

THE STANDARD

Bearer

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

VOLUME XXXV

NOVEMBER 15, 1958 — GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

NUMBER 4

MEDITATION

THE YEAR OF GOD'S GOODNESS

*"Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness; and
Thy paths drop fatness." PSALM 65:11*

The minister of my infancy loved the psalm from which my text is taken. As soon as my mind settled on the psalm and the verse for this year's Thanksgiving meditation, my thoughts went back to the days of yore. And again I heard them sing: "De lofzang klimt uit Sion's zalen tot U met diepst ontzag!"

That minister made us sing psalm 65 time and time again. It is a beautiful psalm.

It seems as though Israel had gone through a trying time of drouth. And those that feared God and trusted in His name had prayed to Him, and made vows to Him.

The Lord heard their prayer and gave a plentiful rain.

The results? Verse 13 gives the conclusion: "The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing."

But also in my text the results of God's visitation is sung: "Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness; and Thy paths drop fatness."

Literally it should read: Thou crownest the year of Thy goodness!

How very often must Zion have sung this psalm in the fall of the year when a thousand farmers gathered their crops and counted their increase in flocks and herds.

Oh yes, God very often has crowned the year of His goodness so that His footsteps dropped with fatness.

Yes, also this year the Lord has blessed us with good crops and excellent food and drink. I imagine that the fat things of the earth are stored and being stored by the millions of tons.

God's footsteps drop with fatness here in our America of plenty.

* * * *

However, it is not so that David's mind was exclusively

busy with the things of this earth when he composed this psalm.

I think that David understood very well that the things of this earth are but a picture of the things of a better earth and a better heaven. Even as Jesus would say many years later: "all these things (that is, the things of God's Kingdom) are done in parables."

Therefore it is so wicked to be busy on the day of Thanksgiving with the things of this earth exclusively, and to forget the spiritual year of God's goodness.

It provokes God to wrath when the world is talking about Thanksgiving while they stuff themselves with turkey and chicken, with mince pies and cranberries, but forget to worship Him who revealed Himself as the great Savior of His world. The world emphasizes the things of the earth, of time, of the flesh, of the natural senses, but forgets that they have a soul and body that must be used in worship of God. They forget the "reasonable service!"

Oh, I do not minimize the beauties and the delicacies of nature. It is God who filleth man with bread and gladness of heart. It arouses thanksgiving when our table is spread with the bounties of His earth.

But what the world forgets and we should remember is that man does not live by bread. The Holy Spirit even says: Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not? And Jesus said by the same Spirit: Labor not for the bread that perisheth

Lazarus desired to be fed with crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. That was all. But subsequent events prove that he desired much more the Bread from heaven, and that is Jesus and the salvation of God.

It is far better to die of hunger and thirst and to have God for your portion, than to have bread enough and to spare but to be not rich in God. Suppose you do fare sumptuously every day, but have to spend your eternity in hell, what profit do you have of all your feasting?

Moreover, will not your feasting on earth be a witness against you in the great day of the Lord Sabaoth?

I shudder when I see, hear and observe the world's day of Thanksgiving.

And I pity those who fare sumptuously every day. The nights of eternity in hell will be so very, very long.

Yes, God crowneth the year of His goodness, and His footsteps drop with fatness. But when you go and exegete these words, be sure and mention more than rain on parched fields, flocks in the meadows, and corn in the cribs.

Because it means much more than that.

* * * *

The year of Jehovah's goodness.

What is it?

It is the same as the Day of His salvation.

The abundant watering of the ridges; the springing corn, the green pastures of the wilderness, the merry flocks and herds — they all are figures, pictures, symbols of something that is far better than meat and life here below.

We sing of it: "The lovingkindness of my God is more than life to me!"

The year of God's goodness? Jehovah has taken out time to be gracious; He has made a pause that refreshes; He breaks the stream of time in order to show us an eternity of love.

Let us be glad on Thanksgiving Day, but let it be the gladness of Psalm 65. Be sure and pay your vows to God and remember your distresses when you made that vow.

Here is the year of God's goodness and His footsteps of fatness: He purged away your sins and iniquity. That is His goodness in negative terms. And positively? Listen and I will tell you in the words of David, no, of the Holy Ghost: He chose you and caused the men and women and children of His goodpleasure to approach unto Him!

And here is the wonder of it all: when you approached Him you were not scorched by His righteous wrath.

No, you were not burned away because of your sins and iniquity. The very reverse happened: He said to you that you might dwell in His courts so that you might be satisfied with the goodness of His house!

Oh, I think it a wonderful thing that we first go to God's house on the Day of Thanksgiving, and then we go home and eat and drink.

Let that rhythm fill all your life! And mine.

* * * *

Thanksgiving Day is a day of merriment and gladness. I have no objection at all.

But remember it is only so for those whom God chose from all eternity. If you are not one of God's chosen it would fit you better to begin to cry and to weep all the miserable days of your life on earth.

Oh, I know that these words hurt. But it is the truth. What will it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

If your sins and iniquity are not purged away, they shall stay with you and accompany you when you make your last journey to God. And according to His justice and right-

eousness He shall demand these sins from your empty hand.

But I hear you ask: if that is so, how then can anyone be glad and rejoice? Is it not so that everyone is wicked and perverse?

Listen to verse 5 of this wondrous psalm: Terrible things in righteousness wilt Thou answer us, O God of our salvation!

Do you know to what the poet refers here? He refers us to the cross of Jesus, and in that cross you have your answer.

God gave that terrible answer when He bruised Jesus in the place of those whom He chose from all eternity.

He cast away His dearly beloved Son, so that He might cause you and me to approach unto Him. Jesus experienced hell so that you might dwell in His courts, and might go to church and eat and drink of the words of life. Jesus had to become ever so hungry and cry: I thirst, so that you might become satisfied with His goodness and relish all the fatness of God's footsteps.

You are drawn ever closer to God, and finally you will rest in His bosom, but Jesus cried in the awful hour of darkness: Why, O why hast Thou forsaken Me?!

You may go to heaven. You may even taste a little bit of heaven here on earth, and it is well. But remember the terrible answer of God in righteousness which was spoken on Golgotha. Here is that answer which was so terrible: My Son, you must go to hell!

If you want to give thanks on Thanksgiving Day then give thanks for those things that came by unspeakable terror for Jesus.

Oh yes: Thou crownest the year of Thy goodness and Thy footsteps drop with fatness!

Blessed Thanksgiving!

* * * *

His footsteps drop with fatness!

Shall we try and follow those footsteps?

The first one we cannot see: it was taken in the never begun eternity. That step is as old as God. He said: I love thee with an everlasting love!

The second step was when that love found you. And also that second step you cannot see: it was taken in your inmost heart. God took that step in a place which we call your subconsciousness. It resulted in your regeneration.

The third step of great fatness was taken when you were converted. At first it did not look like fatness at all, for you began to cry. You saw God and wept. But when such weeping is translated in heavenly speech, the very angels rejoice.

The fourth step is the step which gave you the faith of Jesus, and through it you began to know that your sins were forgiven. We call it justification.

The fifth step is called sanctification. And it is of the fatness of God. It is all of Him. Sanctification means that you begin to hate sin and love goodness. You feel yourself drawn to all that is really beautiful and virtuous, but you

shudder inwardly because of all wickedness and filth, especially your own.

And the final step is glorification. And that begins already here on earth. You can see the glorification of the saints in their eyes, you can hear it in their song, you can feel it in their behaviour. Like seeks like: you begin to sing: I am a companion of all those that fear Thee. There is a little bit of heaven on earth.

Have your Thanksgiving days, but remember God's day and year of goodness, and mark His footsteps that drop with fatness. His should be the praise forever. G.V.

Report of Eastern Ladies' League

The Ladies' League meeting was held Oct. 23, at our Southwest Protestant Reformed Church. The meeting was opened by singing Psalter No. 374, our theme song, and Ps. 42 from the Holland Psalter. Our President, Mrs. D. Jonker, read from Deut. 6 vs. 1 to 15 after which she offered prayer. A welcome was extended to all the ladies present. A ladies' trio from our Hope Church sang Psalter No. 236.

The President then introduced the speaker for the evening, Rev. B. Woudenberg, who spoke on "Television in the Home." He showed us how a Protestant Reformed home should be in complete accord with the Word of God as referred to in Deut. 6 vs. 5 to 9. The essence of our home life should be in the fear of the Lord with the members of the home, as also our going out and coming in. The love of God should be our central theme, teaching our children about God and they seeing the love of God in their parents. It must be seen in the children going to school, the father to his work, and the mother in the home. Where then does television fit into the Protestant Reformed home, and will it have evil effects? Much corruption from the world can enter from some of the programs. Others are of a neutral nature and some permissible, but none of this must distract or detract from the godly life in the home. The inward desire of the old man of sin is still with us on one hand while the principle of the new man struggles as on a battlefield, striving with our old carnal nature, so that in the temptation to distract us from worthwhile things, hatred finds a place in the home instead of love. The question then remains, am I and members of my family strong enough to resist the temptation of turning on the good and turning off the evil? What proceeds out of the love of God? We should control the set and not let the set control us.

Mrs. Jonker thanked the speaker for his timely address. The collection for *The Standard Bearer* was taken while we sang Psalter No. 215. The trio again favored us with the number, "Close to His Heart." The business of the evening was taken care of, the new board members introduced and the retiring members were thanked for their services. After singing Psalter No. 325, our new president, Mrs. M. Schipper, closed with prayer. Refreshments were served in the basement. Mrs. G. Spruyt, Reporter

THE STANDARD BEARER

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

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

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Communications relative to contents should be addressed to
Rev. H. Hoeksema, 1139 Franklin St., S. E.,
Grand Rapids 7, Mich.

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

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

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

Subscription price: \$5.00 per year

Entered as Second Class matter at Grand Rapids, Michigan

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EDITORIALS

Trouble About Nigeria

As I said before, I do not know what the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church meant when they instructed the committee that was appointed to come to the next Synod with clear-cut recommendation regarding certain matters connected with the dispute about the TCNN, also to study the implications of the ordination vows made by their missionaries.

I was not present at the sessions of Synod.

But I cannot understand the significance of this instruction to the committee unless it means that missionaries never promise to abide by the doctrine of the Church as expressed in the Confessions nor sign the Formula of Subscription.

If this is not the meaning, if Synod proceeded from the assumption that missionaries as well as ministers are bound by the Confessions and by the Formula of Subscription, then either I can see no sense in studying the ordination vows or the committee is supposed to suggest an attempt to show that those ordination vows may very well be understood to be in harmony with teaching in the TCNN.

But the latter is impossible.

Dr. Boer cannot teach the Reformed truth according to the standards of the Church in the TCNN. He will not even attempt to do so, for he realizes full well that this is an impossibility. Besides, the very fact that he is so eager to teach in the TCNN shows that he does not care for the definite Reformed truth.

But we will see, the Lord willing what the committee will report on this matter.

* * * *

The second item which the committee is supposed to study and concerning which it is to come with clear-cut recommendations to the next Synod, reads as follows: "The relation of the Christian Reformed Church to the TCNN, taking into account our church polity as well as our theological distinctiveness."

It seems to me that this should not be difficult for the committee to decide. Our church polity is governed by the Church Order and our theological distinctiveness is such that it is rather clearly and fully expressed in the three formulas of unity. The Church Order in art. 53 states:

"The ministers of the Word of God and likewise the professors of theology (which also behooves other professors and school teachers) shall subscribe to the three formulas of unity, namely, the Belgic Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordrecht, 1618-19, and the ministers of the Word who refuse to do so shall de facto be suspended from their office by the consistory or classis until they shall have given a full statement, and if they ob-

stinately persist in refusing, they shall be deposed from their office."

This is our church polity, and this at the same time denoted our theological distinctiveness.

This surely also implies that Dr. Boer, in the capacity of teacher or professor in the TCNN, is obliged to cause his instruction to be in harmony with the standards of the Christian Reformed Church. And this is impossible in a school where all kinds of professors give instruction.

The investigation of the committee on this point, therefore, should result in some such statement as the following:

"The relation of the Christian Reformed Church to the TCNN, taking into account our church polity and our theological distinctiveness, is such that it cannot support that institution nor permit one of their own missionaries to give instruction there.

"Grounds:

"a. The teaching of our missionaries must at all times be distinctively Reformed in harmony with the standards of the Christian Reformed Church to which all professors and teachers subscribe.

"b. To give such distinctive Reformed instruction in the TCNN is, in the nature of the case, impossible."

The rest of the items which the committee must investigate are, to me, of minor importance; and, besides, I am not sufficiently acquainted with the situation in Nigeria to express judgment on the matter.

The latter is, for instance, the case with point c, which speaks of the relation of the Nigerian General Conference to the TCNN particularly as to the appointment as members of the Board of governors. I hope to learn more about this when the report of the committee is published.

