

The STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

... we will maintain that the Word of our God and it only stands forevermore! To young and old, at all occasions we shall deliver that message alone. Do not ask anything else. And the more persistently the world intrudes upon us with its arm of flesh, the more loudly and clearly, the more distinctly and boldly we shall in the name of the Lord of hosts cry out: Only the Word of the Lord standeth forever. In it alone is all our salvation!

Inaugural sermon of Rev. Herman Hoeksema (1920)

See "In Celebration of a Centennial" — page 000

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MEDITATION

Comfort in Chastisement

Rev. M. Schipper

“And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.”

Hebrews 12:5, 6

And ye have forgotten. . . .

That means that they to whom this Word of God

was first directed had not kept in mind what they once knew. There was evidently a lapse of memory.

They had been instructed in the Word of God, here particularly the Word as it appeared in Proverbs 3:11, 12, which the writer now quotes. They knew that Word and understood its significance, but when chastening came they failed to recall it.

They evidently had become wearied and faint in their minds. And it is above all things necessary when the children of God are required to pass under the chastening rod of their heavenly Father that their regenerated minds are clear, that they are able to reason correctly, shall they be able to live according to the Word of God and experience the comfort they need.

Though the Word of God here is intended to serve as a rebuke, it nevertheless means also to serve as a comfort for all those who are required to suffer under the mighty hand of God. The text does not specifically speak of comfort, yet it is clearly implied. And comfort in the Scriptures is always a consideration of the regenerated, sanctified mind. Accordingly the child of God contemplates the evils he presently suffers in the light of the salvation and glory God has promised, in which contemplation he is able to perceive that the suffering he must endure is subservient to and absolutely necessary for the attainment of the promised glory. Not enough is it for him simply to conclude that for a time he must suffer, and then when that measure of suffering is filled, he shall enter the state of bliss. For then he would have nothing for the present but suffering with a promise; then he may easily murmur and rebel. But when he is able in the midst of his suffering to consider with the mind tempered by faith that the evils he endures are absolutely necessary and subservient to the attainment of the glory, then he is comforted. From the Word of God he not only knows that all things, including also the evil, work together for good, but that the chastening rod is inflicted on those whom God loves.

Indeed, here is comfort in chastisement!

Chastisement, not punishment!

There is a marked distinction between these two, both as to motive and as to purpose. Punishment is motivated by anger, wrath; while chastisement is always motivated by love. Punishment means to destroy, while chastisement purposes to build up and to save.

Here in the text it is the chastening of the Lord, that is, the chastening which the Lord inflicts. In the text in Proverbs, of which the text is a quotation, it is the chastening of Jehovah. In this name God particularly relates Himself to His people as their covenant God. In this covenant relation He has known them eternally in Christ in love, and chosen

them in His counsel of predestination. In that covenant relation He is their Lord, and they are His covenant friend-servants. In that relation there exists a most intimate bond of living love and friendship.

In the light of the context the chastening of which the text speaks refers, first of all, to the suffering for Christ's sake. Of this the writer of this epistle had written earlier (10:32ff). There the nature of the suffering which the Hebrew Christians were required to endure is described. The children of God have been required to endure a great fight of afflictions, having been made a gazing stock or being companions of those who were so used. They suffered bonds, and the spoiling of their goods, and other reproaches. Though they had not yet resisted unto blood, that is, they had not yet been required to die for their faith, nevertheless for this they must be prepared.

Though the reference is primarily directed to this type of chastening, there is no reason to limit it to this type. No doubt all the sufferings and afflictions of this present time are to be included. Also here we must not forget that not only our moments of prosperity but also of adversity flow to us in the providence of God, and all the sufferings of this present time are evidences of His chastening hand upon us. And if in the midst of your suffering you ask, as we so often do, "Why? Why am I required to suffer under the mighty hand of God?" Then our text presents the perfect answer. There is a two-fold reason for the chastisement.

In the first place chastisement is God's way of showing us that we are His sons and daughters. The proof of our sonship must be seen in the rod of chastening. This point is stressed in the verses which follow our text. There we read, "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons . . . but if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." Bastards are illegitimates, but sons are legal. So in our text we read in the last part of verse six, "and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." It is evident, therefore, that those who are required to suffer Jehovah's chastening rod have in that chastening a Word of the Lord concerning their legal sonship.

