? In general it may be said, and maybe this applies to you and me personally, that the prayer for the speedy return of the Lord is replaced by a desire that He may postpone His coming until we have enjoyed to the full the comforts and pleasures of this present time.

This only serves to bring home the fact that we must always watch, since we know not the day nor the hour of our Lord's coming.

It is the midnight hour when finally the cry is heard, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him."

The midnight hour expresses that it is the completion of God's day. It is exactly the time that God has eternally appointed for the final realization of His purpose in Jesus Christ.

It also expresses that the powers of darkness have fully manifested themselves, and that the man of sin has been fully revealed. The measure of iniquity is so full, that this old world of sin lies exhausted under the destructive power of corruption. She is too weary to go on with her blasted hopes, and her vain pretenses of refinement and happiness.

It is the hour of deliverance for the church of Jesus Christ, the realization of the hope of the ages.

In that hour the foolishness of the five virgins is fully

(Continued on page 168)

DECENCY and ORDER

Article 31

E. Bodies To Which Appeals Are To Be Directed

Article 31 states clearly that appeals are to be made from the minor assemblies to the major assemblies. That means that decisions of Consistories may be appealed to Classis, and the latter in turn may be appealed to Synod. On this point there is agreement among all who adhere to Reformed polity. As such it creates no occasion for dispute but unless we say more than this we do not do justice to the underlying principle that is involved here.

Monsma and Van Dellen in *The Church Order Commentary* correctly make the observation that this Reformed system of church government (appeal from the minor to the major assemblies) is the opposite of the Congregationalistic, Baptist or Independent system which reverses this order of appeal. They write: "In these systems (independentistic) decisions of the ruling body of the local church may be challenged and brought before the congregation. However, we find no warrant for this in Scripture. Christ vested the power of government over His church in the office-bearers."

Hence, according to the independentistic systems, the final decision in all contested matters rests with the congregation itself; a form of ecclesiastical government *of the people, by the people and for the people* and a denial of the regal office of Christ which is vested in the particular office of elder in the church and not that of the general office of all believers. Against this view the Reformers have and do remonstrate, insisting that the authority to rule in the church lies in the particular offices and not in the general office of believers as such. This is also strongly supported by the Word of God and it must be insisted upon and maintained if this matter of appeal is to be kept straight for it is folly to appeal anything to a body that lacks authority to decide. Under the independentistic system, the assemblies of the church are reduced to nothing more than informal and unofficial conventions or conferences.

In Reformed churches, congregational meetings are also held. In the present connection, it is not necessary to enter upon the question of ascertaining the official status of such meetings. We will come to that, D.V., in another connection. As far as the matter of appeal is concerned, however, it may be said that one aggrieved by a decision made at a congregational meeting may appeal to the consistory. That body must then decide. From there the matter, if serious enough, may pursue a process of appeal that ultimately ends with Synod. That is the order in Reformed circles. What, therefore, under the Reformed system is the starting point of appeal is under the independentistic system the final court of appeal. The two are opposites!

However, under the Reformed system, mention is frequently made of autonomy and of the autonomy of the

particular church. What is meant by this is not infrequently considered to conflict with the broader Reformed system of polity. Webster defines the term "autonomy" or "autonomous" to mean "*independent in government, self-governing, also, without outside control.*" Now then, with respect to a particular church that is part of a broader federation or denomination of churches, this can be true only in a limited and not in the absolute sense of the word. Article 31 implies as much. If a local church were absolutely autonomous, independent, without outside control, it would be foolish indeed to even suggest appealing a decision taken by that autonomous church to another, outside body. Autonomy ecclesiastically is not the same as independentism. Neither is it equivalent to anarchism. If every church within the federation could respect or ignore any or all decisions of the broader ecclesiastical assemblies, as they see fit, it would certainly be practical nonsense to appeal any matter beyond the local consistory. In that case the final decision or disposition of the matter would rest with the local church anyway. Such is pure independentism!

And so, without entering into the matter of the jurisdiction of the broader assemblies over minor assemblies which is to be treated under Article 36, we want to make just one observation here. This is that the provision of appeal from a minor to a major ecclesiastical assembly presupposes that by virtue of the act or bond of agreement, the individual churches subject themselves to the decisions of the major assemblies with the exception of the condition provision under Article 31. Autonomy is limited to the local sphere and with respect to the broader federation, no church may, on the basis of its autonomy, disregard those decisions with impunity. To do so is to violate the act or bond of agreement. To permit this is to allow chaos. Only when these decisions are considered by all concerned as settled and binding does the idea of appealing to a broader or major assembly make sense.