The items *d* and *e* are rather interesting and suggestive. Item *d* speaks of the relation of the Benue and Tiv churches to the TCNN. Now it is evident from the rest of the report that, at least, the Benue church favors contact with the TCNN. For in point 3 of the synodical decision we read: "That Synod permit special gifts to be solicited for the native church which desires to be participate in the TCNN, and that it be understood that this does not further commit Christian Reformed Church to the TCNN at this time inasmuch as the support is given to the native church and the responsibility for expansion of the TCNN is the responsibility of the native church."

And one of the grounds given for the above decision is that "the Benue church has requested such help."

This is a rather strange decision, too.

The Synod of the Christian Reformed Church does not wish to commit itself further to the support of the TCNN and does not want to be responsible for its expansion. Nevertheless, it recommended the solicitation of funds for a church of its own in Nigeria for the very and avowed purpose that this church may support the TCNN! I ask: is it true, then, that the support of the TCNN rests only with the responsibil-

ity of the native church? If I give money to a certain party for the support of Christian Science or Arminianism, is that party alone responsible for the use he makes of the money given him, or is not even the first responsibility mine? The latter is, of course, the truth. The same is the case here. The Christian Reformed Church cannot shed its responsibility for the support of the TCNN by merely giving money to the native church though it knows that this native church will use the money for the support and expansion of the TCNN. This is nothing but camouflage and dishonesty, unworthy of anyone but especially of a Synod.

But at any rate we learn here that the Benue church favors the TCNN.

How come?

We surmise that this is under the influence of Dr. Boer.

And may we not also rightly surmise that this is related to item *e* of the matters which the committee, appointed by Synod, must investigate? This item reads as follows: "The relation of the teachings of our Missionary Professor to the distinctive positions and practices held by the Benue and Tiv churches."

What does this mean? To me this sounds somewhat ambiguous. It speaks, not of the relation of Dr. Boer to the Benue and Tiv churches, but of his teachings. Moreover, it speaks of the relation of his teachings to the distinctive positions (doctrines, I suppose) and practices of the two native churches. To me that can only mean one thing: that there was expressed doubt on the floor of the Synod concerning the teachings of Dr. Boer so that, while the Benue and Tiv churches hold the distinctively Reformed position in doctrine and practice, he does not.

This is how I read this part of the report although I could wish that Synod had expressed itself more clearly on this matter.

The two last items on which the committee is supposed to shed light on the Synod of 1959 concern the relation of the Missionary Professor to the Nigerian General Conference as, for instance, matters that concern the supervision of his teaching at the TCNN and other problems; while the very last item speaks of the need of a distinctively Reformed training on the Benue and Tiv field.

Of this last I would certainly be in favor.

I will close this review of Synod's decision by once more emphasizing that I cannot understand how Synod had the courage to go ahead and appoint Dr. Boer for another year as professor in the TCNN, not only in the face of strong opposition from the churches, but especially in the light of what Synod states at the end of its own decision, namely:

"There are many aspects of this problem that have not been defined or that have not come to sufficient clarity."

Synod should have waited.

H.H.

About The Three Points

In one of the recent copies of *De Wachter*, the Holland paper of the Christian Reformed Church, the editor, the Rev. E. Van Halsema, reflects on an editorial I wrote in *The Standard Bearer* about correspondence with the Christian Reformed Church. In that editorial I took the stand that, before our churches could enter into the relation of correspondence with the Christian Reformed Church, we must first have a thorough discussion about what took place in 1924, not only about the notorious "Three Points," but also about all the history connected with them and with the entire "common grace" question.

From the above editorial of Van Halsema in *De Wachter* the editor, evidently, differs from this position of mine.

That is, of course, his privilege.

But the main ground he adduces for this stand, as I understand him, is that the history of 1924 is now thirty-five years old and that it is no use to rehearse it once more. We better let bygones be bygones, and the Dutch expression has it, "we moeten geen oude koeien uit de sloot halen."

With this I cannot possibly agree.

I have several reasons for this disagreement, but I will mention only one.

It is this that I consider it a grievous sin that, in 1924-25, the Christian Reformed Church cast out faithful and thoroughly Reformed ministers, two of whom, of which I am one, are still alive, together with the large majority of their consistories, by deposing them from their office.

They did not leave the Christian Reformed Church, but they were cast out because they could not possibly agree with the "Three Points." They did not intend to leave the Christian Reformed Church, but they wanted the liberty to discuss the "Three Points" and expose their error within the Church. But they were expelled.

This was, for me, and for others of our ministers with me, especially also the Rev. Ophoff, a very grievous experience.

But it is also a heinous sin before God. It is about this sin especially as well as about other matters that we must have a thorough discussion before we enter into the relationship of correspondence with the Christian Reformed Church.

To repent and confess, — that is the only Christian way.

* * * *

But it was not so much about the article by the Rev. Van Halsema that I meant to write.

I mean to reflect on an article written in *Torch and Trumpet* by the Rev. F. H. Klooster. He evidently does not agree with Van Halsema, for he writes about 1924 and the "Three Points."

About this, then, in our next issue, D.V.

H.H.

OUR DOCTRINE

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

PART TWO

CHAPTER V

The Locusts Out of the Abyss

Revelation 9:1-12

What we have therefore in the words of the passage we are now discussing is nothing but the picture of the letting loose of one of the reserve forces of hell over the world of men. Satan has his regular troops. They are the powers of the air, the spiritual host of wickedness in high places. With them he always works. With them he always offers battle against the Christ and His people. And against them we must be armed with the whole armor of God. With these he always stands in close contact with his human servants on earth. Through them Satan influences the minds and hearts, the thoughts and the affections of men, so that he may be able to maintain his position as the prince of this world. And over against them Christ also has His angels, strengthening and protecting His people. Through this regular army of Satan, under the influence of them, develops what we call "the spirit of the age." If we say that the spirit of the present age is humanistic, we must not imagine that the development of the same has nothing to do with the regular hellish troops of the devil. On the contrary, also that spirit is come to the consciousness of the wicked world under the influence of the powers of the air. They are everywhere. They stand behind the throne of kings and emperors, as we learn, for instance, from the tenth chapter of the prophecy of Daniel. They control the minds of the leaders of the people. They influence the thoughts and the teachings of the infidel professors in our universities. And in a thousand ways they are influential in causing to develop the so-called "spirit of the age."

But of these our text does not speak. No, it speaks of special forces, of the reserve troops of hell, of the army of maneuver of the devil. Not of the powers of the air, but of the spirits of the abyss, that are commonly bound and imprisoned but that are let loose at the command of Christ over the wicked world, does the text speak.

And what is the teaching of the Word with regard to these wicked spirits? When are they to be let loose? Whenever the world is ripening for judgment. The sinner and the sinful world in general chooses to do the works of Satan and his kingdom. They choose to trample under foot the precepts of the Most High and to walk in ways of darkness. And therefore, entirely in harmony with their own choice the Lord surrenders them to the devil and his host. And as they continue and reach the stage of sin and evil in the which they have fully surrendered themselves to the powers of darkness,

He sends them more devils and more demons, that they may actually increase their sin and become ripe for the great day of the Lord. This we read time and again in Scripture. When the leaders of the Jews blaspheme the work of Jesus and prove that they love darkness rather than light, we find that Jesus begins to teach in parables for the very purpose that the things of the kingdom of heaven may remain hid to them. After Paul has given a description of the idolatry and foolishness of the heathen world, he continues to say: "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts." And again: "For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections." And therefore we find this relation in Scripture. Man has surrendered himself to the service of the devil. In this service he stands in the power and under the influence of Satan and his host generally, and the powers of the air have dominion over him. The more he serves sin and Satan, the more this power of the evil hosts in high places is emphasized, until, when gradually the world becomes ripe for the judgments of God, this power is made stronger by the letting loose of the reserve forces of Satan, the evil spirits out of the abyss. And it is that emphasis of the power of Satan over the wicked world that is pictured in the words of our passage. Again, therefore, in harmony with the character of the trumpets, there is just a little emphasis of the general conditions. If the general influence of the powers of the air may be compared to one-fourth, the influence is now increased to one-third by the liberation of these locusts, of this infernal army of the reserve forces of the devil.

But what is the special work of these infernal spirits? The text emphasizes that it is their task to torment men. With emphasis this is stated. Their power is as the power of scorpions. This power is in their tails. Their torment is as the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. They are not allowed to kill, but only to torment such as have not the seal of God in their foreheads. And the effect of this torment is such that in those days men seek death, but shall not be able to find it. They desire to die, but death fleeth from them. And they may torment these men that have not the seal of God on their foreheads for five months. From the outset we may say that these five months have no other symbolical significance than this, that these infernal spirits may serve their full time. The five months are evidently in harmony with the picture that is given of the locusts. We are told that the time during which locusts may be expected is generally five months of the summer. Not as if any swarm of locusts would continually remain in a country for that length of time: for their work is generally finished much more quickly. But five months is the time during which they may be expected. And the meaning therefore is that these spirits may serve their full time, and do as much harm as they possibly can.

But the question is: what is meant by this torment, and what is its nature?

H.H.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Ishmael Blessed

Whenever Ishmael is considered in Scripture, he is usually, by the Reformed, regarded as a reprobate. He is so viewed in Rev. Woudenberg's recent, "The Casting Out of Ishmael." Inasmuch as we do not hold with those who believe God's grace can be general and common, we humbly submit these thoughts pertaining to Hagar and her son.

As Protestant Reformed we do most firmly believe that God's goodness is always particular, that therefore He never blesses the reprobate, and that this being true, we cannot make the false distinction that some blessings are temporal, rather than eternal or spiritual. For God neither blesses nor loves the reprobate, no, not in time, nor in eternity. No "common grace" is ever shown to them. He gives them many good gifts; never blessings!

Since this is all true, then Ishmael must be, not reprobate, but elect!

For we read that God gave Abraham in his old age promise concerning his wife in the words, "*I will bless HER*," referring to the gift of a son. Abraham responded to this not in the strongest faith, having his heart set (understandably) on Ishmael, crying, "O that Ishmael might live before Thee!" Immediately this touching plea was answered: "As for Ishmael, I have heard thee. Behold, *I have blessed HIM*" (Gn. 17:16-20). Abraham correctly understood the word "bless" in both instances to be used in the same sense of gracious favor. It will not do to interpret the word to mean favor in the case of Sarah, but not in that of Ishmael. It will not do to render the text, "As for Ishmael, I have heard thee, — i.e., heard thy prayer, 'O that Ishmael might live,' — and behold, I have *cursed* him!"

That one thought out of all Scripture ("I have blessed him.") is sufficient. A similar case we have in the rich young ruler. In a conversation with the Lord he revealed himself as proud, self-righteous, avaricious and Christ-rejecting. Yet we read that "Jesus . . . loved him" (Mk. 10:21). We may therefore expect to see both Ishmael and this rich young ruler in heaven. For God blessed the one and loved the other.

That Ishmael in Gal. 4 is spoken of as being born after the flesh makes no difference. Paul is employing allegory (4:24), which is an extended metaphor (an implied comparison), and compares Hagar and Ishmael not in their proper persons, but as illustrative of spiritual truth. He considers Ishmael in his unregeneracy, and Hagar in her capacity as a female slave. Then, Ishmael may have been as mocking, as wild and spiritually senseless a character as possible. The rich young ruler was equally as wretched by nature. But neither of these men were left in their sins. Whom the Lord loveth, and blesseth, He doth not leave to perish. The same allegorical reference is apparent in Rom. 9, altho Ishmael is not even mentioned in this passage, nor is

his eternal state here, or anywhere, negatively determined. We do not read, "*Ishmael have I hated*." Scripture, as already indicated, says the opposite: "Ishmael . . . I have blessed . . ." (Gn. 17:20).

Hagar, also, was elect. For when the Angel of the Lord (the Lord Himself) met her, He spoke kindly to her, promising her more than the mere providential gift of many descendants, but went on to prescribe the name for the son promised (16:11). Where in all Scripture does God thus prescribe the name of a reprobate? Invariably such instances apply only to the elect. Furthermore, the reason set down for giving and so naming this child was in answer to Hagar's prayer (Ishmael means "God heareth."), "*because the Lord hath heard thy affliction*." Affliction is the portion of the elect, whereas reprobates are punished. Besides, this is the same language God used of Israel in Egyptian bondage: "I have surely seen the affliction of My people" (Ex. 3:7; cf. 2:23, 24). In short, the Angel of God bade her to "fear not" (21:17). The Lord never directs this language to a reprobate, not in any of the many "fear nots" of the Bible. For reprobates have everything to fear, and it would be better for them to die on the spot in infancy or childhood than to increase their condemnation by living in sin any longer. "Fear not" is expressive of electing love. Wherefore Hagar is cast out bodily by Sarah, "in a figure" (Heb. 11:19) according to Scripture, but not eternally by God (cf. Ro. 11:2 with Ps. 43:2; 89:38). God blessed Ishmael, but He never blesses a reprobate. Then he is elect, tho the covenant did not descend in his line (Gn. 17:21). Japheth is also elect, tho the covenant did not continue in his line.

