

The STANDARD BEARER



A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

They who deny the all-clearness and all-plainness of the Scriptures, leave us nothing else but darkness. Moreover I declare against you concerning the whole of the Scripture that I will have no one part of it called obscure; and to support me stands that which I have brought forth out of Peter, that the Word of God is to us a “lamp shining in a dark place.” (II Peter 1:19) But if any part of this lamp does not shine, it is rather a part of the dark place than the lamp itself. For Christ has not so illuminated us, as to wish that any part of His Word should remain obscure, even while He commands us to attend to it: for if it be not shining plain, His commanding us to attend to it is in vain.

— Martin Luther

MEDITATION

Redeemed With A Purpose

Rev. M. Schipper

“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”

Galatians 3:13, 14.

The context, in which this text is found, bears careful scrutiny. Two or three points of interest must be observed shall we come to a clear understanding of the Word of God in our text.

There is, first of all, the fact that the apostle begins the chapter berating the church of Galatia because of their folly. Through their lack of understanding, they become susceptible to the bewitching stratagems of false, Judaizing teachers. The apostle apparently is astonished that this could happen so soon after he had preached to them the full counsel of God. It appeared as if some one had hypnotized them, and with some evil power had gained the ascendancy over them. O foolish galatians, who hath bewitched you — before whose eyes Jesus Christ has been so openly portrayed as having been crucified? Don't you see that if you return to the pernicious doctrines of Judaism, you must of necessity deny the truth that Christ was crucified to save us?

And to get them to see their folly, the apostle appeals to their experience, which is always a powerful argument. That Spirit Whom you received, did you receive Him out of the works of the law, or was it out of the hearing of faith? Having begun by the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

The answers to all the questions asked, must, of course, be negative. Implicit in them is the positive truth that the Spirit of Christ is well able to apply unto us the salvation which Christ crucified has merited for us, and that, too, without any contributions on our part. It is this truth which is most clearly expressed also in our text.

Secondly, also worthy of note is the reference the apostle makes to Abraham. Throughout the immediately preceding context, in the text itself, and even in the succeeding verses, particular reference to this Old Testament saint is made. And the question cannot be suppressed, Why? Was it merely for the reason that Abraham served as a good illustration of a believer who was saved by his faith? Though this is true when considered by itself, this can hardly be the

sole reason. Rather, are we to understand that the apostle refers to Abraham because he exemplifies most clearly all the doctrine the apostle had preached to the Galatians. The Jews had always boasted that Abraham was their father, and with him the rite of circumcision began. If the Galatians will not listen to Paul, then by all means let them honor their father Abraham by listening to what he had to say. And what did Abraham say? Did Abraham say you can be saved by keeping the law of circumcision? Of course not! You know better! Abraham believed God, and this faith was reckoned unto him as righteousness. This faith was not another work that Abraham performed, but it was a gift of grace. Moreover, the Scripture foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, “In thee shall all nations be blessed.” Shouldn't it be plain to you that he understood this blessing would be realized, not in the natural seed that would seek to attain to righteousness by keeping the law, but in the spiritual seed who possessed the faith of father Abraham? If you return to the works of the law, then you should never speak of Abraham as your father again. He disowns you.

Thirdly, it is to be noted that in the immediate context the apostle declares plainly that as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse. That cannot mean that there was anything wrong with the law. The law is good. It is good also for everyone who keeps it. But it is also true that since no one can keep that law perfectly, it must curse everyone who continueth not to do all that the law requires. This is not the testimony of Paul, but of Moses, who gave the law. “Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.”

But here is the gospel I preached to you, and which you evidently never clearly understood. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. This He became when He was crucified on the cross.

And why was He made a curse for us? The answer is twofold: that the blessing of Abraham might come unto the Gentiles in Jesus Christ; and that the promise of the Spirit we might receive through faith.

Indeed, we are redeemed with a purpose!

Marvelous redemption!

From the curse of the law!

Not are we to conclude that the curse, of which the Word of God speaks, had its origin in the giving of the law. Fact of the matter is, that the curse was there long before the law, as inscribed by the finger of God upon the tables of stone on Mount Sinai, was given. The curse does not begin with Moses, but with Adam. The formal expression of the law did not come until Moses' day, but the essence of the law was there from the beginning. The heart of the law, its pervading principle is: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, mind, soul, and strength. This law Adam knew, but through the temptation of Satan failed to keep. In the day he sinned, in that day the curse came; and it has prevailed upon him and all his posterity ever since.

The curse is universal in its scope. It descends not only on those who are reprobate in life and walk, but on all those who proceeded from the loins of Adam. They are not only under the curse when they sin, but they are under the curse when they are born.

That curse is just in its application. God is a God of justice when He condemns all that is not in perfect harmony with His holy being and will.

That curse is fearful, for it demands that its object be banished from God's holy presence. It is temporal, spiritual, and eternal in its application. That curse follows everyone apart from Christ all through his earthly existence, and brings him into eternal desolation.

For those in Christ, God provides the removal of the curse.

The miracle of grace!

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law!

Not merely did He purchase us to make us His own, but He redeemed, ransomed us, through the payment of a price — a price not paid to the Devil who held us in the slavery of death, but a price that is paid to God Who had imposed on us the curse, a curse demanded by the law of God which had been violated by our disobedience.

The great Substitute redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.

The curse which was ours, He removed by becoming a curse in our stead.

Efficacious Substitute!

On the tree of the cross He bore our curse so as to bear it all away, none remaining. And to remove the curse He must pay the penalty of our guilt, while He Himself in perfect obedience fulfilled all the law for us.

Paradox of the cross!

While on the one hand He declares: In the volume of the book it is written of Me, lo, I come to do Thy will O God; on the other God lays all one curse on His sacred head.

This He could do because He could truly represent us. He is so perfectly identified with us that we are bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh. As organic and federal Head He is not only appointed to represent us, but He is completely of us. As we were subject to the fire of God's holy indignation, Christ delivers us from that fire, but Himself is consumed in that flame.

And why did He do it? What was the divine purpose in this substitutionary act?

First of all, that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ.

Of the blessing of Abraham the apostle had spoken more than once in the context. He speaks of the faith of Abraham which was accounted unto him for righteousness. Faith, not the works of the law, which justified Abraham, is the gift of grace whereby the believer is united to Christ, in and through Whom is all our righteousness. Faith, which is the living bond connecting us to Christ, in Whom is all our righteousness and salvation, — not our keeping of the law, is our justification. And this great boon God purposed to give not only to Abraham, but to his seed; not his natural seed, but spiritual, as that seed is found in all nations. So it was that through the preaching of the gospel which Abraham heard and believed, this justified saint of the Old Dispensation understood that God would grant the grace of faith that justifies also to the Gentiles, and so all nations would be blessed in him.

But there was more, much more. Father Abraham believed!

He believed that this promise of the gospel, this divine purpose of God, would be realized through the reception of the promise of the Spirit through faith.

This is not another purpose of God connected to redemption, but it belongs to the first. The blessing of Abraham which must come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, is the reception of the promise of the Spirit through faith. At the same time the latter shows how God planned to realize His purpose. The Holy Spirit of Pentecost, as the Spirit of the ascended and exalted Christ, God would send on all who are of the faith of Abraham, applying unto them

the redemption they have in Christ.

Glorious purpose of God!

Realized through the Spirit of Christ, not, as the translation has it, — “through Jesus Christ,” but on all who are “in Jesus Christ.” Jesus Christ is viewed here, not as the mediator through Whom the Spirit works, but as the sphere in Whom the Spirit is given.

Jesus Christ is Abraham’s seed, as the apostle declares in the verses that immediately follow the text. “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.” To Him therefore, first of all, the promise of

God pertains. And in Christ, that is, to all who are in the sphere of Christ, — to all who are incorporated in Him, does the promise also pertain.

We receive all our salvation out of Christ, when we are in Him. We receive it of Christ through faith. And faith is not of us to God, but of God to us. Faith does not emphasize what we can do, or must do. But emphatically, what we cannot do, and need not do, — but what God in Christ has done for us.

Marvelous redemption!

Wholly unmerited!

Given unto us of free and sovereign grace!

EDITORIALS

Seminary Commencement 1974

Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

It is always somewhat of an oasis in the midst of the busyness of our synodical meetings when we can gather to mark the graduation of new candidates for the ministry of the Word in our Protestant Reformed Churches. Synodical meetings are busy and require concentrated attention. And while they may be pleasant in their own way, they are not intended to be pleasurable experiences. Hence, it is a relief and a change of pace when we may gather simply for the purpose of celebrating a joyful event.

And this year was no exception.

We gathered in the auditorium of our Hope Church, the site of Synod’s meetings. Fortunately — for Hope’s auditorium can easily become somewhat like a sauna bath when the weather is hot and sultry — the weather was pleasantly comfortable. The Theological School Committee had prepared a brief, well-balanced program, with devotions by the president of the School Committee, Rev. G. Van Baren, audience singing, and a couple of fitting solos by Mr. Arnold Dykstra, — all centered around the commencement address (which follows this editorial) and the presentation of diplomas to Candidates den

Hartog and Slopsema. And then, after closing prayer by the Rev. D. Engelsma, president of Synod, the two candidates received congratulations from our people who were present for the occasion.

And so the Lord has given us two more potential ministers of the Word, who, we expect, will soon have places in our churches. All thanks and praise be to Him!

We are sorry that we are not able to present their pictures along with this article, especially for our people in areas where they have never met these brethren. Perhaps they will be kind enough to send in portraits at the time of their ordination, D.V.

On a temporary basis two of our vacant congregations will enjoy the labors of these brethren during the summer months, the Lord willing. Mr. den Hartog expects to fill the pulpit of Prospect Park, New Jersey; and Mr. Slopsema plans to spend the summer in Edgerton, Minnesota. [Note: Due to the abundance of copy connected with seminary graduation and a report on Synod, the second installment of the Post-Lecture Question Box will not appear until our August issue.]