F. Unless or Until

Article 31, in connection with the fact that decisions taken by majority vote in ecclesiastical assemblies are to be considered settled and binding, contains this conditional provision: ". . . *unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the articles of the church order, as long as they are not changed by a general synod.*" Much has been said, written and debated regarding the exact thrust of the word "unless" (*the Dutch has "tenzij"*). In defense of its appearance in the article, it has been and is claimed that those who would substitute for it the word "until" are guilty of imposing hierarchy upon the Reformed system. The whole argument centers around the matter of whether or not the appellant is bound to submit to the decisions of the ecclesiastical body during the period of time that his appeal is processed and treated. Those who emphasize the "unless" answer this in the negative while the advocates of the "until" reply in the affirmative. This question itself we will consider under a separate sub-title but at present we are concerned

only with the meaning or thrust of the terms "unless" or "until."

As to the difference in the simple meaning of the two words, it should be noted that "until" has reference to time, to a definite, limited period of time while the word "unless" has no temporal reference in it but denotes a factual condition. These two words are not mutually exclusive even though in the present connection this is frequently inferred. "Unless" means, according to Webster, "if not, except that," and in this application it would merely denote that the decision taken is valid and binding, limited by the conditional provision "that it is not proven to conflict with the Word of God, etc. . . ." That is merely a matter of fact. But, on the other hand, "unless" denotes time and in this connection signifies that the decision taken is valid and binding during the period of time that it is subject to question and appeal. This term, therefore, covers the duration of the matter of fact. The two are not exclusive but complementary.

Now the question concerns whether or not there is really such a conflict between these two complementary concepts that is of such proportion that to insert one or the other would radically change the meaning of the article. So it is often presented and the advocates of the two schools of thought will vigorously oppose each other and tenaciously cling to a word. Those who refuse to be bound even for a time insist that the insertion of "until" mutilates their consciences and compels them to sin against God because they are then forced to subject themselves to that which they honestly are convinced is in conflict with the Holy Word. This argument we will weigh in another connection presently. On the other hand, those who maintain that an ecclesiastical decision once taken by majority vote becomes binding and settled immediately, hold that the "until" is implied in the Article itself, if not also in the "unless."

We fail to see any real conflict here and believe that most, if not all, of the argumentation over which word is proper here is unnecessary. Especially so since it should be noted that in the *Formula of Subscription* which speaks of the same matter as Article 31 of the Church Order, namely, the matter of appeal, and to which all office bearers in Reformed Churches subscribe, uses the word "until." We quote:

"... reserving for ourselves, however, the right of appeal, whenever we shall believe ourselves aggrieved by the sentence of the consistory, the classis or the synod, and until a decision is made upon such an appeal, we will acquiesce in the determination and judgment already passed."

We do not believe that there is a serious conflict between our Church Order and our Formula of Subscription. We believe that they harmonize well even though in speaking of the same thing the one uses the word "unless" and the other the word "until." The substitution of a little more tolerance, patience and understanding for heated and often beside-the-

point argumentation would help much toward resolving any seeming difficulties on this point. Those who insist on the exclusive "unless" should remember that submission under protest for a time (as required under the Formula of Subscription) does not violate the conscience. It simply means in the words of this Formula, "acquiescence," which, in Webster's words means, "to accept or comply tacitly or passively, without implying assent or agreement; to accept as inevitable or indisputable." Isn't it inevitable and indisputable that a certain decision was taken by a certain assembly and is, therefore, an official decree of that body, right or wrong? Can anyone who is a member of the organization represented by the body that takes such a decision, not recognize and accept that fact even though they be in disagreement with it. Such recognition does not imply assent or agreement. Hence, the appeal follows.

On the other hand, an undue emphasis upon "until" to the exclusion of the "unless" is also wrong. That would create a circumstance making appeal impossible and thus abnegating the "unless" altogether. This would violate Article 31 but here again, the matter centers upon the question: "To what must one submit until . . . ?" Must one bow with agreement of conscience to the decision made until . . . ? Then the appeal is of course impossible. Or does one simply submit to the fact of the decision, acknowledge it as legal (though he is convinced it is incorrect) and proceed from there to appeal? Then *until the appeal is heard and unless the decision is reversed*, the appellant submits. This, we believe, is the thrust of the matter.