R.C.H.

Missionary Notes

It is rather difficult for our well-fed (I mean with the Gospel) Protestant Reformed Churches to appreciate the position of the Isabel Reformed Church prior to the coming of Rev. H. Mensch in April of 1953.

For it can be truthfully said that the sheep here in Isabel were not well cared for by the Eureka Classis. They were short of ministers, it is true. But that does not alter the fact that Isabel was receiving a very, very little shepherding by the ministers in this vicinity, such as B. E. Bosma, the late W. Grossmann and R. Klaut.

Yesterday I went to the Secretary-Treasurer of the Isabel congregation to see the records of the congregation in the past. I found that the congregation of Isabel during the past twenty years, prior to the coming of Rev. Mensch, never had more than nine (9) *sermons* a year! They did not receive nine *Sundays*, but nine *services*, and sometimes less. The record shows that in 1932 they were allotted six (6) services in one year. This meant that more often than not the congregation saw a minister for the sum-total of ten (10) hours! And that in an entire year of 52 Lord's Days!

During those twenty years there is no record that the congregation ever received any financial support at all. They

hardly needed it. They paid out the unbelievable sum of \$180.00 a year for preaching. They also paid out dues for the Classis during those years. But they received no financial aid at all. What did they need it for; to pay that \$180.00 per year?!

During that time they read sermons, and that, too, mostly in the German language. And, I am solemnly assured, that often they heard the same sermon every three or four weeks from the aged elder! What became of catechetical instruction one needs no great imagination to surmise. And that for twenty years! Small wonder that the congregation dwindled in number and that the faith of those who remained was severely put to the test.

One can imagine the joy of these children of God when Herman Mensch, graduate from the Protestant Reformed Seminary, came to these parts and preached here in the fall of 1952! That Isabel conceived the plan to call Rev. Mensch is understandable.

On November 23, 1952, a congregational meeting was held in the Isabel congregation. Rev. R. Klaudt, according to the minutes of the congregation, presided. Eureka Classis proposed that Isabel call Rev. Mensch as their pastor, and that he be also a kind of "missionary" pastor in Heil, N. D. (100 miles north from Isabel) and in Highmore, S. D., about 140 miles to the S.E. from Isabel. Later also the congregation of Aberdeen, S.D. (165 miles due east from Isabel) was added. This meant that Isabel had Rev. Mensch to preach for them every third Sunday. They received *two* sermons then! Mensch also preached during the week, when he would be absent on the Sunday he should be in Isabel. Besides, he faithfully conducted catechism during the week!

The Classis Eureka did not give Isabel *direct* financial aid. This was paid Rev. Mensch (Isabel thinks it was \$2000.00 per year) for traveling expenses and for labors in Heil, N. D., Highmore, S. D. and in Aberdeen. They (Isabel) were the beneficiaries of the entire set-up! They were *joint*-beneficiaries with the other churches just mentioned. At most the share of Isabel in cold figures was, as best they can compute, about \$1,000.00 in two years. Isabel was reminded once by letter: since, we, Classis Eureka, pay the lion's share of Mensch's salary, don't stand in his way to preach in the other churches!

Hence, when Isabel requested in Jan. 1957 for \$2,000.00 support and were informed that this "could no longer be given" that was also a bit unfactual on the part of the "Executive." And when Isabel was reminded that they were unthankful children, since they did not express thanks for all this help of \$1,000.00 in a fourth of a century, plus nine sermons a year at the most, it was, to be sure, a nice bit of the German school-master that came to manifestation!

Imagine what a spectre it presented to the eye of the brethren and sisters in Isabel to no longer have the preaching of Rev. Mensch, Protestant Reformed preaching to be sure, and go back to those who robbed them of their minister by "tabling" the matter of support, and then go back to nine

sermons per year, and that, too, to preachers for whom they had learned to have a profound disrespect!

Now you can somewhat see that the brethren and sisters in Isabel would "hold what they have"!

Rev. Mensch could not continue here. For that he assumes the responsibility. But his work stands!

And Isabel, I am sure, is profoundly grateful for the labors of the undersigned and his help-meet. G.L.

Poem by Mrs. Alice Banta, taken from "The Gospel of Grace Messenger"

THE TRIUMPHANT WORD

The Word of God shall triumph
O Church of Christ, fight on!
Though dark the night of conflict
Soon shall the morning dawn.
The armor of the Spirit
In battle shall prevail.
Ye struggling saints, despair not,
Though gates of hell assail.

The Word of God shall triumph,
Though unbelief abounds,
Though worldly wisdom's error
O'er all the earth resounds.
Though vain, deceitful pleasures
In carnal hearts hold sway,
And godless, taunting scorners
Deride the narrow way.

The Word of God shall triumph,
Though sorrows, trials, cares
Becloud thy path, O Christian —
Though steadfast, earnest prayers
Appear unheard, unanswered,
Bow to His holy will.
His truth abides forever;
He loves His children still.

The Word of God shall triumph.
Ye saints, do not despond.
With eyes of faith look forward
To Salem's realm beyond.
Built on the Rock of Ages
Your hope shall rest secure;
In God's true love abiding,
Trust in His promise sure.

The Word of God shall triumph.
When Judgment trumpets call,
Sun, moon, and stars shall vanish —
The earth in ruins fall;
But through eternal ages
His truth divine shall stand
The theme of songs victorious
In yonder Glory-land.

The Word of God shall triumph.
O blood-bought church, rejoice!
Led by His Holy Spirit,
Lift up in song thy voice.
Soon shall thy vile oppressors
Be overthrown, cast down —
And thine shall be the Kingdom,
The glory, and the crown!

— ANN HOPPE

A CLOUD OF WITNESSES

Concerning Ishmael

There has come to my attention since the appearance of my article entitled "The Casting Out Of Ishmael" in the October 15 issue of *The Standard Bearer* (page 31) several questions concerning my presentation of the spiritual status of Ishmael. These were brought to my attention first in several private conversations and now in the appearance of a "Contribution" entitled "Ishmael Blessed" submitted by the Rev. R. C. Harbach. These responses are appreciated and I am every happy to use this article for a further explanation of my position.

The question that arises is whether Ishmael in our study of Scripture is to be considered by us as regenerate or unregenerate, believing or unbelieving, and ultimately as elect or reprobate. A superficial perusal of the various passages of Scripture which have reference to Ishmael would seem to lend support to both propositions, leaving us with a sort of dilemma or apparent contradiction. To the serious student of the Scriptures, being convinced of the necessary inner harmony of God's Word, this can only mean that the matter is worthy of a deeper and more intensive examination. Hence we welcome this occasion to examine the various passages in question. First we would like to review those passages which speak badly of Ishmael, and secondly those which seem to speak more positively.

Those portions of Scripture that reflect negatively upon Ishmael are the following.

1. The birth of Ishmael was occasioned by circumstances which were spiritually very unbecoming. Not only was Abraham's union with Hagar bigamy, which although more frequent in Bible history is nonetheless never condoned by God, but it was perpetrated because of an expressed lack of faith by all that were concerned. Although God had specifically promised Abraham that he would bring forth a great and blessed seed, Sarai after many years had passed by doubted the promise of God and accused Him of having restrained her from bearing. Therefore she plotted to raise up a seed unto herself and Abram through the use of her handmaid Hagar. Abram also failed to use spiritual discretion and leadership in the home when he acceded to this scheme. Even Hagar cannot be counted guiltless for allowing herself to be used in such a way. We might feel, however, that this can not be counted against Ishmael for it would hardly be just to hold him guilty for the sin which his parents committed even though his birth was the result of the sin. Nonetheless Paul in Galatians does designate Ishmael as the one "born after the flesh" and evidently considers it to be an earmark of his spiritual character.

2. Perhaps of greater importance regarding Ishmael personally is the prophecy concerning him given to Hagar prior to Ishmael's birth, and recorded in Gen. 16:12. This prophecy concerning him given to Hagar to Ishmael's birth, and recorded in Gen. 16:12. This prophecy consists of three different parts. The first says of him, "He will be a wild man" or literally translated, "He will be a wild ass among men." He is compared to the animal described in Job 39:5-8, "Who hath sent out the wild ass free? or who hath loosed the bands of the wild ass? Whose house I have made the wilderness, and the barren land his dwellings. He scorneth the multitude of the city, neither regardeth he the crying of the driver. The range of mountains is his pasture, and he searcheth after every green thing." This would seem to designate Ishmael as a wild unruly man unwilling to be bound by law or the will of God but inhabiting the desolate unblessed expanses of the wilderness. The second element of this prophecy reads, "his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him." Here it is said that Ishmael will be a pugnacious, warring man, a stranger to the blessedness of peace, and like his nephew Esau living by the sword. Finally it is stated, "He shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren." Geographically this had literal fulfillment as we read in Gen. 25:18 concerning Ishmael's children, "And they dwelt from Havilah unto Shur that is before Egypt, as thou goest toward Assyria." But the text would seem to designate more — namely, that Ishmael maintained an existence independent from his brother Isaac, and for any one to maintain an existence independent from the promised line of Isaac and his seed can hardly be considered a blessing.

3. That this prophecy very soon began to show its fulfillment is intimated by the prayer of Abraham recorded in Gen. 17:18, "O that Ishmael might live before thee!" It is no doubt true that this text has its primary significance in the fact that Abraham wished that the covenant promise might be carried on through Ishmael; but it also clearly implies that at that time already Ishmael showed himself to be unwilling to live before the face of God. Already at that time he was like the wild ass of the wilderness, unwilling to submit to the spiritual instruction of his father.

4. By far the most revealing facts about Ishmael are those recorded in Gen. 21 and reflected upon by Paul in Gal. 4:22-30. In these passages Ishmael is revealed not only to be "born after the flesh" but he is compared to the covenant of Sinai, "The one from Mount Sinai which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children." Gal. 4:24, 25. It is true that this is an allegory; but, if the allegory is properly drawn as it must be because it is found in Scripture, it must mean that Ishmael in his life was actually in bondage to the law. The thought is that Abraham, even so many years before the formal law was given from Sinai, maintained the rules of a Godly life within his household. He insisted that all of the members of his household should live in accord with the

principles of the Divine Will. To the child of the promise who was spiritually alive, life under this strict rule of his father was a life of freedom for it served to lead him in the way that his inner heart desired to go. So it would have been for Ishmael if he had been spiritually regenerated. But, in fact, for Ishmael life within the household of Abraham was a bondage. He had no desire for the Godly life, and for him to have to observe the strict rule of Godly life only served to irritate his soul. This irritation of soul finally erupted in his mockery and persecution of Isaac at the great feast that was held on the day that Isaac was weaned. Had Ishmael been spiritual he would have held Isaac as being very dear to his heart, for he would have recognized Isaac as being the first fulfillment of the covenant promise and the one through whom God would ultimately work salvation. But Ishmael did not care for salvation; and, therefore, he recognized Isaac as nothing more than his competitor for supremacy within the family. He mocked Isaac and persecuted him, thereby spurning the promise of God, spurning the covenant, and in reality spurning the Christ. It was but proper that Ishmael should be cast out for he was spiritually dead. He was at the command of God as much as excommunicated from the church.

This conclusion would no doubt be generally accepted if it were not for the fact that there are other passages which seem to speak more favorably of Ishmael.

1. The first of these passages is found in Gen. 16 where we read that the angel of the Lord met Hagar, instructed her return to her mistress, told her to name her son "Ishmael; because the Lord hath heard thy affliction," and gave certain prophecies concerning Ishmael. This passage might be used to show that there was spiritual life in Hagar and that she found favor with God; but even then we should be very careful because we know from Scripture that at times God deals with people within the sphere of the covenant as if they were true members of the covenant, while in later life these same people fall away and are never again restored. The prime example of this is of course King Saul. Concerning Ishmael personally, however, this passage has very little to say apart from the prophecy which we have already treated and which could not be counted as a favorable promise in any sense of the word.

2. More important in this respect is the answer of God to the prayer of Abraham found in Gen. 17:20, "And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation." We should note concerning this that the passage is concerned in the greater part with the temporal seed of Ishmael and the extent to which it should be multiplied. This is nothing more than God had already told Hagar in Gen. 16:10 and does not in itself imply a favorable disposition by God, — that is, it partakes of the nature of a prophecy more

than of a blessing. Nonetheless the actual word "blessed" does appear also in this passage for it states, "And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him." The question arises, therefore, whether there is any record in Scripture of an actual spiritual blessing in connection with Ishmael; and such a blessing we do find. From Gen. 25:13 we learn that the two oldest sons of Ishmael were Nebajoth and Kedar. Concerning these two sons we read further in Isaiah 60:7, "All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebajoth shall minister unto thee: they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory." Thus God had ordained eternally a blessing for Ishmael, not personally, for personally he was like a wild ass that would not submit to the rule of the covenant; but an elect segment of his seed was chosen to be converted from the wild ways of their father so as to submit to the easy yoke of Isaac's seed.