It must become plain to us that we do not become sons and daughters of the Most High through the chastening, but through the adoption. God has only one natural Son, the second Person of the Trinity, Who becomes our Lord Jesus Christ through the incarnation. Shall He have many sons and daughters as He has planned, these must come to Him through the legal process of adoption. God has chosen us to be His children in His eternal counsel, but the legal papers of our adoption were written at the cross with a pen of blood. Through the death and resurrection

of Christ, God's Only Begotten Son, our adoption into God's family takes place.

Wonder of grace is this adoption! In natural adoption the children are declared to be legally sons and daughters of the parents who adopt them, yet they nevertheless do not partake of the nature of their parents. But in the adoption of God's children they are conformed to His image. And with and through Christ, the Elder Brother, they become heirs of all things.

Having been adopted into God's family, the Father exercises His right to bring us under His discipline. This He does through the chastening rod which is a rod of correction, beating as it were from us all the remnants of our natural sonship, and shaping us into legitimate children of God. So we are told that every one of God's sons receives this chastening. If we receive no chastening we may well ask ourselves whether we are God's sons. Such chastening is not to be despised, and for this reason.

But there is more!

Much more!

That chastening rod is also indicative of the truth that God loves us.

For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth!

But is it not this truth that always seems so strange and difficult for the child of God to understand? Even in the sphere of the natural it is most difficult for the child to comprehend the motivation of the rod of correction that beats him, and it is so difficult to believe that the rod is inflicted in parental love. The writer to the Hebrews was aware of this natural phenomenon and in verse 9 uses it for a point of comparison. Says he, "we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence..." When we were small children and naughty we expected the parental rod. Some of us older ones remember the old-fashioned wood shed where this discipline took place. Out of deference for father who was older and stronger than we, we walked into that shed with fear and trembling. Because we could not comprehend what moved father to inflict the chastening rod, we complained that he was unjust, and even went so far as to believe he hated us. Because of this sinful reasoning we failed to render the respect which was his due. Well, much like this from a spiritual point of view the children of God often rebel when our heavenly Father inflicts His rod. Like the Hebrew Christians we fail to recall the Word of God that spoke to them in the chastening rod of His eternal, unchangeable love for them.

Father knows how many are the imperfections manifest in our lives as we are called to live them in the flesh in this present world. And it lies in the very

nature of His love to perfect us. It is in this light that we can understand the Word of God in Colossians 3:14 where we find love defined as "a bond of perfectness," that is, a bond which unites a perfect subject and a perfect object. When God Who is perfect loves us who are so imperfect, it lies in the nature of His love to perfect us even as He is perfect. Or, to put it in the words of the writer to the Hebrews (12:10), "that we might be partakers of His holiness." The divine motivation of the chastening rod is His eternal, unchangeable love; and the purpose of that chastening rod is the perfection of His people.

It is this that the Hebrew Christians had forgotten, and of which they must therefore now be reminded.

There are several possibilities to account for their forgetfulness. In the race to heaven they had not always kept their eye on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of their faith. They evidently were not running with patience in that race. They had become weary and faint in their minds. And when the context so describes their spiritual condition they are not fully prepared for the disciplinary acts of God Who so graciously exhorts them to remember His Word that must comfort them in the midst of all their distresses. O, they had not forgotten that the Book of Proverbs was in the Scriptures, but they forgot what God teaches His children in that Book, particularly in the passage quoted in our text.

But not only they, but we also need this reminder.

How do we look at the sufferings of this present time? Do we look at them perhaps stoically and indifferently? Do we perhaps with some semblance of piety acknowledge that our circumstances flow to us in the providence of God, and then say, "Well, I guess I will just have to grin and bear it?" Or, do we say perhaps, as some do, that God is punishing us for some particular sin we have committed? Or, do we throw up our hands in despair, and sit in the dumps?

You understand, of course, that if any of these describe our attitude overagainst chastisement and suffering, we can have no real comfort.

But when we remember that the sufferings of this present time are so many Words of God informing us that He is perfecting us for glory, and that He sends these chastisements to us because He loves us, then indeed we experience the comfort we need.