Finally, it may be pointed out that not only is there then harmony and agreement between our Church Order and the Formula of Subscription but also that then an appeal makes sense. Why appeal a decision if it isn't settled and binding? Moreover, suppose an appellant succeeds in convincing the synod of its erroneous decision. If there is no "until" implied in the "unless," it follows that the decision in question has never been settled and binding and, consequently, there is no need to rescind or revoke it. This, however, is not the case. All decisions, from the moment they are taken by majority vote, are valid and binding and remain so until they are changed or revoked by the proper body.

G.V.D.B.

Teacher Needed

The Hope Protestant Reformed School will need a teacher for grades 3 and 4, next September. Since we already know that this vacancy will exist, we are making our need known to anyone interested in applying. Write or call Miss A. Reitsma, principal, 1111 Boston St., S.E., Grand Rapids, or Mr. John Kalsbeek, School Board Secretary, 4132 Hall St., S.W., Grand Rapids.

ALL AROUND US

Sputnik! Mutnik! Whatnik!

The other day my young daughter, having returned home from a day's session at school, sat down with the family to partake of the evening meal. As is quite often the case, she receives much of our attention and interest with her conversation about the happenings of the day. On this occasion she floored us with the enigmatical question: Why can the Russians see to ride horses at night better than we can? When we could not produce the answer, she replied: Because they have the satellite. Naturally we gave her the satisfaction she desired by all having a good laugh. It was a joke at the expense of the Russians.

However, when one reads the newspapers and magazines today, both secular and religious, he becomes more and more impressed with the thought that this business of satellites and sputniks is no laughing matter at all. These periodicals clearly emphasize the alarm registered in the military minds of those in the Pentagon, as well as of those policy-makers in N.A.T.O.

Even the religious periodicals we have read feel they should not keep silent about these scientific developments. The December 9th issue of *Christianity Today* devotes no less than two articles whose titles contain the word: Sputnik. And the latest issue of *Torch and Trumpet* contains an article written by the managing editor entitled: Not Sputnik but Christ, in which he denied the very popular idea that man shall one day succeed in inhabiting the moon. This article was reflected on one evening in the *Grand Rapids Press*, and the next evening this same daily contained an article in which a Calvin College professor offered a contradicting view.

The first of the articles above referred to appearing in *Christianity Today* was entitled: Sputnik and the Angels. It was written by David H. C. Read, minister of the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York City. The Angels of which the article speaks refer to those who announced the birth of Christ to shepherds on the fields of Bethlehem. The writer, therefore, is concerned with especially the doctrine of the Incarnation and that doctrine as it is the very heart of our religious faith as it is being off-set by the triumph of applied science in the production of earth revolving satellites.

In connection with the "Miracle of Incarnation" the writer contends without producing any substantial proof, other than "the growing ecumenical contacts of differing traditions," that this doctrine is "more clearly recognized within the Church today than it was some fifty years ago. He claims that "the advance of New Testament criticism . . . has contributed to this recognition." He contends further, "In the general membership of the Church we could similarly say that there is now a greater disposition to ponder the real meaning of the Angels' Song, instead of using it as a senti-

mental back-ground for a virtually unitarian theology, or, in other circles, as an unexplored slogan for a docetic Christology." "Today," he avers, "there is a manifest yearning for the Word of Christ who 'was made man for . . . our salvation,' and a readiness to ponder afresh the Incarnation miracle."

We are not at all inclined to go along with the above contention and surely not on the grounds the writer produces. It is difficult for us to see how that the advance of New Testament criticism or the growing ecumenical contacts of differing traditions has helped one iota in establishing in the minds of men the truth of the Incarnation which can only be embraced by a true and living faith. In fact, we are inclined to believe the very opposite reaction is true, namely, that there is stronger tendency today to deny this basic doctrine of our Christian faith than to accept it.

The writer, it appears, is also aware of this when he reflects on the advances of modern scientific discovery and asserts, "It is natural that the man of science who dives into the mysteries of the physical world and comes back to us with automobiles, radios, television and nuclear devices, seems to speak with much more authority than those who speak of the mysteries of God . . . Men and women are bound to be enormously affected in their thinking about the universe and in their readiness to hear a supernatural message by the dazzling and imagination-baffling advances of science . . . We have now reached the point where around the world men hear the 'beep' of a satellite which, being translated, is 'the hand that made us is human.' And so Sputnik arrives to symbolize this vague sense of living in a world where God is somehow less real, less near, less in control."