3. One other passage which might seem to cause difficulty in this regard is found in Gen. 21:20. There we read concerning the later life of Ishmael, "And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer." Although this passage might seem to imply a certain favorable disposition of God toward Ishmael, it need not signify anything more than that God in His providence watched over Ishmael so that His prophecies concerning Ishmael might be fulfilled.

In conclusion we would reiterate our position that Ishmael stands in the Scriptures as a type or symbol to all ages of the unregenerate seed that grows up within the sphere of the covenant. Although they received the best of covenant instruction, it finds no place within their hearts. All of this rich covenant instruction and guidance only serves to irritate their souls and drive them farther into sin, until at last they must be cast out from the Church.

In regard to this symbolic significance, however, Ishmael differs somewhat from Esau. Esau is typical of the reprobate; for such there is no possibility of salvation, but they are inevitably hardened unto perdition. Ishmael is typical of the unregenerate seed within the covenant. Many, if not most, of these may be also like Esau, reprobate which can never be renewed unto repentance. But there may also be those who begin their life in the unregenerate state, and who nevertheless in their later life are by the grace of God regenerated and converted to take their place, like Kedar and Nabajoth, with the elect of all ages.

Nonetheless, in regard to Ishmael personally, there is nothing in Scripture to suggest or necessitate the belief that such a conversion ever took place. From all that the Scriptures tell us, he is only the son born after the flesh who "shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman," and that heritage which he did not receive is ultimately Christ.

B.W.

FROM HOLY WRIT

Exposition of Matthew 24 and 25

IX.

(Matthew 24:27-44)

We have noticed, that, in the immediate context, Jesus states most emphatically that the "day" and the "hour" when the Son of Man shall come in his "Parousia" is known to no one. And to this rule there are no exceptions. Among all the millions of men, the great and the small, there is not one who can state the exact date of Christ's return. Even in the angel-world there is not one, not even Gabriel who stands before God, who knows the day or the hour. And, strange as it may seem, even the Son himself does not know this hour as to His human nature. He too lives in faith of that day and, therefore, as the chief prophet does not tell that day. This would be against the manner of the manifestation of the wisdom of God in the revelation of the Mystery of God's will.

Only the Father, the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit knows this day and hour of Christ's return. Hence, ours is not the prerogative to attempt curiously to pry into this unrevealed Mystery of God's will. Ours is but to live by the secret counsel of God as it has been revealed unto us, as being necessary for our salvation!

Our Scripture study deals this time with the verses 37-44 of this eschatological discourse of Jesus, recorded in Matthew 24. This passage reads as follows: "*And as (were) the days of Noah so shall be the Parousia (presence) of the Son of Man. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and they knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also be the Parousia (coming) of the Son of Man. Then shall two men be in the field: one shall be taken and the other left: two women shall be grinding at the mill: one is taken and the other left. Watch therefore: for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken through. Therefore be ye also ready: for in an hour that ye think not the Son of Man cometh.*"

The general thrust of this entire section is: Be ye *watchful*. Verse 42. And this element of the necessity of watchfulness is once more emphatically stated in verse 44, "Be ye therefore *ready*."

Concerning the Scriptural idea of *watchfulness* we would notice that it is most emphatically a *spiritual* watchfulness that is here referred to by Jesus.

This is evident, in the first place, from the meaning here employed by Jesus of the term itself. It is the verb *griegoreoo*. This verb is really derived from the perfect tense (*egreegora*) of the verb *egeiroo*. The latter term means: to raise one up, to rouse one. In the perfect tense it means: to be in a completed state of watchfulness, having been roused from sleep up till the present moment. Hence, a completed state of wakefulness!

As to the content and current usage of the verb to be watchful we notice that there are various passages in Scripture which shed a great deal of light on the spiritual-ethical nature of this watchfulness. It is a watchfulness which is rooted in *godly fear*, in childlike reverence for God. Thus, to cite a classic passage, we read in Hebrews 11:7 that Noah prepared an ark for the saving of his house, being "moved with godly fear." It is rooted in the proper attitude toward God. Lack of watchfulness is always willful disregard of the word and warnings of God. Hence, watchfulness is certainly spiritual-ethical in character, an act of worshipping God!

The Scriptures in their usage of this term give a content of *sanctification* to this watchfulness. Thus we read in Rev. 16:15, "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame." Watchfulness falls under a beatitude of Christ. One who is watchful is inwardly blessed, content, since he has been roused from sin's stupor and spiritual drunkenness. In this watchfulness he fights against sin with a free and good conscience, and thus he retains his *garments*, the raiments of Christ's righteousness. Thus he shall not be found naked, the shame of his sin will not be seen, for such a one is blessed of the Lord! In him sanctification is perfected in the fear of God. II Cor. 7:1.

It is, therefore, also a watchfulness of a living hope which is ours through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Thus we read in I Peter 1:13, "Wherefore having the loins of your mind girt up, being sober, hope perfectly for the grace to be brought unto you in the revelation of Jesus Christ." He who is watchful in hope will give heed to Paul's admonition in I Cor. 16:13, "... stand in the faith, quit you like men, be ye strong."

From this we may conclude, negatively, that this watchfulness is not a morbid, excited watching and waiting for the return of Christ. This is no watchfulness which causes a man to sell his farm, and sit on the porch, watching for the return of the Son of Man! That is contrary to all the sobering teaching of Scripture. They who do not labor shall not eat. II Thess. 3:10, 11. We have an office and calling here in life which we are to attend to as faithfully as the angels attend to their calling in heaven. Heid. Catechism, Question 124.

That this negative conclusion is wholly warranted is evident from various elements here in Matthew 24 and 25. Will not two men be in the field in their earthly calling?

And will the one that "is taken" not be busy in his "office and calling"? He is "watchful," is he not? And, again, will not two women be at the mill? And will not the one that "is taken" be equally at her tasks as is the other. This too shows, demonstrates that watchfulness is a spiritual-ethical activity of sanctification and hope in the child of God, who is roused from all sinful stupor. It is a seeking of the things above, where Christ is at the right hand of God. And it implies the mortification of our members which are upon the earth.

We shall see more of this when we discuss the parables of Jesus, recorded in the sequence of this eschatological discourse of our Lord in Matthew 24 and 25.

The underlying truth which makes this watchfulness necessary is the element of *surprise* in the Parousia of Christ and His coming with the clouds. We know not the day or the hour! In this matter of surprise we have the objective as well as the subjective. However, that objective surprise element is not disastrous for those who are watchful unto prayer right in and through their office and calling in life. The disaster is for those who are "unprepared," who do not heed the Word of God, but are held captive by the drunkenness and stupor of sin! There is a great deal of difference between Lot and his wife, not only after and during the destruction of Sodom, but equally before the manifestation of God's righteous judgment upon Sodom. Lot's wife, evidently, never understood nor sympathized with her husband's "being sore distressed with the lascivious life of the wicked" and with his "vexation of soul" over the lawless deeds of the Sodomites! Scripture leaves no doubt that here too the one is taken and the other is left! Both are surprised when God destroys Sodom. The one is delivered and the other becomes a pillar of salt! II Peter 2:7, 8; Gen. 19.

Thus it was also in the days of Noah, prior to the Flood, the cataclysm. See the difference between Noah and the men of his day. The one was moved by godly fear and the others flaunted the Most High God.

In these wicked men on Noah's day there are evidences, by way of negation, what watchfulness is.

The lack of watchfulness, or the opposite of watchfulness is here in evidence. The dictum here is, as always in the world, "Let us eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die." It was a time when, very evidently, men were mockers and scoffers of the Most High. It was a time when those who, had been under the preaching of Enoch and others, having their hearts fattened and their eyes blinded, rushed forward on the way to destruction. The time was one when the church went a-whoring after the world! It was a time of amalgamation of church and world, that is, of the wicked and false church with the world. The church was finally very small. Only eight souls. And God was very long-suffering over his people. Gen. 6:1, 2 and I Peter 3:20. God would save his church by means of the water and in the ark! He would save them from wicked men!

On the day that the doors of the ark were closed by God the banquet halls resounded with women, music and wine. Eating, and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. Life went on "normally"! It is ever thus. God strikes as a thief in the night, when men do not expect it. How the horrible waters must have terrified those drinking and banqueting, giving a toast to Noah's ark! But suddenly destruction falls upon them, as in a moment!

Thus it was when Belshazzar at his feast, drinking from the golden vessels taken from the house of God, and praising the gods of gold and silver, of brass, of iron and wood and stone, sees the finger of God, the hand, writing on the wall, "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN."

Yes, it was a surprise to the wicked. But not because the word was not clear. It was a willful ignorance!

However, these things are our examples to the end that we be warned and excited unto watchfulness, rooted in godliness. For these things happened unto them by way of example: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come. I Corinthians 10:11.

We can learn from the example of a good man of the house. He did not know when the thief would come. Hence, his house was broken into. He was not ready.

We are to be ready. We, the people of God, are to be busy seeking the things above, where Christ is. All our labor is to be in view of the Parousia of Christ. Let the world send their false prophets. We will not hearken to them. We will look for "our Lord," who has purchased us from all our sins with His blood and be comforted. And in all our sorrows and persecutions, with uplifted head, we shall look for the selfsame One, who before offered Himself for us, and removed all the curse from us, to come as the Judge from heaven, who shall cast his and all our enemies into everlasting damnation, but shall take us with all His chosen ones to Himself into heavenly joy and glory.

Unto that we are admonished to be watchful.

G.L.

GOD THE SOURCE OF JOY

Almighty God, Thy lofty throne
Has justice for its cornerstone,
And shining bright before Thy face
Are truth and love and boundless grace.

Thy Name with gladness they confess,
Exalted in Thy righteousness;
Their fame and might to Thee belong,
For in Thy favor they are strong.

All glory unto God we yield,
Jehovah is our help and shield;
All praise and honor we will bring
To Israel's Holy One, our King.

Psalm 89:1, 3, 4

IN HIS FEAR

Jehovah, The God of Arithmetic

(4)

“I AM that I AM.”

Thus did God speak concerning Himself when Moses asked Him what he should say to the Israelites when they would ask the name of the God who had appeared to him and had promised deliverance from the bondage of Egypt.

This is the richest name which we have of God, and it is full of significance. It signifies His sovereignty first of all. In this name He declares that He is what He will be. He asks no one's permission. He bows before no one's law. He is His own law. We are to such a great extent that which men desire us to be; and in the absolute sense of the word we always are what God wants us to be. We dress the way men fashion our clothing. We are bond or free according to the influence and authority of men over us. We work or are barred from work by the wishes of men. We go to the schools our parents choose for us or else to a certain district school according to the dictates of the civil authorities. And so one could go on. We are hemmed in on every side and have to say to such a great extent, “I am what men allow me to be.” But, as we said, we always are what God wants us to be. A child is born. We may secretly have wanted a son. A daughter is born. We may have looked for a daughter and a son is presented to us. We had nothing to say. And the child is what God wanted it to be. It may be talented or mentally retarded, a normal child or one deformed, a strong child or a weak and sickly child. We are what God wants us to be. And we are on this earth just as long as He wishes to have us here. I am here as long as God wants me here. Never can I say, as He says, “I am that I am” and put the period right there! Never can we say this without any ifs, ands or buts as God does. He is what He will be; and no one can change that. No one has even the right to desire to change that! He is that which He desires to be; and He denies all others the right to change this, for He sovereignly decrees their being.