Preaching And Perspicuity

Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

(The following is an approximate transcript of an address delivered at the commencement program of our Theological School. A more exact transcript was originally intended; but the recording tape was defective. Hence, this transcript is from my outline and from memory. HCH)

First of all, I want to speak a hearty word of congratulations to Candidates Den Hartog and Slopsema. We are happy and thankful with you for the achievement which occasions this commencement program. In a rather distinctive group of graduates you have the distinction, too, that you are the first to receive diplomas with the "Grandville, Michigan" address rather than the "Grand Rapids" address. That is not the main thing, however. We are thankful to our God because he has given us two candidates for the ministry in our Protestant Reformed Churches. And we pray that the Lord may soon give you a place in one of our congregations and may then keep you faithful to His Word.

It is fitting to say something on this occasion about the preaching of the Word. To preach the Word will be the life's calling of these candidates. And it is that preaching of the Word, as well as the very possession and understanding of the Word – and with them the very existence of the church – which are in jeopardy today. Indeed, they are in jeopardy because the authority and the very divine character of the infallible Word are being challenged and denied. But they are in jeopardy, as I hope to bring out presently, in a peculiar respect, namely: in connection with the *perspicuity* of Holy Scripture. Theologians today are attacking and seeking to destroy the idea of the authority and infallibility of the Word; but they are doing so especially by attacking and denying that attribute of Scripture called *perspicuity*. And it is that perspicuity more than any single aspect of the doctrine of Holy Scripture which constitutes our Reformed heritage with respect to Scripture.

The Meaning of Perspicuity

To understand what is meant by the perspicuity of Scripture we must go back in history to the differences between Rome and the Reformation. Rome historically has taken the position that the Bible is really a closed book for the laity. The latter cannot understand Scripture without an interpreter who has authority to speak. And this, in Rome's

view, means that the authoritative interpretation of Scripture can be given only by the clergy, that is, ultimately, by the pope. The Reformation, on the other hand, maintained that Holy Scripture is perspicuous.

The difference between the two has been illustrated by a house with a locked door or a house with an open door. Several people approach a house. The door of that house is locked. And only one of that group of people has a key. The rest of the people ask that one person, "Open the door, please, so that we may enter and inspect the inside of the house." This illustrates the Romish conception of the relation of the church to Scripture. The pope is the man with the key; those without keys are the laity. On the other hand, the Reformed position, it is said, is illustrated by a house with an open door. Several persons wish to enter a house; and the door is not locked, but open. All are equally able to enter the house and can freely inspect it.

Now it is true that the second illustration represents the Protestant view of Scripture in a way. But the illustration is partly misleading. For it makes the Protestant view individualistic. But Protestants did not lose sight of the fact that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, is the real interpreter of Holy Scripture, and that the Spirit is not given merely to a number of individuals, but to the *church*. However, the Protestant conception of the church is different. According to the Reformation, the church is not the clergy; but it is the body of Christ, the gathering of believers and their children in the midst of the world. And for that church's well-being our Lord Jesus Christ has instituted the offices. One's conception of the church, therefore, is inextricably connected with the doctrine of the perspicuity of Holy Scripture.

What is meant by perspicuity?

Literally, the term means that Scripture can be "seen through." If I may coin a term, the perspicuity of Scripture is the "see-through-able-ness" of Scripture. Perspicuity means that Scripture is lucid, transparent, understandable, clear.

Perspicuity implies, in the first place, that Scripture is *penetrable, but unfathomable*. It does not mean that there are no depths in Scripture which are not easily penetrated; the very opposite is true. Scripture is not closed, but it is profound. It is not impenetrable, but it is unfathomable. This is one of the unique features, in fact, of the divine Scriptures. Any book of man which you may read is soon exhausted. You read it a few times, and you soon feel that you are finished with it. You have fully entered into the sphere of thought of the author. You have penetrated his mind. You have no more need of reading what he has written. But one of the peculiar facets of Holy Writ is this, that the more you turn to Scripture in faith, approach it as the Word of God written, the more you realize that you are exactly not dealing with a word of man, but with God's Word, and that there are depths in Scripture which you have never yet plumbed and which seem to grow deeper and more unfathomable according as you try to understand them.

That brings us to a second aspect of perspicuity: that you *need not fathom Scripture in order to understand it*. In the process of probing into the depths of Scripture, of entering more deeply into the riches of God's Word, you somehow understood the Word of God all the time! Again, this is a unique characteristic of the Bible. As far as man's word is concerned, it can be easily fathomed. But the mere fact that you can fathom it does not necessarily mean that you can understand its meaning; and though it may be easily fathomed, you do not always easily understand it. Nor, in fact, do you really understand a man's word until you have fathomed it. The Word of God, on the other hand, can never be fathomed; yet it can readily be understood by the believer (and I wish to emphasize: *by the believer!*). Nor does the believer have to fathom that Word of God in order to understand it.

These two unique features constitute the perspicuity of Holy Scripture from an objective point of view.

This perspicuity is the key to several realities of the Christian life. It explains several facts. It explains why, in the first place, you may read Scripture every day, study it often and much, listen to the exposition of it in the preaching of the Word on the Lord's day, and not only never grow weary of reading and hearing, but experience that your interest deepens and increases according as you read and listen and study more diligently. It explains why, in the second place, the Scriptures are not limited in their address to a certain class of people. They simply do not address one class of people, and they do not find receptivity with only one class of people. On the contrary, every believer — be he child or adult, be he

layman or clergyman, be uneducated or learned — every believer is addressed in the Scriptures and also experiences that the Scriptures are addressed to him and that they are for him. And is it not a marvel that even our little children can read and in their childish way understand the Scriptures? In the third place, it explains why all believers together have not exhausted the treasures of Holy Scripture. Even after centuries of reading and studying and interpreting Holy Writ, we may still find unexplored depths in the Word of God. No, it is not that in the past they have misunderstood and misinterpreted Scripture, and that they have failed to grasp its meaning. But they have not fathomed and have not exhausted its riches. There is always something more, something new! The minister of the Word may well remember this, too. There is no sermon as rich and as deep as the text upon which it is based; and when the minister has prepared his best sermon on a given text, he must not imagine that he has exhausted the riches of his text. There are always new depths to be plumbed, new riches to uncover, greater treasures to bring to light. The Scriptures are inexhaustibly rich! And, in the fourth place, this truth of perspicuity explains why it is possible to have officebearers, ministers of the Word, whose special task it is to interpret the Word, to be busy in its doctrine, to expound it to the church, to the believers, though, mind you, they understand and interpret the Scriptures themselves!

Hence, the Bible is an open book, from which every child of God may receive all the spiritual instruction and knowledge necessary unto salvation. And this is the teaching of the Bible itself. In II Peter 1:19 this is taught: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts." Notice: the Word of God is a *light*, not darkness. And again, we read in Hebrews 8:11: "And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest."

But there is another side to this same truth of perspicuity, as we have already suggested. The subjective side of this same truth of perspicuity is the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ in every believer. We must remember that the Word of God is perspicuous to the *believer*, to the child of God. Even though Scripture, objectively considered, is *clear*, we must remember that the things of the Spirit of God are *spiritually discerned*. They cannot be discerned by natural man, but only by the believer, that is, by him who has the Spirit of Christ, and that, too, in the fellowship of the body of Christ.

Every individual believer has the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was bestowed upon the church. And the church

is not the clergy, but the organism of the body of Christ. Hence, the Spirit was bestowed not on a certain class, or part, of the church, but upon all the members of the body. Only, this is not to be conceived of individualistically, but organically. The Spirit is given not to all the members of the church as mere individuals and in separation from one another. But He is given to every believer in the fellowship of the church – never in separation from the body of believers. And it is by this Spirit that all are guided into all the truth, and all have that truth spiritually applied to their hearts. This implies that no man – minister, elder, deacon, priest, pope, council, synod – is absolutely necessary for any believer or group of believers in order to understand the Word of God unto salvation. This is by no means the same as saying that believers will *despise* the pure preaching of the Word and the preachers of that Word. But for the understanding of the Word of God unto salvation no man, even though he be a preacher, is absolutely necessary. This must be maintained. It is an essential element of our Reformation heritage. “But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. . . . But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.” I John 2:20, 27.

The Relation of Preaching and Perspicuity

That brings us to an important question: what is the relation between preaching and the perspicuity of Scripture?

Preaching we may define as the authoritative proclamation of the gospel by the church in the service of the Word of God through Christ. In this connection, our attention is drawn to two facts. In the first place, preaching, in the Reformed view, is *essential* in the life of the church. In fact, we may safely say that this emphasis is as much a characteristic of the Reformation as is the emphasis on perspicuity. In the Reformed view, the church is a *preaching* church, not a sacramentarian church. And preaching, in the second place, is precisely the proclamation of the whole Word of God, that is, of the perspicuous Scriptures. Hence, what is the relation between the two? If preaching is essential, and if, on the other hand, perspicuity implies that no man, not even a preacher, is absolutely necessary for the understanding of the Word of God unto salvation, how are the two related? And what are the implications of the attribute of Scripture called perspicuity for preaching and the preacher?

It should be obvious, first of all, negatively, that the preacher must not approach the Word and must

not approach the congregation in the preaching as though the Scriptures were not clear and understandable unto salvation.

Yet this is the very position that is taken today even in Reformed churches. The Scriptures, they say, are time-bound and are culturally and historically conditioned. The result is that we cannot really understand the Scriptures unless we engage in the science of historical criticism. We cannot understand the Scriptures unless we can understand fully the cultural and historical background of the human writers and of that of which they write. We cannot understand the Scriptures unless we can understand how the human writers themselves understood their own writings. And the result is, too, that one must try to distill out of the Scriptures the Word of God. Thus, for example, as Dr. Harry Kuitert taught already several years ago when he spoke in Grand Rapids, in Genesis 1 there is not an account of how things happened, nor a report of what actually took place; but Genesis gives us the accounts of the origin of things which were current in Israel’s cultural community, accounts which were assimilated by Israel and put into the framework found in Genesis, a framework suited to their worship of Jehovah. Heathen myths were demythologized and filtered and refashioned and made suitable for a profession of faith of Israel’s God, Jehovah. This same approach and method are applied to all of Holy Scripture. I have cited but a single example.