We can agree with most of what the writer declares when he writes in the concluding part of his article that God "is Lord not only of the stars, but of the atoms — and also of the telescope and microscope and the heart of enquiring man . . . We are concerned with man's own predicament, which remains the same however far he ranges into the mysteries of creation. And that predicament is one of estrangement, man from man, and man from God. No satellite flung into space, no power released from the elements, can bring about the needed reconciliation. The 'beep' of Sputnik may bring valuable scientific data. Only the grace and truth that came with the angels' song can redeem mankind. With such an emphasis we may meet the situation of today. As we look forward to Christmas 1957 let the Church boldly proclaim no lesser Gospel than this: that God Almighty, Maker of *all* things visible and invisible, was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. Against this message the gates of hell cannot prevail — how much less the new mysteries, hopes and threats of outer space."

Concerning the second article in *Christianity Today* we will be brief. It contains a short sermon preached by the Rev. Richard W. Gray, pastor of Calvary Presbyterian

Church, Willow Grove, Pa. We quote only the first three paragraphs of his sermon.

"Myriads of words have been uttered on the scientific, political and military implications of Sputnik, but little has been said about its religious implications. Is this a sign of the times? In 4 B.C. wise men from the East were so attracted by a strange constellation in the sky that they went out of their way to inquire of its meaning. We have reason to wonder whether the launching of Sputnik I and Sputnik II is not saying something of significance to us and we are missing the message.

"Scientists tell us that it is the most significant event since the splitting of the atom. Military strategists inform us that it will change the face of future warfare. Were a rocket with an H-bomb warhead to be launched in Moscow, they say, it would destroy New York or Washington twelve minutes later. Several of these rockets could change the course of history, even extinguish Western culture. And prophetic scientists declare that if warfare were thus waged in this fashion, man could be wiped from the face of the earth.

"The hubbub created by Sputnik has exposed a condition in American life more alarming than the disclosures of the Senate Labor Rackets Committee, a condition against which God thundered judgment long ago in the book of Amos the prophet. Is it unreasonable to suggest that, since Sputnik has exposed this condition, and it is a deplorable one, the Sovereign God who works all things after the counsel of His will might have His hand in this new exploit for a holy purpose? In old times God often punctuated the message of His prophet with supernatural phenomena. Certainly in our own day He could use a scientific phenomenon to arouse us."

The Rev. Gray then proceeds to compare America today with Israel in the days of Amos, as a country that is at ease, trusting in military defenses and forgetting that God is "essential to our defense." And he concludes his sermon with this statement: "America needs to repent for allowing the gods of pleasure and wealth, of might and wisdom, to displace the God of Holy Scripture. Repentance leads through Jesus Christ to dependence on God and to his grace and blessing. Our failure to do so will ultimately hasten the real Armageddon—the day in which nations that have forgotten God will be destroyed."

As we have before commented in another connection, we do not like the comparison of America with Israel. There are others also, even of Reformed persuasion who via radio and printed page try to convey the thought that America is some kind of Israel that must return back to God. They therefore entitle their broadcasts: America for God, and Back to God Hour. All, of course, on the supposition that America was once a God-fearing nation, born under the favor and blessing of God; but now departing from Him,

needs to be called back. Though we love our country and the religious freedom we enjoy in which we may worship God according to His Word, we do not believe this makes America God's nation any more than other nations of the world. With respect to Israel of the old dispensation this was quite different, although also in respect to Israel God very early shows that His nation is not composed of those who are circumcized in the flesh, but in the heart.

As far as Rev. Gray's criticism of America's complacency and sin is concerned, we can agree. God will surely judge the nations that forget Him or ignore Him. There can be no doubt about that. When that nation has made its cup of iniquity full, He destroys that nation. But how Sputnik must remind us of God's final judgment, Armageddon, we fail to see.

Rev. H. J. Kuiper in *Torch and Trumpet*, as we said, also reflects on "Sputnik" and "Mutnik." Writes he, "As Sputnik and Mutnik revolve around the earth, so our thoughts and those of millions of men are today revolving around these earth-satellites, wondering what they really mean."