But this name, Jehovah, also expresses, therefore, His self-sufficiency. He IS. He does not become something. Because we are dependent upon so much we can never say, “I will be.” If it is God's will, we will be here tomorrow. If it is His will, we will be healthy and do the things which we planned to do. And we can look back and say, “I was this or that. I was a child. I was born on such and such a day.” But then we always have to add, “I was this or that by God's providence. I am alive at this moment but not independent from God.” However, God says, “I Am.” Never does He add, “By the kind permission or support of this one or that

one.” It is not always true, as men frequently state, when observing a criminal going to the electric chair, “There, but for the grace of God, I go.” That is relatively a little thing: to go to death in the electric chair! To go to hell is indescribably more horrible. And if a man is on the way to hell, perishing in his unbelief, then it is not by the grace of God that he does not die as a criminal. For God's grace is everlasting (we come to this in a moment) and does not cease at death. That grace if it is upon a man in this life follows him also thru death and the grave into the life to come. But that a man does not die as a criminal is according to the will of God. We can say, that is, those who perish in their sins can say, “There but for the providence of God, there but for the will of God's sovereign decree, I go.” We depend upon God's providence. We are controlled by His will. Rain and sunshine, famine and plenty, war and peace, sickness and health, life and death come by His decree. And though we should not say, “I am alive by the permission of God” for to permit is not the language or thought of Scripture in regard to God's works—we can and should say, “I am alive by the support and providence of God.” God Himself, however, never speaks that way. Nor can He. He says, “I am.” He is that apart from all the creatures. Apart from any other being, for there is no God besides Him and all creatures and all other beings owe their existence unto Him. He does not say, “I, too, Am.” No, He alone says, “I Am.” He is the self-sufficient One Who has all His life in Himself and therefore is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

But in this name, Jehovah, He also expresses the truth that He is the unchangeable one; and that truth He has caused to be reflected so beautifully in the world of numbers which He designed. I Am means exactly that! Never does God say, “I was” or “I will be.” Always He speaks that one truth concerning Himself, “I Am.” We must say that we were children, and if He wills we shall some day be old men and old women. With us there is constant change; so that it is claimed that in seven years we will not have one single cell in our bodies that present day. They will all be changed. But Jehovah, the Self-Sufficient One Who sovereignly does as it pleases Him, knows no change of any kind. Also in this respect He is the same today, yesterday and tomorrow and until all eternity.

This, we said, is reflected in the world of numbers which He has designed. We compute exactly as Adam did in Paradise. We may call our digits or numbers by different names; but these numbers or digits retain the same value over against each other. This never changes. Two and two always is four. That has not varied in the least through all the centuries of this world's history. And you could not teach your children anything else! That is truth and you cannot make a man believe anything else. Try it and you will run so stuck that nothing will work out anymore. O, indeed, as we said, you can rearrange the numbers so that your series of numbers runs thus, one, four, three, two, five and so on. Then four and four will make two. But you have

not changed the basic principle that the second digit in your series multiplied by itself equals the fourth digit. This you cannot change. And you can never teach a child to follow that way of confusion. Leave the numbers in the order in which we use them and call them by those names and then try to teach that two and two is five; the child will not go along with you because he will discover upon his own fingers that two and three is five, and that therefore two and two cannot equal the same number. The value of these numbers — call them what you may — always retain their value according to their position in the series; and nothing can change that because the I Am is pleased to have it that way. And all your and my desires to change this will be to no avail; for He truly does as He pleases in His good pleasure. You can run against Him only to your own hurt and confusion.

So unchangeable is God in all His works. As we remarked at the outset of this series, water will always freeze at the same temperature; light always travels at the same speed; and sound also has its own definite, invariable rate of speed. These are God's works in the realm of the natural. They show us how exact He is but also how invariable are His ways, how unchangeable He is. His sun rises and sets with amazing accuracy. The moon goes through its four phases on an unchangeable schedule. Men figure on it and depend upon this unchangeableness of God.

But so are His dealings with men unchangeable. His fierce wrath burns unchangeably against the wicked. "God is angry with the wicked every day" is the testimony of Psalm 7:11b. It is not true that as long as man is on earth in this life God loves him, has pity upon him, and looks with a certain common grace upon him and then suddenly at death changes into a God of fury and terror which is unrelenting and unchangeable. He does not say, "I Am one thing while you are in this life; and I will become the opposite when once you take your last breath of life." He says, "I Am that I Am." Is it really true that He hates sin but not the sinner? Why, then, does the sinner die before God has caused him to repent? Is God's love for him not strong enough to work in him both to will and to do? Jesus says, "No man can come to me, except the Father Who hath sent Me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day," John 6:44. Is that grace, that mercy of God not strong enough to draw this sinner that He loves and now lets perish in his unbelief and sin? Listen, for this awful!, you who know yourself to be His child and expect to see His face in glory, can you be sure that He will not change also towards you, if after death He does change His attitude towards some of whom you claim that He does show grace, does pity and does love?

Let us rather hold fast to His name and its beautiful meaning: He IS and does not change in any way or in regard to anything. Listen to His own word through the psalmist, "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him . . .," Psalm 103:17. From ever-

lasting to everlasting is not from the moment that one begins to fear God. It goes back into God's counsel in eternity. The thief on the cross did not fear God all the days of his life. Ruth did not know and believe God in the early days of her life. Yet since God's mercy was (or rather is) from everlasting to everlasting upon these children of His who did fear Him in the latter parts of their lives, it was upon them also before they repented and believed. Let us grasp and hold with all our might and main to that blessed truth that exactly because His mercy was upon them in their unconverted state, He caused them to repent and believe. Is not that what Paul writes when he says that "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy," Romans 9:16. No, God does not change; and the attitude He assumes now overagainst a man is the same attitude He will everlastingly have over against him in the new creation.

Let us be sure that we do not corrupt that truth. And if we do, we will find that even the system of numbers which He has designed and created will rise up to testify against us. He never makes two and two equal anything more than four, nor anything less. And we can find comfort and have peace of mind in that truth that He is the Unchangeable I Am. For then we know that His promises to us are sure. We know that He will keep every word and every letter of them. We know that even as we cannot make two and two equal three, so can we not make Him fail to keep His promises to us. No conditional promise does He give us. Then He would not be the I Am but the I Might Be — If You Let, or the I Would Like To Be (your Saviour). Paul writes that nothing present nor to come can possibly separate us from His love. That means that your and my sins and unfaithfulness, too, cannot keep Him from being unchangeable in His promises to us. In my sins I may lose the consciousness of His promise. In my sins I may find that I have no reason to believe that His promise is for me. But for those whom He from eternity has promised it, nothing can possibly enter to work unfaithfulness and a change in Him.

Indeed all these things cannot be taught thus to the child in the arithmetic class; but a serious effort ought to be made, not now and then, or simply at the beginning of the year but from time to time to impress these truths on the child's mind as he works with God's numbers.

J.A.H.

We fade and die like flowers that grow in beauty,
 Like tender grass that soon will disappear;
 But evermore the love of God is changeless,
 Still shown to those who look to Him in fear.

Contending For The Faith

The Church and the Sacraments

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

THE SUPREMACY OF THE POPE

REFORMERS BEFORE THE REFORMATION

JOHN HUSS (continued)

We concluded our preceding article with the remark that, in spite of the papal bulls that were hurled at him, John Huss continued to preach and to condemn the Church.

Finally, a general council was convened for Nov. 1, 1414, at Constance. This council was convened by the emperor Sigismund. Sigismund was the heir to the Bohemian crown and he was anxious to clear the country from all accusations of heresy. Huss and his followers had been put under the ban. Besides, the emperor was also desirous to heal the Great or Papal Schism. He, therefore, convened this council. He invited John Huss to attend and promised him safe-conduct to and from the council. And John Huss was apparently eager to attend the meeting. From the sermons which he took along it is evident that he purposed to convert the assembled fathers to his own principal doctrine. And provided with sufficient testimonies concerning his orthodoxy, and after having made his will as if he had divined his death, he started on his journey on Oct. 11, 1414. He arrived in Constance on Nov. 3. He was ready to testify for the principles he prized above everything else and, if need be, to die for them. This council of Constance had been convened, we repeat, by the emperor, Sigismund to clear the land of Bohemia of heresy and to heal the Papal Schism.

In the beginning of his stay in Constance Huss was at liberty, living in the home of a widow. After a few weeks, however, his opponents succeeded in imprisoning him, on the strength of a rumour that he intended to flee. He was finally cast into the dungeon of the Dominican monastery. Sigismund appeared to be greatly angered because of the abuse of his promise of safe-conduct to the Bohemian reformer, but finally accommodated himself to the circumstances when he was told that, should he insist on his promise of safe-conduct, the council would be dissolved. Shortly afterwards Huss was imprisoned in the castle of the archbishop of Constance where he remained seventy-three days. Here he was separated from his friends, chained day and night, poorly fed, and tortured by disease. The promise of safe-conduct had been repudiated and the fate of John Huss was thereby sealed.

And now follows a description of the trial and condemnation of John Huss as set forth in the new Schaff-Herzog

Religious Encyclopedia: "On June 5 he was tried for the first time, and for that purpose was transferred to the Franciscan monastery, where he spent the last week of his life. He acknowledged the writings on the Church against Palecz and Stanislaus of Znain as his own, and declared himself willing to recant, if errors should be proven to him. Huss conceded his veneration of Wyclif, and said that he could only wish his soul might some time attain unto that place where Wyclif's was. On the other hand, he denied having defended Wyclif's doctrine of the Lord's Supper, or the forty-five articles; he had only opposed their summary condemnation. The king admonished him to deliver himself up to the mercy of the council, as he did not desire to protect a heretic. At the last trial, on June 8, there were read to him thirty-nine sentences, twenty-six of which had been excerpted from his book on the Church, seven from his treatise against Palecz, and six from that against Stanislaus. Almost all of his articles may be traced back to Wyclif. The danger of some of these doctrines as regards worldly power was explained to the emperor to incite him against Huss. The latter declared himself willing to submit if he could be convinced of errors. He desired only a fairer trial and more time to explain the reasons for his views. If his reasons and Bible texts did not suffice, he would be glad to be instructed. This declaration was considered an unconditional surrender, and he was asked to confess (1) that he had erred in the theses which he had hitherto maintained; (2) that he renounced them for the future; (3) that he recanted them; and (4) that he declared the opposite of these sentences. He asked to be exempted from recanting doctrines which he had never taught; others, which the assembly considered erroneous, he was willing to revoke; to act differently would be against his conscience. These words found no favorable reception. After the trial on June 8, several other attempts were made to induce him to recant, but he resisted all of them. The attitude of Sigismund was due to political considerations — he looked upon the return of Huss to his country as dangerous, and thought the terror of execution would not be without effect. Huss no longer hoped for life, indeed martyrdom responded to an inner desire of his being.

"The condemnation took place on July 6 in the presence of the solemn assembly of the council in the cathedral. After the performance of high mass and liturgy, Huss was led into the church. The bishop of Lodi delivered an oration on the duty of eradicating heresy; then some theses of Huss and Wyclif and a report of his trial were read. He protested loudly several times, and when his appeal to Christ was rejected as a condemnable heresy, he exclaimed, 'O God and Lord, now the council condemns even thine own act and thine own law as heresy, since thou thyself didst lay thy cause before thy Father as the just judge, as an example for us, whenever we are sorely oppressed.' An Italian prelate pronounced the sentence of condemnation upon Huss and his writings. Again he protested loudly, saying that even at this hour he did not wish anything but to be convinced from Holy

Scripture. He fell upon his knees and with a low voice asked God to forgive all his enemies. Then followed his degradation—he was enrobed in priestly vestments and again asked to recant; again he refused. With curses his ornaments were taken from him, his priestly tonsure was destroyed, and the sentence was pronounced that the Church had deprived him of all rights and delivered him to the secular powers. Then a high paper hat was put upon his head, with the inscription *Haeresiarcha*. Thus Huss was led away to the stake under a strong guard of armed men. At the place of execution he knelt down, spread out his hands, and prayed aloud. Some of the people asked that a confessor should be given him, but a bigoted priest exclaimed, a heretic should neither be heard nor given a confessor. The executioners undressed Huss and tied his hands behind his back with ropes, and his neck with a chain to a stake around which wood and straw had been piled up so that it covered him to the neck. Still at the last moment, the imperial marshal, Von Pappenheim, in the presence of the Count Palatine, asked him to save his life by a recantation, but Huss declined with the words ‘God is my witness that I have never taught that of which I have been accused by false witnesses. In the truth of the Gospel which I have written, taught, and preached I will die today with gladness.’ Thereupon the fire was kindled. With uplifted voice Huss sang, ‘Christ, thou Son of the living God, have mercy upon me.’ When he started this for the third time and continued ‘who art born of Mary the virgin,’ the wind blew the flame into his face; he still moved lips and head, and then died of suffocation. His clothes were thrown into the fire, his ashes gathered and cast into the near-by Rhine.” — end of quote.

The Czech people, who had loved John Huss in his lifetime as their prophet and apostle, now adored him as their saint and martyr. The principles which he had held and advocated would surely strike deep roots. The end of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, as exercising a strangle hold upon the consciences of the people of God, was in sight. It is true that a hundred years must yet elapse before the dawn of the Reformation, when the Lord raised up Martin Luther to nail the ninety-five theses to the church door of Wittenberg. But the fundamental weakness of the Church had become fully apparent in the trial and condemnation of the Bohemian reformer. Huss laid all emphasis upon the Scriptures and the Word as the only authoritative rule for doctrine and life, and he insisted that he be tried and examined upon the basis of the truth of God’s Word. This had merely evoked from the Roman Catholic hierarchy scorn and ridicule. The seeds of the Reformation which Wyclif and Huss had sown would surely assert themselves. The pope at Rome and his priestly hierarchy did not rule in the Name of Christ because they ignored His Word and trampled it under foot. The Church, as consisting of the elect people of the living God, cannot be destroyed and would surely be delivered out of the shackles of Rome.

THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS.

The name *sacrament* is given to seven sacred Christian rites in the Roman Catholic and Eastern churches, and to two, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, in the Protestant Churches. The word *sacrament* is not derived from the Scriptures. However, this is not the only word which we use that is not derived from the Holy Scriptures. Words such as *providence* and *Trinity* are not Scriptural terms either. The word *sacrament* is derived from the Latin word *sacramentum*. The Greek word *mysterion*, mystery, used in the Eastern Church to designate these rites, is taken from the New Testament, and contains a reference to the hidden virtue behind the outward symbol. The Latin word *sacramentum* means something that is consecrated, more particularly an oath, especially a military oath of allegiance to the standard; and also the sum of money deposited in court by the plaintiff and defendant previous to the trial of a case, and kept in some sacred place. The term was applied to Christian rites in the time of Tertullian, one of the early Church Fathers.

Regarding the etymology and the classical and patristic usage of the word “sacramentum” Hodge, in his *Outlines on Theology*, writes as follows, page 588: “1st. It is derived from *sacro*, *āre*, to make sacred, dedicate to gods or sacred uses. 2nd. In its classical usage it signified — (1) That by which a person binds himself to another to perform any thing. (2) Thence a sum deposited with the courts as pledge, and which, if forfeited, was devoted to sacred uses. (3) Also an oath, especially a soldier’s oath of faithful consecration to his country’s service. — Ainsworth’s ‘Dic.’ 3rd. The Fathers used this word in a conventional sense as equivalent to the Greek *mysterion*, a mystery, i.e., something unknown until revealed, and hence an emblem, a type, a rite having some latent spiritual meaning known only to the initiated, or instructed. The Greek fathers applied the term *mysterion* to the Christian ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, inasmuch as these rites had a spiritual significance, and were thus a form of revelation of divine truth. The Latin fathers use the word ‘sacramentum’ as a Latin word, in its own proper sense, for any thing sacred in itself, or having the power of binding, or consecrating men, and in addition they used it as the equivalent of the Greek word *mysterion*, i.e., in the entirely different sense of a revealed truth, or a sign or symbol revealing a truth otherwise hidden. This fact has given to the usage of this word “sacramentum,” in the scholastic theology, an injurious latitude and indefiniteness of meaning . . .” — end of quote. H.V.

SPECIAL MEETING

Reformed Free Publishing Association

THURSDAY EVENING, DECEMBER 4, 8 o’clock

FIRST CHURCH, GRAND RAPIDS

Speaker: REV. G. VOS

The Voice of Our Fathers

The Canons of Dordrecht

PART TWO

EXPOSITION OF THE CANONS

FIFTH HEAD OF DOCTRINE

OF THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

Article 4 (continued)

For the correct rendition of this article we refer the reader to the previous issue of *The Standard Bearer*.

This is a very important article because it deals with the relation between God's preserving grace and the sins and falls of the people of God, and therefore with the nature and the manner of the operation of God's grace in the work whereby He preserves His people. And from this point of view it is an important article because it concerns the very honor and holiness of God and of His grace as they are presented according to the Reformed conception. This is after all but one phase of a very old problem, the problem of God's sovereignty and man's sin. But here we have a very acute phase of that problem. It is not merely the general question whether sin has a place in God's counsel. Nor is it the problem in general of God's sovereign and providential government in relation to the sin of men. But it is a problem that deals, first of all, with the sins of God's children. And therefore, in the second place, it is a problem that concerns God's *grace*, — the very power and work whereby God saves His people from sin, — in relation to the sins of the very people whom He saves. And in the third place, it concerns God's grace in relation to the sins of His people which they commit after they are saved, that is, after they have become conscious participants of that grace. And finally, it concerns the very grace that is supposed to preserve God's saints against the power of sin, that is, against these very grievous sins which they commit. Hence, the question is this: if you maintain that the grace of God always must and always does preserve the saints, and if you maintain at the same time that the saints sin and fall grievously, do you not defame and impugn the very holiness of God, and that too, in regard to the very work of God in which the glory of His holiness is supposed to shine forth most brightly?

By the same token, of course, the whole question concerning this relationship brings us face to face with a most serious ethical problem. It is true that the *Canons* deal further with this problem in later articles; but here that problem is introduced, and that too, as to its very principles. The question is: if God's grace must and does always preserve the saints, are not the sins and falls of the saints to be charged against that very grace that preserves them, *and therefore not against the saints themselves*? Is not the

fault for the sins of the saints not in them, but in God's grace? And are therefore the saints not to be absolved of any blame, any responsibility, for their sins and falls? And does not this necessarily produce careless and profane Christians?

Now the Arminians were well aware of these apparent weak points in the Reformed conception, and they capitalized on them, in order to hold the Reformed truth up to scorn and contempt as an ethically horrifying doctrine. This explains also why the fathers take pains already in the positive section of this fifth chapter to expound the true Reformed position.

But weak points these are only *apparently*. And to see these supposed weak points one must look at the truth through Arminian spectacles. In fact, the situation is thus, that the Arminians rear up their own presentation of the Reformed truth, in order then to criticize it as an immoral conception, one that is unworthy of God. And indeed, we may hasten to add, if it were true that the Arminian construction of the Reformed truth is correct, it would assuredly be an immoral doctrine. If it were really true that the preserving grace of God is itself responsible for the sins and falls of the saints, we could not possibly subscribe to that doctrine. However, as usual, the Arminians take the offensive against the Reformed faith simply in order to cover up and to divert attention from their own immoral view. For what could be more immoral than a doctrine which maintains that the grace of the only Lord of heaven and earth can be overcome by the power of sinful flesh, yea, is utterly dependent upon the movement of the human will before it can operate?

How then do the fathers explain the relation between God's preserving grace and the saints' falls?

In the first place, let it be noted that they do not retreat whatsoever from the stand of the preceding article: "But God is faithful, who having conferred grace, mercifully confirms, and powerfully preserves them therein, even to the end." Now this is important. This means, as we have seen previously, that from the moment that He first confers upon His people the grace of conversion on to the very end God keeps on confirming and preserving them in that grace. Our *Canons* will have more to say on this in later articles. But already here it is plain that the *motif* of all the work and dealings of God with His saints, even in their deepest falls, is grace. Or, to express this from the viewpoint of the saints, the undercurrent of their entire life, even then when through falling into sin they may not be conscious of God's grace, is the preserving grace of God.

In the second place, let it be noted that the fathers steadfastly maintain that the confirming and preserving power of God's grace is so great that it cannot be overcome by the flesh. This stands in close connection with the preceding, but emphasizes a little different aspect of the truth. To be sure,

if at any stage that preserving grace of God could be overcome by the flesh of the saints, then the whole matter of the perseverance of the saints is in doubt. Then it is possible that they cannot endure to the end. Then it must also be granted that the operation of preserving grace is dependent upon whether or not the saints on account of their flesh resist and overcome and reject God's power of preservation. But this is impossible: "The power of God which confirms and preserves the true believers . . . is greater than that it can be overcome by the flesh." That always remains true. At no point in the life of the saint does the power of the flesh overcome the power of God's grace, — no matter what takes place in his life. It may even appear sometimes as if he is utterly devoid of grace. It may seem to the saint himself that God's grace has forsaken him. This is never the case. The flesh cannot conquer, no matter how mightily it battles against divine grace.

In the third place, let it be noted that the fathers do not posit a conflict, an antithesis, between the operation of God's grace and the responsibility of the saints for their own falls. Nor do they at all present this whole problem as a matter of a sort of double-track theology. They present the entire matter from the viewpoint of *God's actuating and influencing the believers*. It is true, the fathers use a negative statement here. The fact remains that they explain the sins and falls of the believers in this light: "The converted are not always thus actuated and influenced by God so that they are not able in certain particular actions to draw back" Once again, therefore: the preserving grace of God never forsakes the saints. It is simply a question of how that grace actuates and influences them.

In the fourth place, the manner of the actuation and influence of God's grace is not always such that the believers do not sometimes deviate from the guidance of divine grace, and that they do not sometimes fall into temptation and comply with the lusts of the flesh. Here we really have the crux of the matter. What happens when the believers are led into temptation, when they fall? Is it thus, that the Lord wants to lead them so that they do not fall into temptation, but that the power of God's grace is overcome by the power of the flesh, so that the Lord God is helpless to prevent their fall? Was it thus, for example, with the fall of David in the incident of Bathsheba? Was it thus, when Peter denied his Lord? Speaking now abstractly of what might have happened, could not the Lord have so led David and Peter that they would never have fallen into those gross sins? And when you and I fall into sin, can that be ascribed to the inability of God's grace to prevent our falls? Such must necessarily be the Arminian position: God would like to prevent it, but He is powerless. But God forbid that such should be the case! That would certainly mean that not only occasionally, but always, the power of the flesh is beyond the control and dominion of God's grace. What then? The fact is that God in His grace does not always lead His people in such a way that they do not fall into temptation. Some-

times He leads them thus, that according to their own carnal inclinations and lusts of the flesh they are seduced and actually fall into grave and atrocious sins. Thus it was very plainly with Peter. For, first of all, the Lord Jesus plainly foretold the fact of Peter's three-fold denial of his Lord, and that too, in the face of Peter's bold assertion that it was impossible. Was the Lord merely venturing a guess that this denial would take place, on the basis of His knowledge of Peter's self-assertive character? By no means; but He made a flat prediction that before the cock crowed, Peter would deny Him thrice. But in the second place, the Lord did not at all prevent the fall of Peter. He could have. If He could pray that Peter's faith fail not, — and that prayer was answered, — He could also pray that Peter would not succumb to the temptation to deny his Lord at the high priest's palace. And that prayer would be answered also. But Jesus did not pray thus. Why not? There can be but one answer: He knew the Father's will was that Peter should be led into temptation. But He also knew that the Father's will was that Peter's faith should not fail. And according to the Father's will He prayed; and the prayer was answered.

This brings us to our fifth observation, namely, that even in such instances God in His gracious leading of His people works *righteously*. This is according to the teaching of the fathers in this article: "but sometimes by the righteous permission of God they actually fall into these evils." We need not stumble over the term *permission* here. We may safely say that this is a characteristically infralapsarian expression. But we may say at once that it makes no principal difference whether you speak of "permission" or of "leading." If I permit something when I could prevent it, the fact remains that it takes place within the confines of my control and my decision. Besides, God's permission is active; God is the living God, the God of pure and full activity. And further, it is certainly according to Scripture to believe that God sometimes *leads into temptation*. This is presupposed in the prayer which the Lord Himself taught us to pray: "Lead us not into temptation." However, the point to bear in mind here is, first of all, that whether you speak of "permission" or use a more positive and active term, we are concerned here with God's gracious dealings with His people. We must not avoid this issue and say that here we must forget about God's grace and concentrate on God's other virtues. Not at all; we are talking about God's dealings with His children, dealings that are always fundamentally *gracious*. And we are speaking precisely of the *operations*, the actuating and influencing operations, of God's preserving grace. And now, secondly, the fathers state that even then, when the actuating and influencing operation of God's grace is such that it permits the saints to deviate from the guidance of grace, to be seduced, to comply with the lusts of the flesh, and actually to fall, — even then God deals *righteously, justly*.

What this implies we shall see the next time, D.V.

H.C.H.

DECENCY and ORDER

The Report

of the Committee of the Synod of 1924 on the Question

"Can A Classis Depose A Consistory?"

d. *Deposition and Enforcements:*

When the right to declare a judgment of deposition is ascribed to a Classis but not the right to execute it, then the question arises as to what ecclesiastical significance such a decision has? It declares that, according to the judgment of the Classis, the Consistory should be deposed. Yet, if the Classis is of the conviction that she has no right to execute this in the local church, she makes a decision while she knows that it neither *can* nor *will* be executed. Naturally this is completely senseless and without ecclesiastical significance. Actually this amounts to less than advice since that is generally observed. An ecclesiastical gathering makes a decision with the intent that it will be carried out. If a Classis makes a decision in the name of Christ and according to his will, it must be executed unless external circumstances in one way or another make this impossible.

The decision to depose a Consistory has, according to ecclesiastical rule, *final* significance for the local church. There is no consistory in the church that can execute it. The Consistory is by that decision actually deposed.