But I call your attention to the fact that this is a denial of the perspicuity of Holy Scripture. It makes Scripture a book which only the experts – theologians, scientists, historians, anthropologists, archeologists, etc. – can understand. Without those experts the common people of God cannot understand the Scriptures. The attitude of those who take this position is like the attitude of the chief priests in Jesus’ day, “This people that knoweth not the law is accursed.” Principally the position of these theologians – and there are many of them today – is nothing but a reaffirmation of Rome’s error. It interposes the preacher between Scripture and the believers.

But what then is the relation between preaching and perspicuity? If the Scriptures are perspicuous, why is preaching necessary? And why does the right-thinking Reformed believer esteem the preaching of the Word very highly, so that he accounts it the chief of the means of grace and so that he does not want to be deprived of the pure preaching of the Word?

In answer to these questions we call attention to the following important truths. In the first place, it is indeed a blessing for the church that Christ has

instituted the office of the ministry of the Word: through the preaching of the Word it pleases Christ to gather and build up and instruct His church in the midst of the world. In the second place, we must remember that it will not do to say that the preaching of the Word is not necessary. This is simply not true. For according to Scripture and the confessions the preaching of the Word is the God-ordained means for the working and strengthening of faith. "How shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" Romans 10:14,ff. We must not, therefore, create a false disjunction between the preaching of the Word and the reading and studying and understanding of the Word by the believers. In the third place, and in close connection with the preceding, we must remember that the preaching of the Word is given as a means of grace to the *church*. It is not the clergy, therefore, as a separate class, that preach the Word. But it is the church, the body of Christ, that preaches the Word. And the church accomplishes this calling to preach the Word through the office of the ministry which Christ has ordained in and bestowed upon His church. This, in turn, stands in close connection with a fourth truth: the preaching of the Word exactly has as its premise the perspicuity of the Scriptures. It is not an obscure, dark, unintelligible Word which the church proclaims. Then the preaching itself could not be understood. Then we would never be able to hear Christ Himself through the preaching. On the contrary, it is exactly because the Word of God is clear and perspicuous that it can be *preached*, and that through the preaching we may indeed hear and behold and embrace Christ unto salvation. If that were not true, preaching would be of no avail. And finally, therefore, the authority of the preaching also rests exactly in the perspicuous Scriptures. You see, the *authority* of the preaching and the *content* of the preaching are inseparably connected. The former rests in the latter. That is, that preaching only is authoritative which has for its content the Word of God. And the church may and does accept the preaching as authoritative only in as far as and because of the fact that she recognizes in the preaching the Word of God. And the church is able to judge the preaching exactly because the Scriptures are perspicuous.

But there is also a very important practical side to the relation between preaching and perspicuity. I may observe here that what I am about to say is true for every believer, and not only for preachers and preachers-to-be. But on this occasion I want to emphasize these points especially for our candidates, who look forward to a place in the ministry.

In the first place, because Scripture is perspicuous, the Bible itself, not any word of man about the Bible,

must occupy first place in the study and preparation of the preacher. It is very easy to turn to other sources, and meanwhile to do lip-service to the truth of perspicuity. To confess the truth of perspicuity and immediately to turn to a commentary when we seek to understand a passage of Scripture is inconsistent. To prepare sermons which are nothing more than an eclectic conglomeration of the opinions of men about the meaning of a passage of Scripture is wrong, dead wrong! We may indeed value commentaries highly; and we may respect the labors of other children of God, both past and present. But the writings of men, even though they be men of God and though their expositions of Scripture may be valuable, — the writings of men may not be allowed to take the place of Scripture, nor to intrude between Scripture and ourselves. If we fall into the habit of turning to commentaries instead of to Scripture, we form a very bad habit. Finally we assume the fixed and false attitude that without the help of man the Word of God is to us a closed book. And that is, of course, a blatant denial of the perspicuity of the Word of God. The preacher must, therefore, always turn to that perspicuous Bible before all else.

In the second place, the minister of the Word should read and study the Scriptures *confidently*. I do not mean that he should do so in *self-confidence*, that is, in conceited trust in his own wisdom and intellectual ability. But I mean that he should read and study the Scriptures in the *confidence of faith*. We must read and study in the confidence that the Bible is the Word of God, so that we certainly believe that God will speak to us through the Scriptures. We must read and study and prepare to preach in the confidence that according to His promise, the Lord our God will through the Spirit of truth guide us through the means of the Bible into all the truth. We must read and study the Scriptures in that confidence that is the result of a prayerful attitude.

Then we will not proceed from the false assumption that we will not understand the true meaning of Scripture from mere reading. Nor will we easily give up and abandon our efforts when a given portion of Scripture does not yield its significance to us immediately. When we do that, we really are blaming Scripture instead of putting the blame where it properly belongs — on ourselves. But laboring in this confidence, we will read Scripture again and again, twenty-five or even a hundred times if necessary.

In the third place, we will not simply thoughtlessly read a passage of Scripture over and over again. That would be a futile exercise. But we will read carefully and attentively. Believing that Scripture is its own interpreter, we will read it in its own light, comparing Scripture with Scripture. We will strive to understand

its figures, its symbols, its visions, etc. We will read the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament. And thus we will understand and grow in the understanding and the ability to expound the Scriptures and to preach the Word.

The Significance of Preaching the Perspicuous Word

Finally, and briefly, what is the significance of all this?

In the first place, this is significant for the position and the attitude of the minister of the Word himself. He must not imagine and assume the attitude that the congregation is bound to accept his word because it is HE, the minister, who speaks. He has no authority whatsoever in and by himself. The mere fact that he occupies the place of minister, or the fact that he may be intellectually superior, or the fact that he has been thoroughly educated – all this clothes him with no authority and gives him no right to impose his word upon the congregation or upon any believer with the expectation that it will be and must be unconditionally accepted. Nor, we must remember, is the danger of assuming such an attitude by any means imaginary! Nevertheless, the faithful minister of the Word must expect desire only that his word is accepted by the congregation only because it is the WORD OF GOD ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES.

In the second place, this is of great significance for

the congregation.

Woe to the church that accepts an attitude of false authoritarianism on the part of its minister! Woe to the church that allows the minister to become a little pope, whose word is with authority. No word of man – not even if it is an interpretation of the Word of God – has any authority whatsoever! The Word of God is the only authoritative Word!

And this means that the congregation – all of it, ordinary member as well as elder, from the least to the greatest – must always judge the word of the preaching in the light of the Word of God. The truth of perspicuity gives no place to the devil of hierarchy! But all believers are called to watch, lest false doctrines should be introduced in the church of Christ, to watch even over the officebearers and the official work of the ministry. And ultimately they have the power and the calling to depose their own officebearers, the power of reformation, if in no other way the purity of the preaching can be maintained and if in no other way false doctrines can be kept out.

To this end we must all, with one accord, be diligent in the study of the Scriptures.

But especially does this hold true for the ministers of the Word!

May God give our candidates grace to be mighty in the perspicuous Scriptures, and never to depart therefrom!

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ALL AROUND US

Synod of 1974

Prof. H. Hanko

The Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches of 1974 is now part of the history of the Church of Christ. This report of the Synod is unofficial; it is a general survey of the work of the Synod to give our people an over-all view of what Synod did. The *Acts* of the Synod will be published in the near future, and all our people will receive a copy of the official record of Synod's business.

Before discussing the actual work of Synod, there are a few general remarks which I want to make by way of introduction.

In the first place, I shall try to give some idea in this article of how Synod works. Those who have been delegated to Synod or who have attended Synod's sessions at one time or another know pretty much the "mechanics" of Synod; but there are a large number of people who have little conception of this.

In the second place, I think it can be said without contradiction that this was a good Synod. There are several reasons why one can come to this conclusion. For one thing, there were no serious problems arising out of Church troubles which occupied Synod's attention. This is reason for gratitude in itself. Synod could concentrate on the positive aspects of her calling. In close connection with this, there was a deep-seated unity on the Synod — a unity of one faith, one doctrine, one hope and one calling. If we stop to think of how rare this is in today's ecclesiastical world, we cannot be thankful enough for this gift of the Spirit of Christ. All our Churches ought to rejoice and give thanks for what the Spirit has wrought. Most of Synod's decisions passed by unanimous vote. And the differences that did reflect themselves in the final voting were never on matters of principle or matters of doctrine. In the third place, Rev. D. Engelsma, Synod's president, proved to be an excellent president. He kept the Synod to its business, and, while allowing plenty of time for deliberation, he moved Synod along to the completion of its task.

Thirdly, Synod labored profoundly impressed with the calling of the Church in the days in which we live. There are several aspects to this that need to be mentioned. Synod labored in the awareness that the Lord has richly blessed us as Churches and has given

to us nearly fifty years of faithfulness to His Word. This places upon our Churches an awesome responsibility with respect to our calling. Repeatedly Synod was reminded that there are people of God all over the world who are struggling to maintain the truth and are seeking to grow in the knowledge of the truth, but who have few or none to lead them. To provide such leadership is the need of the hour. And God has given us this calling. We cannot and may not shrink back from it. Yet this has its problems. These problems are of a practical sort. They root in the fact that our Churches are small and our resources both of men and of money are limited. We simply do not seem to have either the man-power or the financial resources to do all the work that needs to be done. But the Lord knows these problems too; and Synod sought to do its work in such a way that the Churches could perform their task to the best of their ability without placing hardship upon the congregations. It is true, the budget will go up again next year. But if one figures that inflation has raised the cost of everything and that prices are rising astronomically, Synod held the budget within reasonable limitations. The Synodical budget will be \$183.00 per family for 1975. This is up a little more than \$20.00; but it is far from the \$50.00 plus dollars which it first appeared the budget would be. It is hoped that our people will know the urgency of our calling in these days.

Fourthly, it was rather striking to me that Synod, on several occasions, and in several connections, rather directly faced the question of the relationship between the broader ecclesiastical assemblies and the local congregations. This is rather striking because it is characteristic of many (perhaps, most) denominations that there is a growing tendency in the direction of hierarchicalism. By this latter term is meant that there is a growing concentration of power in the broader assemblies and a corresponding weakening of the authority of the local congregations. It is not at all uncommon to hear people complain that their Synods or General Assemblies are robbing the Churches on the local level of their God-given authority. Synod becomes the body to dictate to the local Churches what should be done; and the affairs of the Churches are taken out

of the hands of the congregations and concentrated in Synods and committees of Synods. This is common today. And yet this is destructive of the very genius of Reformed Church Polity. This question was faced more than once on our Synod, not directly, but indirectly in connection with other matters. It was good to see that our Synod was very careful about this, and that our Synod was very intent on leaving matters which belong to the local congregations in their hands.