This is the conclusion of faith in the regenerated mind that is inerrant because it is based on the Word of God, Who cannot lie.

If your regenerated mind is not befuddled but very clear, and you are spiritually alert, you can hear Him say when His chastening rod is upon you: I love you!

That is all the comfort you need!

Amen!

EDITORIAL

In Celebration of a Centennial

Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

Considerable attention has been given in various papers to the centennial of the Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church, and by the time this appears in print the present occupants of the old Eastern Avenue Church will have completed no little celebration of that occasion.

We are well aware, of course, that after 1924 both in the ecclesiastical courts and in the civil courts the "Ninety-two" were held to be the continuation of the Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church. However, in truth and in fact the genuine continuation of that congregation was represented in the pastor and consistory and 450 families who were cast out and who became the First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan. That is the reason, too, of course, why in our annual denominational Yearbook the date of organization of First Church is always given as 1879.

As far as I have heard, First Church has no plans for any special commemoration of its one hundredth birthday. Nevertheless, not only as a son of First Church but also as one who was born and baptized a member of Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church, I thought it fitting to make a contribution to the celebration of this anniversary. This contribution takes the form of a reproduction of one of two inaugural sermons delivered (and later published) by one of Eastern Avenue's most illustrious pastors, Rev. Herman Hoeksema. The other of these two sermons was in the Dutch language (*"Ik Wil Dat Gij Weet"*) and would therefore not be edifying for most of our readers.

As I reread this sermon recently, I was struck by the fact that — apart from some details — the sermon is as appropriate and up-to-date today as it was a half century ago. Why? Because it sounds the keynote of

all true preaching of the Word.

Read it, and find out for yourself.

(Inaugural sermon of Rev. Herman Hoeksema on Sunday, February 29, 1920, at the Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church)

"I'LL CRY

Is. XL:6-8. The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field:

The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass.

The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the Word of our God shall stand forever.

It is undeniable that the modern pulpit has, especially in recent years, been degraded into a platform for the propagation of purely humanistic philosophy. So-called ministers of the gospel have become preachers of man's word, and the servants of Christ in His church have allowed themselves on more than one occasion to be employed as servants of men. I know it, usually the saying was that they served humanity and that they labored for the deliverance, for the upbuilding of mankind and the world. But fact is, that under this beautiful slogan the Word of God as contained in the Scriptures was frequently set aside, failed to be heard from the modern pulpit, and instead all sorts of messages were delivered on a variety of topics that had little or no connection with the gospel of the kingdom. If complete statistics were available of all the subjects discussed before the congregated church of Christ by ministers of the gospel during the last half decade the result would be little short of astounding to whoever entertains a

generally conservative conception of things. Now the flock of Jesus Christ came to the house of God on that Sabbath to be fed on a lecture on liberty bonds; now their spiritual life was supposed to be built up by a speech on thrift stamps. Again, one Sunday the most holy faith of God's covenant people was established by an elaborate discussion of the necessity of good roads, chiefly perhaps for the purpose of making joyriding on the Sabbath more joyful; and another Sunday it was the topic of hygiene that was thoroughly discussed for the enlightenment of the children of the Kingdom. On these and numerous other subjects the church of God was frequently enlightened, with such nourishment the flock of Jesus Christ was often fed, and by it she was expected to live and to flourish. Sometimes a portion of the Word of God was still selected and so distorted as to serve as a hanger-on for the lecture to be delivered. Often, however, this was deemed necessary no more, and the shepherd of Christ's flock bluntly offered the sheep stones for bread.

Of course, this is no strange, no isolated phenomenon in the modern world, no phenomenon that finds no connection with the modern view of the church and the world. If we are at all acquainted with the modern trend of development of thought we will be little surprised to find that in many a church the truth was preached no more and the pure Word of God set aside. Some of the most fundamental truths of Scripture, such as that of vicarious atonement and the necessity of regeneration were denied; truths like that of total depravity and original sin were laughed to scorn and termed mockingly as obsolete sixteenth century theology. And the church itself was considered more and more as a mere human society among others, existing for no other purpose in the world than the uplift of society and the betterment of humanity in the evolutionistic sense of the word. If she was to have any right of existence at all she surely was to be the servant of Man. Small wonder that also its ministers laboring under that false notion of the church became literally servants of men and delivered man's word instead of God's.