With a view to the carrying out of such a decision, we must consider that there is no "form for the deposition of office bearers." The Classis must formulate the decision, giving complete and accurate grounds for the deposition, and send this as an official notice to the deposed office bearers and also to those remaining faithful of the church and it must be declared in an official gathering of the congregation.

e. *Interfering in the Right of the Local Church.*

The *deposition* of a consistory, that is, of all office bearers, is not an intervention in the rights of the local church. Intervention can only take place when the ecclesiastical status of the consistory is normal, (kerkrechtelijk in normalen staat is). In this case the Classis has absolutely no right to decide or to do anything to such a Consistory. But we deal here with the case of a Consistory departing in doctrine or life or both and that is guilty of insubordination to the Classis and Synod and that rebels against the authority of the church and acts directly in opposition to the Formula of Agreement signed by them.

Naturally, mention cannot be made here of intervention by the Classis in the rights of the local church and consistory. Intervention in these rights can only mean that the Classis impedes the consistory in her actions according to Reformed Church Order. Of this no mention is made here. Just the

opposite. The Classis employs a means to bring them back from their ways that are in conflict with their own rights and duties.

f. *The Insubordination of the Consistory:*

Distinction must be made between the departing in the doctrine and life that was treated in the aforementioned process through Classis and Synod and the insubordination or refusal to submit to the decision of the broader gathering.

The question is whether a Consistory by such refusal to submit to the decision of the broader gathering ceases legally to belong to the church and the denomination. This depends on how we view the denominational bond. Does it have its origin in the will of the consistory, (de mutuus consensus) the mutual consent by common accord; then it simply comes down to a contract that may be freely kept or broken. Voetius already strongly defends the godly right (het jus divinum) of the church denomination overagainst the Independents. The church denomination has its origin in Christ and He, the king, uses His office bearers as His servants to order (het formeel) according to His will. The (kerkverband) denominational bond, as instituted by Christ, functions therefore upon His authority and is officially (kerkrechtelijk) higher than the churches and the office bearers. No consistory can officially sever the ecclesiastical bond. No one can legitimately do what is wrong. No consistory has a legitimate right or power to break the bond by which Christ has bound it with other churches. That would be secession from a true church, an act of human high-handedness. A local church may and must alone secede from a false church, because Christ demands that in His Word, the law of the church.

From this also follows the proper understanding of the character of *insubordination*. Refusal to submit one's self to the decisions of Classis and Synod is not an abrogating of the denomination bond but insubordination; disobedience to the authority of the Classis (Art. 36), a gathering of churches, office bearers in the service of Christ, which makes decisions in conformity with His law. This disobedience can be called *moral or spiritual sin* but all sin that, according to Article 80 of the Church Order officially (kerkrechtelijk) must be treated with discipline, can be named thus. All sin is moral in character but here is no official ecclesiastical conflict because it does not say that it is not official according to the church. This merely signifies that it is a sin that must be treated with discipline, that is, officially by the church. The Formula of Subscription: "being ready always cheerfully to submit to the judgment of the Consistory, Classis and Synod, under penalty in case of refusal to be, *by that very fact, (ipso facto) suspended from our office.*" Here refusal to submit to the decisions of the Classis is set forth as a sin in the official ecclesiastical sense for which one must be deposed.

g. Finally, it must be noted that the deposition of a Consistory by the Classis is not an act of hierarchy or coercion. Christ alone has the ruling power by which He has the au-

thority to give laws and to demand obedience and to punish disobedience. The office bearers are not administrators of His law-giving nor of His punitive power. Discipline is the administration of His ruling power, the maintaining of His right over against those who depart therefrom. Discipline is no punishment but the (medisch) and pedagogical means to humble and to save those who depart from the law of Christ. And although this to us appears impossible, and the discipline and also the excommunication do not have this result, the church may not refrain from applying discipline, because the result is neither the ground nor essence of discipline but the maintenance of the right of Christ as the King of the Church. All this applies to the departing office-bearers in the Consistory.

II.

In the foregoing, in answering the question, "Does a Classis have the right to depose a Consistory?", we have briefly shown the character of the local church and the broader gatherings and their reciprocal relation insofar as one or the other stands related to the question. We have proceeded from the Church Order and our Reformed principles. Our conclusion is that we give an affirmative answer to the question and herewith consider our given mandate to have been finished.

We take the liberty to add that our opinion of the adopted position is also supported by Voetius and this practice has existed in Reformed Churches in her most flourishing period.

(1) We limit ourselves alone to Voetius. Firstly, because he is recognized by all Reformers as the best interpreter of Reformed Church Polity. And in the second place, because later writers in the main follow him and have produced nothing new. Insofar as we have been able to note it is nowhere stated in so many words in the *Politica Ecclesiastica* that the Classis may depose a Consistory, that is, take away the office through excommunication. But for us this is no more necessary as a direct judgment than that baptism is come in the place of circumcision proves infant baptism. The question is solely whether Voetius attributes to the broader gatherings authority and power (*autoritas et potestas*) which includes the right of deposition.

(a) We find the following definition with Voetius: "The ecclesiastical bond of Classis and Synod is an established, abiding combination of many churches under one limited rule (*sub certo regimine*) for mutual improvement and preservation."

The denominational forms and the later acceding to this relation may not be viewed as a matter of choice (of dat het verband *blootweg federatief* zou zijn). Voetius speaks of *libere initia* (initiating free-willingly). But this means: "without compulsion and has nothing to do with moral obligation."

The ecclesiastical relation is clear in the practice and example of the apostles and is set forth through the Holy Spirit in Acts 15:1-34 by which all Christian theologians com-

monly prove the practice and authority of the Synods.

(b) The power of the broader gatherings is not "private but cumulative," that is, it does not deprive, take away the power of the local church but is a power that in the broader gatherings accumulates and flows into one, single, undivided, greater power. Ten can do more than one. "Therefore the broader gatherings ordinarily do not exercise this power over and outside of the local church and with her own authority do anything in or concerning the local church except in matters of common interest or in cases of appeal or in cases of mismanagement."

To the question whether a broader gathering has a binding (coactivum) power so that she can impose the decisions concerning doctrine and ecclesiastical practices and can demand execution under the penalty of censure, Voetius gives an affirmative answer. He proves this with a seven fold argument. In the second argument he says that where there is a regular ecclesiastical relation (denomination), "there is also an ecclesiastical power conformable to this society and where this power is it is necessarily binding (*necessario definitiva*) because otherwise there would be no power, no order, no unity." After he has noted that the local churches each have in themselves an active, binding power, Voetius concludes: (though this power remains when they act in common and together) "On the other side, anything good added to something good produces a greater good." The aim, end (*finis*) of the denominational bond lies in the preserving, the confirmation, the promotion and reparation of the churches in the common faith and godliness.

c. Voetius raises the question: "Whether a Classis or Synod, that is, a gathering of various consistories that maintain ecclesiastical fellowship (*collectione, correspondentiae*) has the power to excommunicate (*competat excommunicandi potestas*). Observe here that Voetius speaks of "consistories" gathering together in broader assembly. To this question an affirmative answer is given. In the following three cases Voetius cites excommunication to be legitimate: (1) In cases of mismanagement by the local church and consistory; (2) In cases of appeal to the Synod; or (3) In cases of an indictment of guilt in such a matter (*delationis istius causae*) that are brought to Classis or Synod. Likewise Voetius proceeds to give the grounds here for his opinion. He says: "For in case the key of discipline is given a particular or local church or to her consistory, why shall it not be given to an assembly and unity of churches and consistories in which the consistory of the particular and local church is incorporated." Voetius speaks of a "*Synerdrium incorporatum*." And with a view to the defense of the Presbyterian form of Church government, he cites the case of Caspar Coolhaes, an "*illustre exemplum excommunicationis*." The power of excommunication is not given to the State because the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven are given to the church and to the ecclesiastical officials.

(to be continued)

G.V.D.B.

ALL AROUND US

The Synodical Decisions of 1924 on Common Grace.

The November, 1958 issue of *Torch and Trumpet* contains an article with the above title written by Dr. Fred H. Klooster, associate professor of Systematic Theology at Calvin Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Obviously it is quite impossible to quote his entire article in our allotted space, since it is contained in about four and a half pages of that paper. We can therefore only reflect on some of the high points of his article and offer a few comments.

After an introduction on the character of the Synod of 1924 in which he points up that it was not a common Synod, Dr. Klooster divides his article into three main sections: the first, dealing with "General Features of the Decisions of 1924"; the second, dealing with "The Three Points in Particular"; and the third, dealing with "The Reformed Character of the Decisions of 1924."

The professor states in his introduction that he is "personally convinced that a great deal of misunderstanding does exist concerning the 1924 decisions on common grace." It appears that as he wrote he had in mind a communication from the De Wolf group sent to the Synod of 1957 in which they admit that "the possibility exists that we have misinterpreted your position. If this is pointed out to us we assure you that we will correct it." As we read Dr. Klooster's article we felt that he had in mind throughout to untangle the ecumenical barriers that exist between the Christian Reformed Church and the De Wolf group.

Dr. Klooster contends that the great deal of misunderstanding concerning the decisions of 1924 is due partly to the fact that all the decisions of that Synod are recorded in the Holland language, and perhaps mostly to the fact that the decisions re common grace are all too abbreviated. With a view to the latter he refers more than once to the report of the committee of pre-advice which he claims greatly moved the Synod to make the decisions it adopted as stipulated in the three points of common grace. The committee had at least eleven points of dispute arising out of some thirty protests and appeals which it had to consider. But the committee advised Synod to treat only three of them because these "were the points on which the Revs. Danhof and Hoeksema had taken a clear stand" and "because they concerned matters which were expressed in our Creeds." The professor points up that "the Advisory Committee and the Synod realized that the three points did not constitute the whole doctrine of common grace. The three points were not even meant to constitute a well-rounded summary of the doctrine of common grace. They were simply a reassertion of three

elements believed to be contained in our creeds and now called into dispute by Danhof and Hoeksema." Synod, according to Klooster, following the advice of the committee rejected the proposal that a committee be appointed "to study the matter of common grace in order to come to the formulation of a dogma which could be made a part of the Confession." But it did recommend that "the leaders of our people, ministers as well as professors, . . . engage in further study of the doctrine of common grace and to discuss the problems involved in it carefully and present them to our people in lectures and articles." Klooster observes further that "it was hoped that in this way the doctrine would be thoroughly investigated in all its aspects and that eventually the time would be ripe for the 'formulation of a dogma' of common grace. It is unfortunate that so little of this was actually done during the next quarter century. But these assertions of the Committee help us to understand how the three points were regarded. This, it seems to me, has significance in judging the creedal status of the three points, which seems to be a touchy problem in the current ecumenical discussions."

Dr. Klooster concludes the section of his article dealing with the "General Features of the Decisions of 1924" by calling attention to the concluding witness or testimony of the Synod. "This testimony to the Churches constitutes a warning against worldliness and a possible misuse of the doctrine of common grace. While common grace and the antithesis are sometimes put in juxtaposition, the Synod called for the sturdy maintenance of both."

In the second part of his article, Dr. Klooster dealing with "The Three Points in Particular," gives the gist of each in turn. Writes he, "The first of the three points concerns the 'favorable attitude of God to mankind in general and not only to the elect.' The Synod asserted that 'in addition to the saving grace of God unto eternal life shown only unto the elect, there is also a certain favor or grace (gunst of genade) which he displays unto his creatures in general.'"

"Need for asserting this point arose from the fact that Hoeksema and Danhof had clearly taken position against it. The Committee quoted from *Zonde en Genade*: 'Grace is not in things, but only in the good favor of God. Gold and silver, rain and sunshine, gifts and talents are not in themselves grace. But grace can certainly work in all those things, but it always remains particular and is given only to His people' (p. 125). Of the other quotations one of the clearest is a statement of Hoeksema in *The Banner*. After declaring that 'such an attitude of God is utterly inconceivable,' Hoeksema concludes: 'Hence we deny that in any way or to any extent, for time or eternity, God assumes an attitude of positive favor or grace over against the reprobate' (pp. 125, 6)."

It is at this point that Dr. Klooster refers to "an unfortunate technical weakness in the Synodical decision." That weakness, he says, is that Synod failed to make the Scrip-

tural references a part of the official decisions. For the references we have to go to the Advisory Committee's Report.

"The passages mentioned are Psalm 145:9; Matthew 5:44, 45; Luke 6:35, 36; Acts 14:16, 17; I Timothy 4:10; Romans 2:4; as well as the passages concerning the well-meant gospel offer, Ezekiel 33:11 and 18:23. Unfortunately, the Advisory Committee Report does no more than list the passages in proof-text method. However, the problem involves divergent exegesis of each passage. It is not possible to evaluate each passage here. It must be admitted that they are not all equally valid. It seems to me that one of the strongest passages in defense of the Synodical decision is Luke 6:35, 36: 'But love your enemies, and do them good and lend, never despairing, and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be sons of the Most High: for he is kind toward the unthankful and evil. Be ye merciful, even as your Father is merciful.' If this passage is parallel to Matthew 5:44, 45, as I believe it is, then this attitude of kindness and mercy is applied to the gifts of rain and sunshine given to all men as well.