Finally, there are two suggestions which come to mind which in my opinion would be of benefit to Synod and the Churches. The first is that the committees of pre-advice should be a little more careful in their work. It is quite amazing how important the work of the committees of pre-advice is. Very often when Synod gets bogged down it is because the committees of pre-advice have not been thorough enough or have not been careful enough in the formulation of their advice. Nevertheless, all the blame for this cannot be placed at the feet of the committees of pre-advice. Sometimes the fault lay in Synod's standing committees. These standing committees ought to see to it that the reports submitted to Synod are thorough enough and well enough formulated so that Synod has *all* the pertinent information before it. Sometimes, on some important points, the reports of the standing committees were too sketchy.

The second remark I have to make concerns the minutes. It seems to me that it would be of benefit to our people if the Second Clerk of Synod would write the minutes in such a way that only the actual decisions taken would be written down. Anyone who has made use of the printed *Acts* knows that it is very difficult to make head or tail out of these printed *Acts*. There are simply too many letters and numbers. And, to find a complete decision, one must page about through the minutes proper, the supplements and the index, finally to find what Synod decided. Our Stated Clerk has done a fine job of making the *Acts* as readable as possible for our people. And there is little more that he can do. But if Synod could prepare a printed *Acts* which would eliminate all the letters and numbers in the articles and give only the official decision, this would be of considerable assistance to understanding what Synod decided. It is, I think, something worth thinking about.

To turn now to the actual work of Synod.

Synod began its meetings Tuesday night in Hope Church for the Pre-synodical prayer service. Under Hope's Consistory, Rev. J. Heys preached from Psalm 23:4: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." This

sermon will be printed in the *Acts*. It is our hope that all our people will take the time to read it when the *Acts* comes out.

Wednesday morning, June 5, Synod began its meetings. The president of last year's Synod, Rev. Heys, lead in opening devotions, presided over the acceptance of the credentials from Classis East and Classis West, and presided over the election of the new officers. Rev. D. Engelsma was elected president; Rev. C. Hanko, vice-president; Rev. J. Korterling, first clerk; and Rev. G. Van Baren, second clerk. After the new officers took their places, Rev. Engelsma spoke a few words of welcome and introduction to the Synod, read the Declaration of Unity (found on pp. 73 and 74 of the Church Order) to which Synod rose in agreement, and began Synod's work by appointing a committee which divided the work of Synod into four parts and the Synod into four committees, and assigned a part to each committee. Committee I was given all the matters which are related to the Seminary; Committee II was given all matters relating to missions; Committee III was given all the other work with the exception of finances; Committee IV dealt with all the questions of finance. In my opinion, Committee IV has the most difficult work; but this work was done well.

Ordinarily, this would be the end of Synod's work for the day because the rest of the day is usually needed for the Committees of Pre-advice to meet. But Synod reconvened in the afternoon to hear the sermons of Candidates Den Hartog and Slopsema. After the sermons were finished Synod recessed for the remainder of the day.

Most of Thursday and Friday were taken with the examinations. The students gave an excellent account of themselves and were declared by Synod candidates for the ministry of the Word and sacraments in our Churches. This is always a thrilling moment in Synod's business. After the final vote on their candidacy was taken, Synod paused to sing the doxology (May the grace of Christ our Savior), pray together, and congratulate the young men who have completed their work. God has blessed us with two new candidates. They will be eligible for a call after July 7. May God give them a place in the Church and bless them in their ministry. Their graduation took place Wednesday evening, June 12 in Hope Church.

Beginning Monday morning, the work of Committee I was placed before the Synod. This committee dealt exclusively with matters of the Seminary. Most of the matters were routine and need not be included in this report. We mention the following items of interest.

— The Lord has richly blessed the Seminary and maintained our school in the truth of the Scriptures.

— Our people have responded beyond expectations to the support and payment of the new building. Apart from a few details and some landscaping, the building is completed. I would guess that the building is nearly 3/4 paid for.

— While two students have graduated, it appears now as if the School will have new pre-seminary students at various levels of study and two new students beginning Seminary work. Of these six, five are at present not members of our denomination. It is evident that the work of our Seminary is expanding.

— There were matters which required Synod's decision relating to licensure, tax exemption status and accreditation. It appears that accreditation is not advisable for the foreseeable future. To take such steps would involve a sacrifice of principles which would eventually ruin our school.

Committee II dealt with matters of missions. The following items are of particular interest.

— Jamaica. The work of Rev. Lubbers was completed on the island. Synod noted with gratitude all that Rev. and Mrs. Lubbers had done over the last years for the cause of the Church there. Revs. Hanko and Heys visited the island last spring and helped ordain the four young men who had graduated. These young men now have Churches of their own. Synod decided to send a couple of men again the early part of next year to evaluate the progress of the work and to help with any problems which may have risen. In the meantime, the Mission Committee will advise Synod next year on the future course of the work there. Synod also recommended to First Church that Rev. Lubbers be released from his work there, that he be given temporary emeritation and that he be declared eligible for a call in our Churches. The Churches in Jamaica are, for a year at least, pretty much on their own. Our brethren there need our continual prayers. Our Churches will continue to give some financial assistance, especially in matters of building.

— The home mission program of our Churches continues to expand. The real problem is a lack of manpower. However, Rev. Harbach is now established in Houston, Texas. Work is at present being carried on in Skowhegan, Maine, and in Edmonton, British Columbia. But the Mission Committee is busy also investigating various other fields, for there are many letters received from many places sent by people expressing interest in our Churches. I wish I could quote excerpts from the various reports submitted, but room will not permit this. The full reports will be published in the *Acts*.

— Foreign Missions. The Foreign Mission Committee, located in the West has also been

expanding its work. 50,000 copies of 16 lessons of Bible Studies have been translated and are ready for distribution in Indonesia. These lessons were originally prepared by Rev. Woudenberg. The committee is also investigating fields of labor in Ghana and Rhodesia. The committee has contact with someone in Accra, Ghana who already receives tapes on Bible Doctrine.

— Synod decided to call a second missionary; Hudsonville was appointed the calling Church.

It seems sometimes as if the Lord has given to us more work than we can manage. We know this can never be the case, but the responsibilities are awesome. Surely the injunction comes to us: Work while it is yet day ere the night cometh in which no man can labor.

Other matters of interest include the following:

— The Catechism Book Committee is busy with several projects to revise our present Catechism Books. This work should be fruitful in the years to come.

— The Catechism Book Distribution Committee reports that our Catechism materials are being used by several outside our Churches who are unable to find any satisfactory material.

— The Fiftieth Anniversary Committee has done a lot of work in preparation for our commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of our Churches to be held, the Lord willing, next year. I will not report the details here, for the committee itself will want to do this when its plans are definite. But I can report that a very useful and interesting book is being prepared as part of our celebration of this event, and that an interesting set of plans is being readied.

— The proposed trip to Australasia has been postponed for one year. Several considerations entered into this decision. One benefit from the postponement will be that more careful preparation will now be possible. This may come as a disappointment to those in Australasia who were looking forward to our coming; but the benefits of delaying the trip are great.

These are the highlights of Synod's work. We have much to be grateful for. Let us never lose sight of the many blessings of our covenant God; let us ourselves be thankful and let us teach our children to be thankful for all that God has done lest we come under His wrath for our callousness and ingratitude.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to see at this point what the results of Synod's decisions will be. All we can do, in the assurance that the Spirit has guided Synod, is wait for the Lord to do His work as we labor and pray for the cause of His kingdom.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

“666”

Rev. G. Van Baren

In treating the signs of the times, one can not help but recall the prophecy of Revelation 13 which describes the two beasts, one from the sea and one from the land. These picture the kingdom of the antichrist from the viewpoint of his political development as well as his social-scientific-spiritual development. Concerning that antichristian kingdom and the image of the beast which is constructed, we read in verses 16-18, “And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.”

Many have tried to show what that number represented. An interesting pamphlet by the late Rev. H. Hoeksema treats this “Mark of the Beast.” (Available without charge by writing to our business office.) Many have wondered what that mark could possibly represent. Would this be placed literally on the forehead or right hand? Or does it describe some condition which has already taken place in the history of the world — such as the rise of the Roman empire?

This mark, and its placement, surely is given in connection with the rise of the kingdom of the antichrist. We can expect that this mark will be demanded for all at the end of this age — and without it one can not buy or sell.

I would suggest that the time is ripe for the issuance of such a number. We, too, ought to be aware of developing events and be on our guard.

Two articles recently came to my attention, one submitted by a reader, which points out how near this “mark of the beast” may be to us. The first article appeared in the *National Observer* of April 13, 1974. The article stated:

Is a Big Brother society like that of George Orwell’s *1984* emerging in America? They didn’t think so in Albuquerque a few weeks ago. But now they’re not so sure.

In an unusual poll of public attitudes, the New Mexico Civil Liberties Union set out to measure the

levels of Albuquerque residents’ concern about possible invasions of their privacy, and then to see if those levels could be raised through an intense advertising campaign.

The levels were low when the researchers took their first poll, they reported, and significantly higher in their second poll, which followed a month-long media “blitz” that this city will not soon forget.

With ads in newspapers, on television, on radio, on billboards, and on a hot-air balloon, and with a blizzard of pamphlets, residents were warned that Big Brother society may be only 10 years away.

Along two freeways that intersect in Albuquerque, 30 billboards were filled with an eerily staring human eye, or a pyramid with a staring eye similar to that on a dollar bill, or a young girl wearing a placard containing a Social Security number.

“What we find today are Social Security numbers being used on medical records, credit records, employment records, so that all the information from the conglomeration of records can be stored in a centrally located computer,” says Charles Daniels, a professor who aided in the study. “This is what we are against.” . . .

In another article, several quotations were presented from national magazines and news services to show how there is developing a system whereby all transactions are done by number. There is a quotation from *Parade* of Dec. 26, 1971 in which is presented an account of an experiment in Upper Arlington, Ohio where numbers are used, instead of checks, to buy groceries and other products; to deposit wages; etc.