Rev. Kuiper tells us that he "can say nothing about the scientific aspect of Russia's amazing achievement. This is not our field . . . We are concerned in these lines only with the spiritual significance of the matter. From this point of view it makes absolutely no difference whether man-made satellites are launched by Russia, the United States, or some other nation . . . The sending into space of Sputnik and Mutnik has preceded by only a few weeks our commemoration this month of the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Every thoughtful Christian must sense more or less clearly the connection and the antithesis, or contrast, between these two events."

Criticizing the feverish attempts which men are working on to penetrate outer space and to contact heavenly bodies, Rev. Kuiper makes the statement which we noted above was commented on by the *Grand Rapids Press*, and the following evening was contradicted by a Calvin College professor in that same daily. "We believe that though man is privileged and even required to study the universe, for the sake of seeing more of the glory of the Creator, he was not made to inhabit or take possession of any other globe. He was given dominion over the earth (Genesis 1:26) but not over any star or any planet not our own. It is our opinion that any attempt to reach another planet and subdue it, claim and use it, will meet with disaster."

Now we will not dispute this contention, simply on the same grounds that Rev. Kuiper himself presents: this is not our field. There will no doubt be many who, like his colleague at Calvin College, will not agree with him. One, however, cannot but be amazed at these frightening scientific developments and ask: Whatnik will be next?

M.S.

OUR FUTURE

*Speech delivered by Rev. H. Veldman, Nov. 15, 1957
in Doon, at our annual meeting of our
Protestant Reformed Action Society.*

My choice of subject for this evening is easily understandable. The purpose and goal of this Protestant Reformed Action Society is, of course, to make propaganda for the cause of our Protestant Reformed Churches and truth. This is suggested by the very name: Protestant Reformed *Action* Society. This means that we do something, that we act, let ourselves be heard from, cause others to hear and learn about us. And the subject, I am sure, is in order: Our Future. Do we have a future? Can we, may we go on? What is our future? What is our calling in this connection?

It is these questions which I will try to answer in this evening as I call your attention to:

OUR FUTURE. — and we notice:

- I. ITS MEANING.
- II. ITS GROUND.
- III. ITS CALLING.

I. *Its Meaning*

Only one future may interest us. This is the first observation which I wish to lay before you this evening. The question is not, for example, whether we shall continue merely as a church, having our own denominational existence, with all that this implies, such as: our own theological school, our own magazine, our missionary, etc. Neither is it the question whether we have a future in the sense that we will grow, although it can surely not be denied that all of us would rejoice in such a numerical growth and advance.

These questions are not fundamental. Numerical strength is not a sign of the true church. If such were true then Cain was surely truer than Abel, and the eight souls of Noah's day could never have been regarded as *the* Church. Then Joshua and Caleb would have been condemned by their fellow ten spies, and the ten tribes were surely the true church rather than the Kingdom of Judah. And, not to name anymore, of the seven churches whereof we read in the Book of Revelation 2 and 3, of the only two churches unto which no rebuke is addressed, we read among other things, that they are very poor and small; I refer, of course, to the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia. And, to judge according to this standard, the Roman Catholic Church of today would surely have to be regarded as the true church. Moreover, neither is the question fundamental whether we shall continue as a Church. Oh, had we desired merely to be a church and to have a name we could have attained unto some prominence by now. Had we not maintained Scripture's position over against unions and union membership; and had we, for the sake of eternal peace and unity overlooked and condoned the two statements of Rev. De Wolf, we would have been stronger. Any church that grows at the expense of church discipline with respect to membership in worldly unions and

the remarriage of divorced persons, is developing in the direction of the false church and denying to itself the right to be called the Church of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

The question of our future is not fundamentally a matter of self-preservation, of being able to preserve and maintain our peculiar view of Scripture and the Confessions, a pet notion, then, on our part, such as our peculiar covenant conception. We do not regard our covenant conception as a pet theory which must be defended at any cost, but as solidly founded in the Scriptures and in the Confessions. The question, fundamentally, is surely whether we have a name and place in the Church of God of all ages. The question, fundamentally, is whether we are Church or Sect.