"The Synodical decision seeks support for the well-meant offer of the gospel by an appeal to the *Canons of Dort*. The Canons (III, IV, 8, 9) are indeed quite explicit in asserting the doctrine of the well-meant gospel call, for they say: '*As many as are called by the gospel are unfeignedly called.*' But I do not think the Canons say much concerning the precise point at issue; namely, whether this well-meant offer of the gospel is evidence of an attitude of favor on God's part to mankind in general. Perhaps the statement that '*God calls men by the gospel and confers upon them various gifts*' (III-IV, 9) comes closest to the point at issue. The Synod claims further support for the first point by an appeal to the classic Reformed theologians who have maintained this doctrine.

"The second and the third points were thought to be involved in the first. The Advisory Committee stated that it considered the first point to be 'of central significance in the question which has caused so much unrest in the Church. The other two points are very closely related to this one and indeed are more or less contained in it' (p. 124)."

On what Dr. Klooster writes thus far we have several questions to ask and comments to make.

We are assuming that he restates the historical facts quite accurately because we see no reason to deny them. And this means that we accept that: 1. It was Synod's intention that the three points did not constitute a well-formulated dogma. 2. Synod wanted the Church to give considerably more study and discussion to the subject before it was ready to formulate such a dogma. 3. Synod asked the ministers and professors to engage in this study and present the problems to the people in lectures and articles. 4. It was simply Synod's intention in the setting forth of the three points only to bring peace to the Church which had been cast into unrest by the denial of common grace by Danhof and Hoeksema.

But, this being the case, is it not strange that the Church nevertheless definitely sealed the mouths of those who wanted to show to all the people that Scripture and the Confessions deny the doctrine of common grace? And, is it not strange that, whereas Synod admitted that it had no well-formulated dogma on common grace, it nevertheless denied the office of the ministry in that Church to men who refused to subscribe to the three points? And, isn't it strange that more than thirty years after Danhof and Hoeksema were banished from the Church that *Torch and Trumpet* would ask the Rev. Hoeksema to air his views on the subject of common grace in that magazine, and after he sends in his article they return it to him unpublished evidently on the ground that it might stir up more unrest in the Church? And, isn't it especially strange that now after more than thirty years the Christian Reformed Church is willing to discuss the subject with those who admit that they may have misinterpreted the decisions of Synod in the three points, but the Church will not discuss the subject with those who do not misunderstand but are well able to show up their fallacy on the basis of Scripture and the Confessions? These questions cry for an answer. Maybe *Torch and Trumpet* would be so kind as to ask Dr. Klooster in another article to answer them.

Finally, we wish to say a word or two about Dr. Klooster's discussion on the first point. Though he may be a bit critical of the technical weaknesses of Synod, he is very plainly in agreement with the general tenor of the three points and especially is this made plain from what he writes in the last part of his article, to which we will call attention, the Lord willing, the next time.

Dr. Klooster believes that of all the passages of Scripture quoted, Luke 6:35, 36 is the strongest in defense of Point I. But the reader will notice that like the Synod, Klooster gives no exegesis of the passage. He simply gives his conclusion. Now, does not Dr. Klooster know that no one, including the Rev. Hoeksema, denies that God is kind to the unthankful and evil? But does that mean that the text teaches that God is kind to *reprobate* unthankful and evil? The entire context shows clearly the very opposite. Yet this is exactly what Synod and Dr. Klooster must prove with all their texts.

As to what Dr. Klooster writes about Synod's appeal to the Canons in support of the well-meant offer is much better. Here he admits that Synod picked the wrong articles for proof, simply because they do not prove Synod's point. But even here, Dr. Klooster is weak. He should have come right out with it and told his churches that they should no longer hold to a general offer of grace to all, reprobate included, in the preaching of the gospel on the grounds of what is expressed in the Canons.

We will have more to say about this the next time, if the Lord wills.

M.S.

QUESTION HOUR

Held after Address at Hull Mass Meeting

July, 1953

Questioner: Rev. H. C. Hoeksema*Answers by:* Rev. H. Hoeksema

(Continued)

Question: You state in one of your letters to the members of First Church: "Be not deceived by those who say that the difference between those that are opposed and us is a mere matter of words. It is a matter of the whole Prot. Ref. truth. The Prot. Ref. truth is that the promise of God is unconditional and for the elect alone. The error which they preach and support is that the promise is general and conditional. Prot. Ref. truth is that God translates us into His kingdom unconditionally. The error they preach and sustain is that our act of conversion is a condition for entering into the kingdom of God." Rev. De Wolf states in his letter to the consistory members of the Prot. Ref. Churches he has never taught that God promises salvation to all men, and that it depends on man's own will whether or not he will be saved. Neither does he teach that natural man must convert himself while he is in the power of darkness, outside of the kingdom of God. He states: "This is contrary to anything that I have ever preached." My question is: how do you harmonize the two conflicting statements of these two letters, and which one is true?

Answer: I can answer that very briefly. If the Rev. De Wolf actually had not preached, had not meant to preach, had not intended to preach what he nevertheless said in those two sermons, he could have easily retracted it, and apologized. He didn't. He still maintains the statement that God promises to everyone salvation if you believe. He still maintains that our act of conversion is a prerequisite to enter into the kingdom of God. He never retracted. He never apologized, — which would have been very easy. He didn't. That's his own fault. He preaches, . . . he preached what was in those two statements of April 15, 1951 and September 21, 1952.

Question: When in 1922 Prof. Jansen was deposed, was he not present because no one informed him of said meeting, or did he refuse to come?

Answer: He was called to come and defend himself. He refused to defend himself. But he was not again officially notified of his deposition. That was the question. Certainly, Prof. Jansen was called again and again. In June 22 the elders were present, and they were asked to apologize, and they refused. But when Prof. Jansen was deposed, that's true, then he wasn't there. He wasn't asked to be there. He was deposed by the Synod. But it's true that he was asked to come and defend himself and be present at the Synod in his case.

Question: It is proper to form a society for Prot. Ref. Action without the knowledge of pastors and consistories?

Answer: Certainly is. That would be indeed hierarchy, if we had to ask the consistory to form a society. How do you think *The Standard Bearer* was formed in 1923? *The Standard Bearer*, when we were still in the Christian Reformed Churches? The R.F.P.A., the association for *The Standard Bearer*, was formed by a group of men. And *The Standard Bearer* was propagandized throughout the Christian Reformed Churches. To that no one ever objected in the Chr. Ref. Churches. And I assure you: no one will ever object, — not successfully anyway, — to any of the consistories. We are at least a free people organically. We are not under the thumb of any consistory. Not in our free action.

Question: Does not suspension and deposition ultimately imply excommunication from the Christian church?

Answer: I think it does. Although, perhaps, not always. But if you think of the grounds which are mentioned in the Church Order in Art. 79 and 80, it seems as if suspension from office, and deposition from office, necessarily implies ultimately excommunication. I cannot see how they can be separated. The only trouble is that usually deposed office bearers, that do not want to apologize, separate themselves from the churches. That's the case here too. We cannot take action anymore against the Rev. De Wolf and the deposed elders, because they separated themselves. They are not under our jurisdiction anymore. But I think if you consider the list of sins that are mentioned in Art. 79 and 80, yes, I think deposition from office usually must, — unless, unless there is deposition and at the same time apology. That is possible too. A minister, for instance, can be worthy of deposition, and apologize without ever entering the office again. In that case he remains member because of his apology. — But if a minister is deposed from office, or an elder, and does not apologize for his sin, naturally the excommunication must necessarily follow.

Question: From the same questioner: The word repent means to turn around. Why turn around when one is already in the kingdom by regeneration?

Answer: That's quite a question. That's really a very interesting question. Regeneration is first. Regeneration in the narrower sense is first. Regeneration . . . by regeneration in the narrower sense I mean the implanting of the life of grace through His Holy Spirit into the heart of a sinner, even without his knowledge and without any activity on his part. That work of regeneration is continued by God: without the activity or the work of God, the operation of God, even that seed of regeneration would never come to consciousness. But through the Word and by the Spirit, — I mean through the Word in the efficacious sense, the calling of the Son of God, — and thru the Holy Spirit that work of regeneration is called to consciousness. Christ says to the sinner: "Arise, thou sleeper; awake, thou sleeper, and arise from the dead." That is the voice of Christ. Following upon that comes the act of repentance. Now you can consider that

whole work, the whole work of regeneration and repentance the entering into the kingdom of God. And even that is not conditioned upon anything, but is the work of God. Or you can consider the work of regeneration the entering in of the kingdom of God in the narrower sense. And even there is no prerequisite. And so the act of conversion is never a prerequisite to enter the kingdom of God.

(To be continued)

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

"All the saints salute thee . . ." PHIL. 4:21

November 5, 1958

Rev. H. Kuiper has accepted the call extended to him by our newest church, Loveland. The installation service will be conducted, D.V., by the Rev. Heys, who will be on a classical assignment on that date, November 16.

The Young People's League held a mass meeting at Southwest church, Oct. 28. The Rev. R. Veldman gave an interesting speech on "Martin Luther, The Man." It was well adapted to his audience of young people and was well received. After recess they enjoyed a "pro and con" speech on "Must A Christian's Literature Be Limited?"; Ruth Dykstra presenting the "Pro" part and Agatha Lubbers the "Con." The subject then was briefly discussed by the audience.

The Mr. and Mrs. League met Oct. 30 at Hudsonville with Rev. B. Woudenberg presiding. The Rev. C. Hanko gave a speech on "The Signs of the Times." The speaker warned his audience to be on the look-out for the signs as predicted by our Lord in Matthew 24 and other passages. He pointed out that, although living in the time when these signs become increasingly worse for the church, the awareness of the same signs gives unspeakable comfort to the **Christian**, for he knows that he shall be redeemed from this body of death at His Coming, the Parousia!

The nineteen families that comprise our Edgerton congregation are very zealous in the instruction of the covenant seed "as it is taught here, in this christian church." Besides carrying the usual burden on congregational expenses, they support a two room school wherein two Protestant Reformed teachers teach thirty-one Protestant Reformed children. Their school opened the doors September, 1950. The enrollment was cut in half after the split in the congregation, but has remained constant since. Mrs. Herman Veldman teaches grades one through four, and Mr. Herman Woudenberg has charge of grades five through eight. The school has a Board room which is utilized Wednesday mornings for two catechism classes conducted by Rev. Veldman. It also serves for meeting places for men's and ladies' societies. Edgerton was without their minister for three Sundays in October when he served Loveland on Classical appointments.

It seems that the choral society reported in Doon and the choral society in Hull are one and the same! The new furnaces in Doon were installed none too soon; it was cold enough to enjoy their heat the first Sunday.

Although the Nov. 2nd bulletin of First Church mentioned that Rev. Ophoff was expected to be in church that day, he did not live up to the expectations. He suffered a slight set back which prohibited his attendance, but he was able to tune in on the public worship service by special wire connected to Rev. Hoeksema's parsonage. First's deacons report that the twenty-two parcels sent to Hungary were received in good condition, and the Rev. Dobos expressed hearty thanks for the much needed clothing found therein.

What Radio station in the Virgin Islands carried a sermon last Sunday proclaiming that God does not will that everyone shall be saved, but that He calls His own from all nations? Station W.I.V.I. for it carries the Reformed Witness Hour every Sunday morning at 9:30.

Our Home Missionary, Rev. Lubbers spent a little time in his home city lately. He appeared at the Hudsonville Ladies' Aid Society to show his pictures of Loveland, Forbes and Isabel, and did the same on the after recess program of the above mentioned Mr. and Mrs. League meeting. He also preached in Creston Nov. 2nd.

Rev. Heys had so arranged for his absence from his pulpit while in Loveland that evening services were held instead of afternoons. In that way his pulpit was occupied by Rev. Van Baren and Rev. Veldman. Through such splendid cooperation the Hull congregation was fed by the lively preaching of the Word in the absence of their own pastor.

Another report of growth! Hudsonville has decided to increase the size of their consistory by one elder and two deacons. They will elect two new elders and four deacons.

Rev. Vos was on the sick list Oct. 26, and Rev. Hanko was called in to conduct the morning service; Elder Zwak had charge of the reading service in the evening. The reverend was back on the podium Nov. 2nd.

The men in Kalamazoo have organized a men's society now that they have a pastor to lead them. They have chosen the prophecy of Isaiah for discussion this season. That Old Testament "Gospel" is full of rich material for society discussion. Congratulations, Kalamazoo!

We note that Oak Lawn and First churches have both been instructed from the history of the prophet Elijah, Rev. Hanko and Rev. Vanden Berg both having preached a series on that wonderful man of God of the time of the shadows.

The joint School Society of Oak Lawn and South Holland is going forward in faith, planning on building a school as soon as it is possible.

. . . see you in church.

J.M.F.