Another quotation is presented from *U.S. News & World Report*, Sept. 4, 1974:

California banks, which introduced the popular bank-credit card systems . . . are now preparing to take another bold step into the checkless society foretold for the future. Beginning Oct. 16, many banks in the state will permit individual customers in California to authorize employers to deposit their pay into their checking accounts automatically. Individuals will also be able to arrange for automatic payment of some or all of their predictable, recurring bills.

Employers can sign up with their own banks . . . Over the next five years, it is expected that 35% of payroll checks in the State will be converted to automatic deposits. In order to participate, an

individual bank must join the automated clearing house system and agree to comply with Federal Reserve regulations. The plan is designed to permit participation of all California banks, regardless of size. Banks representing more than 95% of banking offices in the State have indicated they will participate.

Or another striking quotation is presented in the same article from the *New York Times*, Jan. 2, 1973,

The Federal Reserve System has endorsed the development of a vast nationwide network of computers to transfer money from one person to another. In a long statement on "the evolution of payments mechanism," published in the December issue of the Federal Reserve Bulletin, the nation's central bank spelled out in far greater detail than ever before its ideas on how the coming age of electronic money should be organized. The nation's payments mechanism can be expected to evolve in the direction of a system where credit to the payee's account is made at the same time the payor's account is charged . . .

The Federal Reserve said its role "in facilitating the development of automated crediting systems or pre-authorized debiting systems may pioneer a similar role in the experimental point-of-sale terminals.

The Federal Reserve statement . . . made clear that in the future such systems should operate over large geographic areas . . . "The consumer," the Federal Reserve concludes, "will be able to complete financial transactions through the use of a card or SIMILAR IDENTIFYING DEVICE, and this procedure will be accomplished through automated teller units conveniently located in shopping centers, in other places handling numerous consumer sales and in the homes."

This current development, which we have simply taken for granted as being a part of our "automated" society, appears strikingly similar to the description presented in Revelation 13.

We see today, and shall increasingly see, reliance upon the computer. This handles purchases and sales of most individuals in this country. And, admittedly, this proves to be quite efficient.

But also, the computer relies on numbers. Whether it is a credit card number, a social security number, or some other number, the computer can immediately identify an individual, record his account, add or detract from his balance, present billings. Most of us are familiar with this already.

Increasingly, the numbers per individual used are

being reduced. Often, one's social security number is used as the one number identifying an individual. Thus, one's insurance might be numbered with the social security number, one's bank account is, one's withholding tax is, one's saving account is. In most cases, the government has ready access to information concerning an individual's earnings from wages and from interest. "Big Brother" knows what you earn.

As the above quotations point out, the time can well come when this numbering system is so organized that every transaction will be carried out with it. This makes possible the enforcement of restrictions and regulations — under threat of withdrawal of one's number. It will be possible then that one can neither buy nor sell — unless he is able to retain the mark of the beast.

What could a central authority require of the church? What demands could such make to which the child of God can not submit? Some of the demands I can see on the horizon now. With the emphasis upon "civil rights," I can see the time coming when this is strictly applied to church and school. What would we do if the government insisted that because of one's "civil rights," none might be kept out of the church — in spite of his religious convictions? What would we do if the government insisted that our restrictions concerning entrance into the ministry or into the offices of elder and deacon violated the "civil rights" of women? What would we do if the government insisted that each must do his share of Sunday labor? Many other instances could be mentioned. The time may well shortly come when the government insists on compliance — or one's number is taken away. In the latter case, one could finally neither buy nor sell.

The time of the antichrist is close at hand. What is our calling then? Many suggest organized opposition to this "dehumanizing" of society. Where there is legitimate room for protest, we can well do that. However, there will be no stopping of this "progress." The kingdom of the antichrist must come — before Christ returns on the clouds of glory.

But what we must do is to be alert to developing events of our day. Both we and our children ought to be warned as we see Scripture being fulfilled before our eyes. Let us be aware of what a computerized society will likely mean for the child of God. Our children too must be instructed that the time shortly comes when they (and even we) might face the alternative: forsake Christ and His Word — or lose the number of man so that one is no longer able to buy or sell.

Book Reviews

THE LONG DAY OF JOSHUA AND SIX OTHER CATASTROPHES, by Donald W. Patten, Ronald R. Hatch, and Loren C. Steinhauer; Pacific Meridian Publishing Company, Seattle, Washington, 1973; 328 pp. Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko.

The authors of this book are men who are dedicated opponents of the theory of evolution and firm believers in creationism. Their work is intended to be a defense of the Scriptures as overagainst those who deny the Scriptures in the name of science. However, their main purpose in writing this book is to give scientific credence to the miracles – especially the miracles which involve catastrophes. They concentrate their attention especially upon those catastrophes which are mentioned in the Old Testament.

These catastrophes are explained in the book by a rather elaborate theory which the authors have worked out concerning the orbits of earth and Mars. It is the contention of the book that up until the time of the destruction of the Assyrian host at the gates of Jerusalem during the days of Hezekiah, the orbits of earth and Mars were of such a kind that in fixed cycles Mars passed very closely to earth – sometimes as close as 60,000 miles or less. This periodic “fly-by” of Mars is the explanation for the catastrophes which the Bible mentions. For example, this “fly-by” of Mars is the explanation for the long day of Joshua and the hailstorm that destroyed the armies of the Canaanites, for the catastrophe at the Tower of Babel, for the troubles which came upon Job, for the ten plagues which came upon Egypt at the time of Israel’s deliverance, for the destruction of the Assyrian host which surrounded the walls of Jerusalem.

The book is filled with a great deal of data of a scientific, mathematical, astronomical nature to prove the point of the authors.

We are however, not persuaded of their position. We offer the following objections.

1) There is no proof as such for the fact that Mars and earth were in different orbits than today.

2) The chronologies of Scripture are often forced badly to fit the necessary cycles which the theory requires.

3) Many passages of Scripture are given forced explanations so that they can be interpreted as

referring to these catastrophes. One example of this is found in the author’s interpretation of Psalm 46 on page 51. The Psalm, according to the authors, refers to the destruction of the Assyrian forces. Vs. 2 refers to “orbital shift”; vss. 3 & 4 to giant tidal waves and crustal deformation earthquakes; vs. 6 to Rabshakeh and to vulcanism; vs. 8 to the burial of the 185,000; vs. 9 to the Assyrian war and to “bolitic explosion.” This is repeatedly done throughout the book.

4) Non-canonical writings are relied on too heavily. They are used as proof for the Mars “fly-by” and are sometimes given an authority which is almost equal to that of Scripture.

5) But most seriously, there is a strong tendency in the book to explain the miraculous so scientifically that the miracle is lost. This is serious business. The tower of Babel incident is said to be a catastrophe in spite of the fact that Scripture speaks only of the confusion of languages by God. The calamities which befell Job are also explained by this same theory even though Scripture speaks of them as brought about by Satan under God’s direction. No mention is made of the fact that Job confesses that God has taken all his possessions away from him. Even the plagues of Egypt and the passage through the Red Sea is explained this way; and the authors are forced to crowd all the plagues into a period of seven days or less to fit their theory – even though this is manifestly impossible. The drought which came upon Israel in the days of Elijah is also explained scientifically even though James says that this came about by the prayer of Elijah. (The authors would explain this to mean that Elijah was acquainted with the astronomical phenomena which brought about a Mars fly-by, and simply predicted accurately that such an event was in the offing and would result in a famine.)

The irony of the matter is that the authors repeatedly plead for a *literal* interpretation of the Scriptures; yet they themselves often depart from this rule. They expressly state that the slaying of the firstborn in Egypt is not to be taken literally:

Scriptures indicate death on the night of the cosmic fly-by was so wide-spread that in Egypt, the “first-born” of every family died (that is every family which did not have the blood of the lamb on the door). Under these conditions, destruction was so widespread that no count could possibly be made.

Some entire communities perished with falling bolides. Earthquakes levelled most structures.

The word "firstborn" in Hebrew is *bekowr* meaning elder, chief or firstborn, and comes from the prime verb *bakar*, to burst from the womb. We suspect the death toll throughout Egypt that cataclysmic night was 15% to 25% and that, on the average, "one born" of most families perished. This principle also extended to animals as earthquakes, bolides, meteors, prairie fires, respiratory reactions and shortly, tidal waves, took an unimaginable toll. p. 212, 213.

Not only is the word "firstborn" interpreted figuratively in this passage, but the angel of death is also interpreted in terms of earthquakes, bolides, meteors, prairie fires, etc.

The same is true of the destruction of the Assyrian host. The "Angel of the Lord" is simply defined as being a bolide, which is very similar to a meteor.

In all this the miracle disappears. And the result is that we have a lot of scientific data in Scripture, but no Gospel.

It has been said: "A poor argument in the defense of the truth can often do more harm than a good argument against it." This book strikes me as being an example of that observation.

The book is interesting reading, and we recommend it for that reason. But it must be read with caution.

Eerdman's Handbook To The Bible, edited by David Alexander, Pat Alexander; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973; 680 pages, \$12.95. (Reviewed by Prof. H. C. Hoeksema)

This attractive and well-illustrated book was compiled by the editors and consulting editors through the use of pictures, charts, maps, and diagrams from museums and libraries over the whole world. Well-known Bible scholars were asked to supply information. The need for such a handbook as this is told on the dust jacket: "The Bible is the world's most frequently read book. But it was written in a world far different and far removed from our own, and even in its modern translations there is much it does not tell us about that world. From the pages of the Bible itself we learn relatively little, for example, about everyday life during the time of Moses, or about geography, climate, weights and measures, or money. And we learn even less about the culture and the character of those early civilizations that surrounded the nation of Israel, and that played so prominent a role in the scriptural account."

"*The Eerdmans' Handbook To The Bible* has been designed to meet that need. Here, in this comprehensive and fully illustrated reference volume,

the reader can see and understand the Bible in its historical context, and will find answers to almost every imaginable question about biblical times and places."

This *Handbook* is divided into four parts: 1) An overview and introduction to the Bible, its translations, and its interpretation. 2 & 3) Brief explanations of the books of the Old and New Testaments, book by book, interspersed with essays, charts, and maps. 4) Key themes, doctrines, persons, and places are listed for easy reference.