In answer to the question, "What is our future?", we must distinguish between true and false church. What distinction must we make? What is the idea of the "true church"? According to our Confessions, Art. 27-29 of our Confession of Faith, the earmarks of the true church are: pure preaching of the Word, the proper administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of Christian discipline. Fundamentally, this means that really there is but one mark of the true church: the pure preaching of the Word. In determining the question, "What is the true church," we must bear in mind the following: The true church, whereof the Confessions speak, very obviously must refer to the church as it comes to visible manifestation in the midst of the world — this is evident from the fact that we are called and therefore under the obligation to join it. We cannot join something we cannot see and which does not reveal itself. Now *the* Church, according to Lord's Day 21 of our Heidelberg Catechism, and also according to Scripture, as we shall presently see, is the elect Body of Christ, chosen by God from before the foundation of the world, and called by the Son of God (and, incidentally, only the Son of God can do this) out of all nations, tribes, peoples, lands, and tongues, from the beginning of the world until the end of time. However, the Son of God calls His own by His Spirit and Word. And this explains why the pure preaching of the Word is *the mark* of the true church. This we also read in John 10:16, where we read: "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." There, of course, you have the Church where the voice of Christ is heard, because His sheep hear His voice. Only, this voice of Jesus is always heard in and through the gospel — Christ never speaks apart from the gospel. This does not necessarily mean that all the sheep hear this voice of Jesus through the gospel. The elect infants do not, and they are surely saved, *as infants, generally*. But it does mean that His sheep always hear His voice, that only the sheep hear this voice, and that this voice is *heard* by them through the gospel. This will also explain the identity of the true church. Christ's sheep hear His voice, and they follow Him. Only, it is the presentation of Scripture and the Confessions that the people of God are gathered, that the Church of God is built in the line of successive generations. Hence, the true

church is that visible institute and organism, continuous throughout the ages, where it pleases Christ to call His sheep and where they hear His voice in the line of successive generations.

In connection with the idea of the false church, some are of the opinion that there is but one true manifestation of the church of God in the midst of the world, but one true institute, and that all other churches are equally false. This was also the view of the Liberated in Canada, and it was the topic of discussion at the very first meeting of the Men's society which I attended there in February of 1950. This view, however, is surely untenable. Surely, God's people are not to be limited to our churches alone. This would kill all mission work, would it not, as directed to the false church. One does not sow the seed on rocks or plow upon stones. However, to say that there are people of God in other churches necessarily implies that the voice of Christ is heard there, because His sheep hear His voice, and they cannot possibly live without it. And, they hear this voice of Jesus through the preaching of the gospel. To be sure, the marks of the true church are corrupted; let us say, in the Christian Reformed Church and also in the Reformed Church. In the Reformed Church one looks almost in vain for any exercise of Christian discipline, the opposition to Christian instruction is almost common, lodge members are tolerated, and hundreds of ministers occupy the pulpit who deny that Jesus Christ is the everlasting God revealed in the flesh. And, as far as the Christian Reformed Church is concerned, there we encounter the arminian and pelagian Three Points, the remarriage of divorced persons, whether they are divorced on biblical or unbiblical grounds, the recognition of union members as members of the church. And talk is also heard in that church of allowing lodge members into the fellowship of the church. This, however, does not mean that all churches are equally false, and that a false church is therefore also *the* false church. A false church is a church which, in principle and officially, has departed from the true marks of the Church, will develop in that way of error, in which the calling by Christ of His own will ultimately run dead, so that ultimately the voice of Christ will no longer be heard there. This is ultimately the mark of the sect. A sect is a departure from the historical line of the true Church. Only, a church becomes increasingly false as it departs from that line, and it must depart more and more.

And for the child of God, who knows and loves the truth, it is his calling to depart from that church for two reasons. First, such a church, having become principally false, is developing in the line of the antichrist and will ultimately be found completely within his ranks. And, secondly, I must witness for the truth; and when that has become impossible for me in a church I must leave. This is surely true of our membership in the Christian Reformed Church. There it is impossible for anyone to protest against the arminian conception of the universal love of God to sinners, of the gospel

as an offer of salvation to all; there it is also impossible to protest against union membership in the fellowship in the church and the recognition as members of the church of persons who have divorced and remarried. One cannot protest against these evils because they are the official stand of that church.

Hence, what is our future? Are we a sect, a departure from the line of the true Church, in which the truth will ultimately no longer be heard and God's people will no longer be gathered? Or, do we stand in the line of the Church of God of all ages, where the truth will continue to be heard and Christ's sheep will continue to be gathered? This is the question which confronts us tonight. And this future we surely have.