We emphatically refuse to be carried along by the drift of this modern development. And what must be emphasized in our age is that the Word of God and nothing but that Word, as it is revealed in the Holy Scriptures, must be brought to the Church of Christ in the world. The minister has no other business. He is merely an ambassador. He receives his message not from men; he does not have the right to speak on his own authority. He is sent by the King of the church and, therefore, from that King he must receive His message. Nothing else. And that message of the King, as He has revealed it in the infallible Word of God he must deliver with boldness and distinctiveness. More

boldly and more distinctly he must preach it according as the church in general and the world departs from it or discards it. And since we are about to assume our labors in your midst, we decided to speak to you this evening on the basis of the text we chose on:

The Word of God and Its Proclamation. Let us consider:

- I. The Contents of That Word,
- II. The Imperishable Nature of That Word,
- III. The Mode of Its Proclamation.

I. To understand the words of our text we must remember that in this latter half of his prophecy the divine seer is placed on the standpoint of the latter half of the period of the captivity of the Israelish nation. God's covenant-people had filled the measure of their iniquity. They had repeatedly transgressed the covenant of Jehovah. They had cast to the wind the repeated call to repentance and conversion. And finally, in the prophetic vision they had already been carried away into the land of their exile, there, in Babylon to bear the punishment of their transgression. But in captivity they repented. The measure of their punishment became full. The faithful covenant God remembered the remnant of His people. And in that same prophetic state the seer is called to preach deliverance and salvation to the captive people. Our chapter relates how the prophet is called to deliver that message of joy and salvation. The voice of God comes to the prophet and to the prophets of God in general. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God!" so we read in the first verse of the chapter. They must, therefore, approach the people of Jehovah with a word of comfort. And the brief contents of their message of comfort is, that the warfare of God's people is accomplished, that their iniquity is pardoned, that full atonement has been made for all their sins. And, therefore, the end of their punishment is arrived. They shall be delivered. Already a voice is heard proclaiming that the way through the desert must be prepared, for as in the glorious days of old Jehovah shall deliver His people and shall safely lead them through the desert back to the land of their inheritance. Hark! The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness! Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it, vss. 3-5. But hark! The prophet presently hears two more voices. The first is the voice of Jehovah. It saith: Cry! The other represents the voice of the prophets that are to go and bring the comforting message of joy and

deliverance to the people of God. It asks: What shall I cry? And the answer of Jehovah comes: "All flesh is grass and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the Word of our God shall stand forever."

The message, therefore, which the prophet must deliver, which he is enjoined to cry out is twofold. He must preach that all flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field. That like the grass it flourisheth today and withereth tomorrow. And in the second place, he must cry out that the Word of our God shall stand forever. And this twofold message may after all be comprised in one statement: While all else fails of fulfillment, the Word of our God shall surely be realized. What is, then, that Word of our God referred to in the text? It is nothing short of the entire counsel of salvation. It is in the first place the message of salvation as it must be delivered to the people of the captivity, the message of redemption as it is contained in the first verse of this chapter. It is the Word that speaks to the heart of Jerusalem. Her sins are atoned for. Her iniquity is pardoned. And, therefore, she may look forward to a speedy deliverance. Her warfare is accomplished. That Word of God the prophet must now deliver. That Word of God shall stand and surely be realized. But although this is true, although this Word of our God refers first of all to the message that must be delivered to the people of the captivity at this time, yet in the wider sense, as we will see presently, it implies the entire counsel of God's salvation. In the wider sense the Lord here enjoins the prophet to cry: "Though the enemy may rise up against my counsel, and though there are periods in history in which it seems that my eternal counsel of salvation, the counsel I revealed from the beginning, shall not be realized, yet My Word shall stand forever!" That this is true will be evident if we take in consideration the historical circumstances of that time. It seemed at this time as if Jehovah had cast off His covenant people, as if they were irrevocably lost. That covenant people of God at the time was Israel. Outside of Israel God had no people. The world was through the nation of Israel only. There was the holy seed. There was the line of the seed of the woman. Nowhere else. But apparently that people had been cast away. They had sinned. They had filled the measure of their iniquity. It seemed at this time as if Jehovah was about to lose the people of His covenant and as if the line of the holy seed was to be discontinued. But if this were so, the entire counsel of salvation would fail. For what was the case? Israel bore in its loins the Holy Seed *par excellence*. Israel was to bring forth the Great Son of David that was to sit upon his throne forever. The line of the holy seed,