For the student of the Bible who wants to know a distance mentioned in a given text, a weight or measure, or who wants to see a map or topography of the area of his study and illustrations of various aspects of life in Bible times, this book has ready answers.

Along with Bible history, the *Handbook* provides a background of the current secular history, with calendars, charts of civilizations, and time lines. For easy reference when studying the book of Proverbs, the authors have listed two pages of important themes in the book, with chapter and verse.

Various Bible scholars have written introductions to the books of the Bible, giving the theme and very brief comments about each chapter. If these comments were written by men who heartily embraced the doctrine of Scripture's infallibility, this *Handbook* would be a very valuable book.

However, under the heading "The Origin of Religion" the writer, Robert Brow, tries to give the answer to the question of the origin of religion. He concludes that Adam and Eve were the first *people*, but "were they half-stooping gorilla-faced cave dwellers beginning the long ascent to civilization? The Bible is silent." In the same vein, Israel is treated as one of the ancient civilizations, against the background of evolution.

About inspiration Peter Cousins says that "the Bible is both divinely inspired and fully human." He adds that the writers of Scripture did all they could to make the Bible an accurate record. With this philosophy of a pervading human factor in the Scriptures, the *Handbook* continues to undercut the element of the wonder in Scripture. And it does this insidiously. For example, the book states plainly that the first chapters of Genesis *are* historical. A few sentences later we read, "The problem is the degree of symbolism used in describing these events." And still later we find out that the order of creation on the six days is not necessarily chronological. Moreover, the element of the miracles disappears in the book. The flood was not universal. The ninth plague was a dust storm. A map of Israel's leaving Egypt shows no crossing of the Red Sea. The earth

opened naturally (by a storm) to swallow Korah and his company. The fall of Jericho was a war of nerves for the men of Jericho. And Elijah may have used the "kiss of life" on the widow's son.

The truths in the New Testament epistles are treated briefly and rather superficially. However, in supplemental paragraphs, cardinal doctrines are treated in more detail. In a discussion of election (Romans 9-11) the author speaks of God's choice of some men, but says, "If God selects some men for forgiveness, does He select others for destruction?"

Paul is much more cautious about this ("What if . . .?")." These examples show the superficial and distorted view of the higher critic regarding Scripture.

Some of the information in this *Handbook* is nicely arranged and attractively presented. This book can be useful for the information which it furnishes, but it is badly marred by its unbelieving approach to the truth of Scripture. If the book is used, it must be studied with an extremely critical eye and must be used with much spiritual discernment and discretion.

FROM HOLY WRIT

Exposition of Hebrews 11:32-34

Continued

by Rev. G. Lubbers

We must yet listen to what the writer tells the Hebrew readers concerning David, Samuel and all the prophets. This may seem like an attempt not to wax long and tedious in his exemplification of the power of faith; fact is, that the writer really gives us a deep and profound view and insight into the mighty power of faith in these worthy saints, which he summarizes in a few words. What is here stated in Hebrews 11 will have a deep and profound meaning in the same measure as we have studied the Old Testament Scriptures from which the Hebrew writer gleans these insights!

We are often so slow and dull in grasping the import of such passages as these because we fail to believe these Scriptures with a deep and perceptive faith. The Bible wills to be studied; the spiritually lazy do not profit, failing to see the import of the God-inspired Scriptures.

CONCERNING DAVID, SAMUEL AND ALL THE PROPHETS (Hebrews 11:32)

The writer to the Hebrews is not concerned simply about chronological order here. Were that the case he would have mentioned Samuel before referring to David. But he mentions David and Samuel together, as very nearly associated in their importance in the history of Israel and in the coming of the Kingdom of God. Both have their unique place in the prophetic history of the Old Testament; we cannot understand the one without studying the other. The writer also speaks of Samuel in the second and last place for he

would refer to him as standing at the beginning of the prophets, which truly have their beginning in Samuel in Israel's history and end in the greatest of them all, John the Baptist! Thus we are here given a grand and panoramic view across Israel's history.

In each age we see greater things done by the Lord in delivering Israel from the enemies, and in the establishment of the Kingdom of God. The darker the night the more the light of the sure prophetic word and the heroic deeds of the prophets point toward the power and coming of the Lord. And we do well to give heed unto this more sure word of prophecy even in our day, until the day dawn and the day-star arrive in our hearts. (II Peter 1:19) In this frame-work of the fulfillment of the mighty promises of God we are to view David, Samuel and all the prophets!

THE FAITH-LIFE OF KING DAVID (Hebrews 11:32, 33)

David served the counsel of God in his day. (Acts 13:36) He lived to serve the counsel of God by faith. What David wrought no other saint could have done. When that work was finished he was gathered to his fathers. It was a life of sin and grace; nothing else can be gleaned from the Scriptures concerning David. Not all in David's life was "by faith." There was also something of the flesh and of unbelief and littleness of faith in David. We have but to think of the time when he said, after God had so signally delivered him from the hands of Saul, "And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul; there

is nothing better than that I should escape into the land of the Philistines . . ." We know how poorly David fared during that time. There were no noble and great deeds of faith; it simply was a cowering before Saul. And no good became of David until once more "by faith" when all seemed lost in Ziklag, David "strengthened himself in Jehovah his God." Then out of weakness he waxed strong. (I Sam. 30:6b) It is really needless to speak of the lack of faith and of the obedience of faith in David when he committed adultery with the wife of his trusted servant, Uriah, and then murdered him by the hand of others. But even here David "by faith" walked in contrition and sorrow and wrote the immortal fifty-first Psalm.

However, the writer to the Hebrews cites here the mighty deeds of David, which were "by faith." David was a man of war. And in this warfare he was a man after God's heart. It was walking in the faith which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen! David "subdued kingdoms"; he slew his ten thousands. As a youth he slew the mighty Goliath before whom the entire army of Israel trembled, including king Saul. He did so "by faith" with a sling and stone in the name of the Lord. Says he, "Thou comest to me with a sword and a spear, but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast reproached and defied." (I Samuel 17:44) Yes, David walked in faith in the unseen God when he delivered the entire army into the hands of Israel that day. Hear him speak in faith, "This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thy head from off thee; and I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day unto the birds of the heavens, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel and all this assembly may know that the LORD saveth not with the sword and the spear; for the battle is the LORD'S, and he will give you into our hand." (I Samuel 17:46, 47)

Here we see David, a mere stripling waxing strong in weakness, subduing nations, working righteousness and obtaining the promised victory. When we see this we see faith in action; we see the faith which conquers the world! From this comes the mighty testimony out of the cloud of witnesses to the church: press on in faith, do not fall back by unbelief into perdition as did Saul, the son of Kish.

SAMUEL THE PROPHET-JUDGE IN ISRAEL

Samuel was a child who was given in answer to his barren mother's prayer in Shiloh, in the tabernacle. He was a child who was promised to the LORD in anticipation of his birth. Hannah vowed that the child would serve the Lord, and that, too, in a time when Israel was under the cruel yoke of foreign bondage,

due to the Lord's chastisement for Israel's sin. Not only did Israel serve idol-gods of the heathen, but the very "house of prayer" had become a veritable den of thieves. The priests, the sons of Eli, were sacriligious and adulterous. They despised the sacrifices and ceremonial ordinances of Christ. They so maimed and destroyed the sacrifices that their import, as pointing to the LAMB of God, was effaced. At such a time as that was Samuel born to be a Nazarite child! He was to be standing in the service of the LORD in a special way in God's Tabernacle. His prophetic work began when but a little child; he received the call from the Lord in the Tabernacle and must bring dreadful tidings to the aged high-priest Eli concerning his house and wicked sons.

Samuel sees, in his day, the word of the Lord fulfilled concerning the "departure of the glory" from the house at Shiloh. The Ark of God is taken, and is captured by the uncircumcised Philistines and this Ark never returns to Shiloh, but after being in many different places in Judah, is finally brought to the LORD's resting-place in Jerusalem under David.

Samuel, too, walked "by faith." He, too, was a prophet through whom the Lord "subdued kingdoms." We have but to think of the signal victory under Samuel over the Philistines at Mispah and Bethcar. Did not the Lord there under Samuel, the delivering Prophet-judge, discomfit the Philistines with thunder, rain and hail? Was that not the place where the faithfulness of the LORD is marked by the stone of remembrance, "Eben-HaEzer"?

By faith Samuel, too, was a teacher in Israel, one of the first and great prophets, teaching and operating in that very prophetic history wherein the kingdom of God is in the offing under David. It seems that Samuel was the last of the judges and the first of the prophets. We read in Acts 13:20, "and after these things he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet." Thus also we read in Acts 3:24, "Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and them that followed after, as many as have spoken, they also told of these days." How great Samuel stood is evident from Jeremiah 15:1 where we read, "Then said the LORD unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind would not be toward this people: cast them out of my sight and let them go forth." Samuel was a great judge-prophet who interceded for Israel in his day as did Moses in the days of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness.

"Samuel and all the prophets" takes in the entire era from Samuel till the coming of Malachi. It was during these days that we see the great deeds of faith here spoken of. We have but to think of Elijah as he stood alone before God fighting the entire house of Ahab and wicked Jezebel! He brought down kingdoms, wrought righteousness and obtained

promises. He wrought this by the sword of the Spirit, and was mighty in prayer, even though he was a man of like passions as we. Or turn to Elisha who received a double portion of Elijah's spirit. See how, upon his word, the king Jehoshaphat had the victory of Moab and the host of it. It was all by faith.

We will only remind you, dear reader, of such men as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel and Daniel. We know that Isaiah prophesied before the captivity of Judah in the Emmanuel-prophecies, and Jeremiah prophesied during the time of Judah's being taken captive, while both Ezekiel and Daniel were prophets in the land of Babylon with the captives. All the prophets stood together in this one work of subduing kingdoms, working righteousness and obtaining promises.