II. *Its Ground*

First, permit me to emphasize the all-important observation that we maintain the truth. What is, fundamentally, the truth? Throughout the ages there is but one issue: God or Man. This was the issue in Paradise when Adam ate of the forbidden fruit because he would usurp the place of God. This is the issue throughout the ages. God is Truth. He is in Himself the Absolute Reality. All other glory is only a creaturely reflection of His glory. Everything else has been made, is creaturely, is a reflection, a mirror in which the only Absolute Reality is revealed and displayed. And for you and me to live the truth is simply that we proclaim that God is God alone, alone worthy of all praise, alone the Creator and the Recreator, alone the living God Who does all things for His Name's sake. Anything which deprives the living God of the glory which is due Him and Him alone is the lie and the denial of the Truth as revealed in the Scripture and in the Confessions.

What is truth? This is truth: unconditional election or sovereign predestination. Conditional election and reprobation is not truth but the lie. This is arminianism. The arminians taught that God elected and reprobated on the basis of foreseen faith and unbelief. This arminian conception is contrary to Scripture and to the Confessions. It is surely contrary to the Scriptures. We read in Rom. 9:10-13, 16-21 the following: "And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth:) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated . . . So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God Who sheweth mercy. For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth He yet find

fault? For who hath resisted His will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast Thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" Notice, please, the following. Is God's election or reprobation preceded by anything in the sinner? Did God elect or reprobate because the one believed and the other did not? Indeed not! God loved Jacob and hated Esau before they did good or bad, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, *not of works*, but of Him that calleth. And, the potter forms vessels, does He not, unto honour and dishonour. They were not in existence before time. And this same truth is also taught in the Confessions;—see Canons I, A, 6, 7, 15, and we quote (italics ours): "That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it *proceeds from God's eternal decree*, For known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world," Acts 15:18. "Who worketh all things after the counsel of His will," Eph. 1:11. *According to which decree*, He graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however, obstinate, and inclines them to believe, while He leaves the non-elect in His just judgment to their own wickedness and obduracy . . . Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, He hath out of mere grace, *according to the sovereign good pleasure* of His own will, chosen, from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault, from their primitive state of rectitude, into sin and destruction, a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom He from eternity appointed the Mediator and Head of the elect, and the foundation of Salvation . . . What peculiarly tends to illustrate and recommend to us the eternal and unmerited grace of election, is the express testimony of sacred Scripture, that not all, but some only are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal decree; whom God, out of His sovereign, most just, irreprehensible and unchangeable good pleasure, hath decreed to leave in the common misery into which they have wilfully plunged themselves, *and not to bestow upon them saving faith and the grace of conversion*; but permitting them in His just judgment to follow their own ways, at last for the declaration of His justice, to condemn and perish them forever, but also for all their other sins . . ." What is the truth? Unconditional election and reprobation! God elected and reprobated sovereignly, for His Name's sake, not because of anything in man. And, this truth we preach and teach.

What is truth? This is truth: Total depravity. This is surely Scriptural and Confessional. It is Scriptural. We read in Rom. 8:6-8: "For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." And in Romans 14:23 we read: "For whatsoever is not of faith is sin." This is plain language, is it not? Can the sinner, apart from regenerating grace of

God, (Point III of 1924), please God? The apostle informs us that they who are in the flesh cannot please God, and the Scriptures abundantly testify that only they are not in the flesh who possess the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of regeneration and eternal life. This truth is also Confessional. We read in Canons III and IV, A, 3-4: "Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto, and *without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit*, they are neither able nor willing to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, nor to dispose themselves to reformation . . . There remain, however, in man since the fall, the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the difference between good and evil, and discovers some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintaining an orderly external deportment. But so far is this light of nature from being sufficient to bring him to a saving knowledge of God, and to true conversion, *that he is incapable of using it aright even in things natural and civil*. Nay further, this light, such as it is, man in various ways renders wholly polluted, and holds it in unrighteousness, by doing which he becomes inexcusable before God." Hence, what is truth? This is truth: the sinner, apart from the regenerating grace, can never please the Lord. And this we preach and teach.