GREAT DELIVERANCES BY FAITH (Hebrews 11:34)

What faith was there not exhibited in "stopping the mouth of lions!" Think of the power of Daniel's faith, when, he, rather than ceasing to pray to the Lord, was cast into the lion's den by king Darius. (Daniel 6:24 f.f.) Conversely we see what happened to the men who threw Daniel into the lion's den. Perhaps the writer also has in mind the faith of Samson when he killed a lion (Judges 14:6) and the

faith of David when he killed a lion. (I Samuel 17:34) They, like Daniel, were delivered "because they trusted in God." (Daniel 6:23)

Yea, they "extinguished the power of the fire." The three friends of Daniel refused to bow down to the image of king Nebuchadnezzar in the plain of Dura. We know the history. It was because the "Son of God" was with them. By faith in him the very fire could not touch them. The fire lost its burning power. Their clothing were not touched by the terrible heat. Such was their faith.

And they "fled the edge (mouth) of the sword." This was true of David fleeing before Saul, and of Elijah and Elisha when pursued by Israel or when surrounded by the armies of Syria. Even the hosts of God that were for Elijah were more than those against him. Jeremiah fled the edge of the sword more than once. He stood in faith, even when put in the damp dungeon in Jerusalem. Moses was delivered from the sword of Pharaoh. (Ex. 18:4) David escaped the javalin of Saul. And those who escaped the edge of the sword are many in the annals of Israel's history.

Truly this is a great cloud of witnesses, who interpret for us the meaning of faith, which believes to the saving of the soul.

Glimpses From The Past -- Eleven Years With J.M.F.

Donald Doezema

"May this column serve as a means to reach out to the farthest outposts of Redlands, Lynden, and Loveland, drawing them into a closer circle with the rest of our churches, binding us closer in the bonds of love; yea let it be a means to embrace one another in the communion of saints."

The above paragraph marked the birth of a new column in *The Standard Bearer*. In that first issue of the thirty-fifth volume year, the editor-in-chief, Rev. H. Hoeksema, requested that "the ministers of each congregation, and the presidents of consistories of vacant churches, (mail) their bulletins and other important news directly to the editor of the column." And, for eleven years and two months, those bulletins provided the main source of material for the column

entitled *News From Our Churches*, which appeared above the initials, J.M.F.

With a view to submitting a requested article for the 50th anniversary volume of the *Standard Bearer*, giving, as suggested, glimpses from the past, via the Church News rubric, I read every one of those columns written by Mr. John M. Faber. Beginning with the introductory column in the October 1,



1958, issue, I took note of all the items which struck me as being "glimpses" worth relating. By the time I had reached the November 15, 1969, issue, I had accumulated enough of them to fill the better part of an entire issue of the *Standard Bearer*. Since it was highly unlikely that our editor-in-chief would allow me that much space, I selected only a few of those items which concerned beginnings, or milestones, or culminations, of interest sometimes to congregations in particular, often to the denomination as a whole.

* * * * *

The very first news item concerned the health of one of our then aging Seminary professors. It read as follows:

"What is the news from our churches in which we are all interested? The number one news item today is Rev. Ophoff, of course. Our beloved G.M.O., whose signature under any *Standard Bearer* article guaranteed it to be worthwhile reading . . .

"G.M.O.'s pen is resting. The Lord told him to lay it down for a while. Our beloved Rev. Ophoff has suffered a stroke which has become a stroke for us all . . ."

Throughout the next several years, there were in the news column occasional references to "the old Professor." In the December 15, 1959, issue, our people were informed that "Rev. G.M. Ophoff has taken up one of the many labors laid down when struck with illness. He is again leading the Bible discussion in the Eunice Society of First Church. Although partial blindness prohibits any reading, his wife is the old Professor's eyes, reading the Scripture portion to him until he memorizes it; then the Dominee ponders over the passage, his years of Bible study experience bringing clearly before his mind the truths contained in them."

The September 15, 1960, column noted that Rev. Ophoff led in opening prayer at the celebration of the forty-fifth anniversary of Rev. H. Hoeksema's installation into the office of the ministry. "We were all happy that Rev. Hoeksema's best friend and stalwart ally was able to do this for him. By coincidence it was a red letter day for Rev. and Mrs. Ophoff too, for they were remembering their fortieth wedding anniversary on that date."

Then, finally, the July, 1962, news column carried this notice:

"Our beloved Rev. G. M. Ophoff, Emeritus Professor, was taken to his heavenly rest Tuesday, June 12, at the age of 71 years. Southwest's bulletin expressed it this way: 'After standing in the line of battle for the truth, God has given His servant rest and a wreath of victory.' Rev. Ophoff's old-time friend and colleague, Rev. H. Hoeksema, preached the

funeral sermon and Rev. C. Hanko spoke at the graveside . . . Rev. Ophoff will be missed by all of us, but he has left us a legacy in the volumes of *The Standard Bearer*, as over the years he has delved into the nooks and crannies of the Old Testament Scriptures from whence to bring out its treasures, new and old."

* * * * *

In Mr. Faber's second news column, we find information concerning a proposed new church building:

"South Holland presents us with some real news. Their church is becoming too small for their congregation, and they have unanimously decided to purchase two acres from their School Society for a future site for a church and parsonage. The land in question adjoins their present property to the south, and seems to be the only land available in that locale . . . This activity in South Holland reveals the zeal with which they are endued and the confidence they have in the future."

Some years later, in a September, 1966, issue, Mr. Faber noted that "South Holland's congregation planned two evenings, July 19 and 20, for a double celebration: their 40th anniversary and the dedication of their new church."

Coincidentally, it was in that same issue that we find the following "News Flash" concerning another church building: "The newly acquired church in Forbes, N. Dak. suffered extensive damage from a tornado Sunday evening, July 31. The steeple was blown down, and the entire building was set askew on its foundation, wrecking much of the interior. It is estimated that repairs would cost more than the original investment."

The late 50's and early 60's were years in which a number of our congregations found it necessary to erect new church buildings. The January 1, 1960, issue reported that:

"The December 'Indian Summer' weather enjoyed in Michigan gladdened the hearts of Southeast's Building Committee, for the builders were able to accomplish much in that unexpected warm spell. The church, when completed, will be furnished with pews designed to seat 317 worshipers."

And, in a 1965 column we read that "Holland's congregation experienced an evening of unbounded joy Feb. 18. The occasion was the dedication of their new church . . . Rev. Lanting remembered the loss of their first church, which also had been dedicated to the Protestant Reformed preaching of God's Word, and their meeting in cold and gloomy store buildings

for over eleven years.”

* * * * *

Back in the third issue (Nov. 1, 1958) we learn, from a paragraph entitled “Do You Know,” that “Rev. Herman Hanko teaches Church History in our Seminary.” Rev. Hanko was pastor of Hope Church at the time, and he subsequently accepted a call from Doon. Almost exactly seven years after the above 1958 announcement, the “Church News” contained a report of “another milestone in the history of our churches.” Giving instruction in the Seminary became a full-time task for Rev. Hanko, for on September 9, 1965, he was installed into the office of Professor of Theology.

Less than a month later, incidentally, Rev. Robert Decker, who would one day become a colleague of Prof. Hanko in the Seminary, was installed into office in Doon, Iowa. “And so we have,” wrote Mr. Faber, “a new worker in the vineyard of the Lord.” But, he added, “now a look at ‘the other side of the coin.’ It has pleased the King of His Church to counter-balance the above news. Rev. G. Vos has requested Hudsonville’s consistory for emeritation due to failing health . . . Rev. Vos preached his farewell sermon Sunday, Oct. 24.”

The urgent need for ministers in our churches at that time was a theme oft-repeated by Mr. Faber. In the June, 1962, issue for example, he wrote: “The acute minister shortage in our denomination is more and more being reflected in the bulletin notices of our churches, even in those of Classis East which are closer to the available supply. Reading services and change of service times are becoming more and more commonplace in the Eastern Churches, as the Western Churches have experienced for some time. Young Men, the Vineyard of the Lord needs laborers.”

And the Lord did indeed provide. It must have been with great pleasure that the news editor reported in August of 1968 that “our Seminary will be a much busier place this Fall. At least six young men will join seminarian Rodney Miersma in many of his classes as they receive pre-seminary training . . .” Of those students, one is now in Isabel, another in Redlands, another in Hope, another in Forbes, another in Randolph, and still another has graduated from the Seminary this June and is now, with his fellow graduate, Mr. Arie Den Hartog, eligible for a call.

* * * * *

In the fourth news column, in November of 1958, Mr. Faber reported that “our Home Missionary, Rev. Lubbers, spent a little time in his home city lately. He appeared at Hudsonville Ladies’ Aid Society to show his pictures of Loveland, Forbes, and Isabel.”

Subsequent news columns related further activities

of the Home Missionary. The February 15, 1960, column, for example, noted that Rev. Lubbers “is laboring in the Pella area for nine weeks, giving that tiny congregation the enjoyment of preaching services during that time. Let us join them in their prayer, ‘that the Missionary’s work may be blessed; that God may add others to our number, confessing His name with us.’”

According to a January, 1962, issue “Rev. and Mrs. Lubbers went to Houston, Texas, to interview people who are interested in our churches.” And in September of 1963 “the Mission Committee has directed our missionary, Rev. G. Lubbers, to work in the Patterson, New Jersey, area. Rev. R. Harbach, of Kalamazoo, has been requested by the Committee to accompany the missionary for two weeks because of his familiarity of the territory and many people residing therein.”

Fruits of those efforts were also noted in the *Standard Bearer* News. In November, 1958, we read that “Rev. H. Kuiper has accepted the call extended to him by our newest church, Loveland.” And in May of 1959 – “From the Mission Field comes the report that the congregations of Forbes, N. Dak., and Isabel, S. Dak., have filed official requests to the coming Synod to be admitted as sister churches.” Other of Rev. Lubber’s labors, as you know, are coming to fruition at the present time. A congregation has recently been formed in Patterson, and Rev. Harbach is serving as Home Missionary in Houston.

* * * * *

According to an item in the February 15, 1962, column, “First Church’s bulletin carried an urgent request for summer clothing and shoes from the churches in Jamaica who have been corresponding with Rev. Hanko and receiving our literature and who express a keen interest in our doctrine. The consistory decided to heed the plea and the Deacons boxed and shipped the donations contributed by the congregation.”