What is truth? This is truth: Limited or Particular Atonement. This is Scriptural. We read in John 6:37-39: "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent Me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." And in John 10:11, 25-30 we read: "I am the good shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine . . . Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of My sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: And I give unto them eternal life: and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one." Comment on these passages is hardly necessary. Did Jesus come to save all? Is that His intention? Indeed not! This is the Father's will, commission, Who sent Him; this is the commission which the Father gave Him, that He should save only whom the Father has given Him. And this same truth is taught in the Confessions, in Canons II, A, 8: "For this was the sovereign counsel, and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of His Son should extend to *all the elect*, for bestowing upon them *alone* the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation: that is, *it was the will of*

God, that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby He confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every nation, people, tribe, and language, all those, *and those only*, who were from eternity chosen to salvation, and given to Him by the Father; that He should confer upon them faith, which together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, He purchased for them by His death; should purge them from all sin, both original and actual, whether committed before or after believing; and having faithfully preserved them even to the end, should at last bring them free from every spot and blemish to the enjoyment of glory in His own presence forever." I ask: what is truth? This is truth: Christ died for the elect, only for the elect, for those given Him by the Father. And, this truth also we preach and teach.

What is truth? This is truth: Irresistible Grace. This, too, is surely Scriptural. We read in John 6:44, 6:37, 39 (see above—we need not quote this again), Romans 9:16, 19: "No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day . . . So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. Thou wilt say then unto Me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted His will?" And in Phil. 1:6 we read: "Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Need we make any comment on these Scriptures? This truth is also Confessional. We read in Canons III, IV, A, 12, 14: "And this is the regeneration so highly celebrated in Scripture, and denominated a new creation: a resurrection from the dead, a making alive, which God works in us without our aid. But this is in no wise effected merely by the external preaching of the gospel, by moral suasion, or such a mode of operation, that after God had performed His part, it still remains in the power of man to be regenerated or not, to be converted, or to continue unconverted; but it is evidently a supernatural work, most powerful, and at the same time most delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable; not inferior in efficacy to creation, or the resurrection from the dead, as the Scripture inspired by the author of this work declares; so that all in whose heart God works in this marvelous manner, are certainly, infallibly, and effectually regenerated, and do actually believe. Whereupon the will thus renewed, is not only actuated and influenced by God, but in consequence of this influence, becomes itself active.

(To be continued)

THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS

(Continued from page 160)

evident. Their religion was a mere outward formality. Their hope was a sham. Their interests were in themselves rather than in the Bridegroom. The faith they once professed proved

false and insincere. They lacked, in one word, the oil of preparedness.

They cannot borrow it from the wise, for even the wise have received it as a personal gift of grace wrought by the Spirit in their hearts. And this gift is not transferable. They may go out and seek preparedness, but even as they venture out the Bridegroom comes.

Only the wise are there to meet Him. And they accompany Him with joy and songs of praise to the wedding feast of the Lamb.

The Door is Closed

There is still the final scene in the parable represented by the closed door. It serves to stress the importance of true spiritual wisdom that reveals itself in prudence and foresight in respect to the coming of the Lord.

The wise virgins accompany the Lord into His house to share with Him the wedding feast. This we experience in anticipation already in this life, as we live by faith and not by sight, since faith is the substance of things hoped for. And this we experience also at the moment of our departure from the earthly house of this tabernacle. At death we go to be with the Lord. But the final realization described in the parable awaits the great day of His coming, when we shall live and reign with Christ in eternal perfection in the new creation. The wedding feast is but a figure of that perfect blessedness of covenant communion with the God of our salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Without are the foolish virgins. The description of their going out to buy oil at this late hour and their coming to the closed door with the cry, "Lord, Lord, open to us," only shows their utter despair. How obvious it is, even to them, that their pretense of piety was sheer foolishness; the foolishness of carrying empty lamps that contain no oil, and are therefore worse than useless. They only prove that not every one that saith unto Christ, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. Many will say in that day, was I not a member of the church, did I not take a prominent place in the congregation, and did I not give much of my time and money to various causes? Wasn't I praised and flattered by many other church members? And didn't I have a minister to preach at my funeral?

But the answer will be: "I know you not!" You are not of My sheep. And the door remains closed forever.

Within is feasting, without is weeping with gnashing of teeth.

Within are the wise, without are the foolish.

Watch ye therefore. There is no time to sleep. And this is certainly not the time to nod and doze. We must be prepared. The more so, since the Bridegroom comes as a thief in the night. You and I do not know, in fact, no one knows the day nor the hour.

What the Lord says, He says to all His disciples at all times and at any given moment of history, also today: Watch.
C.H.