In a September issue of that same year, the following item appeared: “Our last synod decided that there was an urgent need to send a committee to investigate the Island of Jamaica as a possible field for our missionary effort. The Mission Committee acting upon this mandate appointed the brethren H. Zwak (Hudsonville) and H. Meulenberg (First) as a committee to visit this field.”

For a number of years thereafter, the Mission Committee continued to explore the Jamaica field and to send laborers there. In March, 1969, it was reported that First Church, the calling church, had chosen “to call Rev. J. A. Heys, of Holland, Mich., to be Missionary to Jamaica.” Mr. Faber noted that

“this is a *first* for our denomination – a foreign missionary elect!”

Rev. Heys subsequently declined that call, and, in a November 28 congregational meeting, First Church extended the call to Rev. Lubbers, who accepted, and remained in that post till 1973.

* * * * *

Towards the middle of the 60's there was increasing reference in the news column to the failing health of Rev. H. Hoeksema. In January of 1965, for example, Mr. Faber sadly reported that “Rev. H. Hoeksema is gradually beginning to experience the time allegorically described in Eccl. 12 . . . The infirmities accompanying old age prevent him from exercising his most desired activity – preaching from the pulpit of First Church.”

The September 15 column of that year included the following paragraph:

“On September 2, 1965, Christ, the King of His Church, translated His faithful warrior-servant, Rev. H. Hoeksema, from the Church Militant to the Church Triumphant. Even to outsiders Rev. Hoeksema was famous as a voluminous writer, a strident lecturer and an eloquent pulpiteer; but to our denomination, and especially to his congregation he will always be remembered as a kind and loving pastor, a prodigious worker, an able teacher, and a faithful minister of the Word of God.”

* * * * *

With the illness of Prof. Ophoff, Rev. H. C. Hoeksema had been installed into the office of Professor of Theology. That installation, on September 4, 1959, had been, according to Mr. Faber, a “first in the history of our denomination.” Then, with the resignation of Rev. H. Hoeksema from his place in the Seminary, Rev. H. Hanko “received and accepted the Synodical call to professorship in our seminary.” And, more recently, with the introduction of the preseminary courses and the increase in the size of the student body, a third professor has been added.

In commenting on Prof. H. C. Hoeksema's 1967 Reformation Day lecture entitled “Four Hundred Fifty Years, and Then . . .?”, Mr. Faber noted that “listening to this lecture one becomes acutely aware of the fact that . . . the Reformed Church community

is lamentably losing its distinctiveness. Will the 451st anniversary see the Reformed churches in joint services with Lutherans and Roman Catholics . . . ?”

Perhaps in Pre-Key '73 days that seemed a little unlikely. Events in the church world around us today, however, can only make us all the more thankful that changes in the personnel in our Seminary have not brought with it any change in the content of the instruction. Ten years before the youngest of our professors assumed his duties in our Seminary, Mr. Faber, in reflecting on this maintenance of the truth, had this to say:

“The complaint is often heard among church-goers that seminary students sound so much alike that it is difficult to detect the identity of their *alma mater* from their sermons. Sunday, January 27, First Church's pulpit was occupied by one of her sons, Seminarian Robert Decker, preaching on, “Come unto me all ye that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Contrary to the above mentioned complaint, the sermon preached in First Church that evening (and in other churches previously) clearly divulged the identity of the seminary in which he receives his training. *The churches thank you, Professors!*”

* * * * *

If my calculations are correct, two hundred and thirty-three issues of the *Standard Bearer* included a column which was closed with

. . . *see you in church.* J.M.F.

Mr. Faber once mentioned to me that, as Church news editor, one has “his finger on the pulsebeat of the denomination.” Having just reread all of his news columns, I'm convinced that he not only had his finger well placed, as it were, to pick up that beat, but he was able to, for the benefit of his readers, put it in clear perspective.

Mr. Faber remains active in our churches, but he retired from his work as news editor of the *Standard Bearer* after the November 15, 1969 issue. Perhaps you recall the closing of that column:

“. . . *see you in the church* triumphant, where we shall join the angels in their worship saying, ‘Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power and might be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.’”
J.M.F.”

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THE STANDARD BEARER

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News From Our Churches

Rev. G. Lanting preached his farewell sermon in Edgerton on Sunday, May 26. On the 29th he moved to Colorado, and on the 30th he was installed as pastor of the Loveland congregation. Isabel's pastor, Rev. Miersma, who was Loveland's moderator during her vacancy, conducted the worship service and installation.

After Rev. Van Baren declined the call from Edgerton, the consistory there formed a new trio consisting of the Revs. Heys, Lubbers, and Kortering. The call was extended to Rev. Kortering.

And, from a trio consisting of Rev. Kortering, Rev. Kuiper, and Rev. Miersma, Prospect Park elected to call Rev. Miersma.

* * * * *

Southwest's congregation, at a meeting held on June 10, approved a "proposal from the Council regarding the paving of the parking lots," in order to meet city regulations. In addition they voted approval of the Council's proposal that a committee be appointed to study the possibility and feasibility of relocating and rebuilding.

Several of the members of Southeast's congregation have been busy recently with some work in their church building. The work included the finishing of the organ loft, redecoration in the basement, and the effecting of a change in the pulpit lighting. The result of the latter change is that, "instead of shining on the light-colored walls, the light will come down on the pulpit, making it easier

on your eyes to look in the pulpit direction."

According to its June 2 bulletin, Southeast has acquired a new Allen organ. "The organ has sixteen speakers which have been placed in the speaker areas on both sides of the pulpit . . . The instrument is capable of producing tones most comparable to that of a pipe organ. We trust you will be pleased," the announcement continued, "with this beautiful addition to our church auditorium."

And then, keeping the new purchase in proper perspective, Rev. Schipper added that, "It is well to remember, however, that this beautiful instrument cannot of itself lift one note of praise to God. It is the inspired playing of dedicated organists, and the voices of a Spirit-filled congregation that can extol the virtues of the God of our salvation. Let us therefore not rejoice in things, but in the Giver of all good and perfect gifts!"

* * * * *

The graduation exercises of seminarians Arie Den Hartog and James Slopsema were held on Wednesday evening, June 12, in Hope Church. The commencement speaker noted that they were the first graduates of our seminary to receive diplomas bearing a Grandville, rather than a Grand Rapids, Michigan address.

I'm sure that the sentiments expressed by the writer of Southwest's bulletin, concerning the graduation of Mr. Slopsema, are shared by all of us,

(continued on back cover)

NOTICE TO THE CHURCHES!

The Rev. G. C. Lubbers has been released from his labors in Jamaica, and is recommended by the Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches for a call in the aforesaid churches. His address:

Rev. G. C. Lubbers
7501 Terrace Lane
Jenison, Michigan 49428

Rev. D. H. Kuiper, S.C.

NOTICE OF CANDIDACY

The following seminary graduates have been declared eligible for a call to the ministry of the Word in the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. They may receive calls after July 7, 1974.

Mr. Arie den Hartog
c/o Clarence DeGroot
176 Prescott
Prospect Park, N.J. 07508

Mr. James Slopsema
930 Mechanic St.
Edgerton, Minn. 56128

— Rev. Dale H. Kuiper, Synodical Stated Clerk

Classis West of the Prot. Ref'd. Churches will meet in Randolph, Wisconsin on September 4, 1974 at 8:30 AM. Material for the Agenda should be in the hands of the Stated Clerk thirty days before Classis convenes. Delegates in need of lodging should notify the clerk of Randolph's consistory.

Rev. David Engelsma Stated Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On June 16, 1974, our parents, MR. and MRS. GERRIT BOL, commemorated their 30th wedding anniversary. As their children we give thanks to God for uniting them in the Holy bond of matrimony, and for bestowing upon them sufficient grace to trust in the Lord and call upon Him for all their needs. Surely, "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies." (Psalm 25:10). We pray that the Lord may continue to bless and keep them throughout the remainder of their wedded life.

Mr. and Mrs. David Bol and Kristen
Rev. and Mrs. Mark Hoeksema
Priscilla Bol
Jonathan Bol

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On July 2nd, the Lord willing, our beloved parents, MR. & MRS. SIMON OFFRINGA, will commemorate their 50th wedding anniversary. We are thankful to our Heavenly Father for sparing them these many years for each other and for us. It is our prayer that God will continue to bless and care for them through their remaining years.

Their grateful children,
Mr. & Mrs. Robert Offringa
Mr. & Mrs. Richard Kamminga
and 4 grandchildren

**SECOND CLASS
POSTAGE PAID AT
GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.**

for both of the graduates. Congratulations "for having successfully completed Seminary is hereby extended, along with our prayers that the King of the Church may soon call (them) to labor in the vineyard of His choice." Candidate Slopsema, incidentally, plans to spend the summer in Edgerton, and Candidate Den Hartog in Prospect Park.

* * * * *

On Friday, June 14, the ministers and their wives spent a day of well-deserved rest and relaxation at Camp Manitou-Lin. The day began with a discussion of Phil. 2:1-11, after which the minister's wives enjoyed a presentation by Mrs. Hoeksema, on the teaching of Bible to children, and the ministers attended a demonstration by Rev. Van Baren, on the use of the overhead projector as a teaching tool for catechetical instruction.

The remainder of the day was intended, no doubt, as a time to "unwind" after more than a week of concentrated effort at Synod. Activities included swimming, canoeing, and valiant attempts at handling kayaks, which were "rather tippy, so that we didn't stay all that dry." Difficulties encountered in handling the kayaks, however, were not the only cause for wet clothing. Prof. Decker, we understand, was drenched by "what was more like a tidal wave" coming off the paddle of, would you believe, his wife. The day ended, as it began, on a serious note, with psalter-singing around a campfire.

* * * * *

Bulletins from Randolph took on a different appearance, beginning on Sunday, May 19. Not only were its covers, for the first time, in printed form, but it included also a picture of the church building. And the mimeographed type on the inside included a reminder concerning the Dedication Service for the new building. "Let us prepare," advised the writer, "to dedicate our new building in thankfulness to God and to the glory of His holy name." Open House was held in the afternoon of May 24, and, at the evening service, Rev. C. Hanko delivered the dedicatory message.

The following week, incidentally, Randolph's pastor, Rev. W. Bekkering, left for Maine, having been released by his consistory in order that he might preach in Skowhegan for the first four Sundays in June.

D.D.

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