historically present in Israel only, was to culminate in the Messiah, in Jesus Christ. If, therefore, Israel is to be cast away, is not to be accepted again, is to die in its iniquity, the Seed of the woman shall not be born. And the counsel of salvation as it had been announced in paradise would fail of realization. There the Lord had spoken: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed, it shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise its heel." But that Word of God could never be realized if Israel were not delivered. For years it seemed as if the covenant-people were lost. For decades it seemed as if that Word of God would fail, and as if Jehovah would have no people. But now the prophet must bring the message of deliverance to that people. He must preach salvation to them again. He must bring the message of grace. He must comfort the people of God and tell them that their warfare is accomplished and their iniquity pardoned and atoned. And, therefore, the line of God's covenant is to be continued. The Word of the Lord shall not fail. A word of joy and redemption may be preached to the people of God, and through the ages it shall resound: Comfort ye, comfort ye my people. Her warfare is accomplished. Her iniquity is pardoned. Her deliverance is near.

I. That this Word of our God, this message of salvation, this counsel of redemption is imperishable, cannot fail, shall surely be realized is emphasized strongly in the text. Not only is this positively expressed, but it is stressed by means of a contrast employed. The eternal, ever enduring, powerful Word of God is contrasted to flesh and its goodliness. The latter is as the grass and as the beauty of the flower. It flourisheth, it standeth in the splendor of its beauty for a moment. But it perisheth and fades away.

What does the prophet mean when he refers to the passing nature of flesh? Does he merely wish to draw a contrast between the eternal nature of God, standing above the changing times and seasons, and the fleeting character of all that is called creature? Thus it appears sometimes in Holy Writ. The author of Psalm XC draws this contrast beautifully. God is from everlasting to everlasting. He was before the mountains were born. A thousand years are to Him as a watch in the night when it is past. But the people, and the generations of the children of men are like the grass, their days are as a tale that is told. Soon the days of man are cut off and he flies away. In that psalm, therefore, the contrast is drawn between the ever-abiding Jehovah and the fleeting creature. But in our text, it seems to us, there is more implied. The message the prophet must deliver implies that all human attempts for the salvation of man and of the world are vain and futile. And, moreover, that all the

attempts of flesh to counteract and oppose the counsel of God are vain. This is plain from the contrast. Flesh and its goodness are here employed in contrast with the Word of our God. That Word of God aims at salvation. It promises deliverance. From the days of old it claimed that the works of darkness would be destroyed, the head of the serpent crushed, God's people saved, redeemed to glory, and all the works of God's hands would ultimately praise Him. But over against this Word stands flesh. Human power, human might, keenness of insight, wisdom and reason, philosophy and science; human counsel and device as it stands alone, separate from God and over against Him. All that is purely human, nothing but human, solely human is implied in this word flesh. Man is his own strength pretends to save the people and the world. Man in his own wisdom, apart from the Wisdom of God, claims to solve the world's problems. Still more. This human power and might, this human wisdom and insight ventures to oppose the counsel of God, to set aside God's way of salvation, and pretends to know a better, a more efficient way than the way of grace. And now the message cries: All these human attempts at salvation shall fail! They may appear beautiful for a while. They may seem as if flesh will be victorious and the Word of our God shall fail. The contrary is true. All these humanistic attempts shall terminate in complete failure. They are like grass and like the flower of the field. Their beauty shall fade, their strength shall perish. Surely, the people is grass.

Understood in this light the words of our text are of great significance for our own age. It is doubtful whether there ever was a period in history so dominated by the spirit of humanism as our own. The last few years have manifested that spirit in all its boldness. It is through human counsel and human effort that the world is to be saved and the Kingdom to be established. The gospel of Golgotha and of Joseph's garden has been replaced by that of a humanistic, evolutionistic philosophy. Man is not inherently sinful. He is not naturally corrupt. He is not in himself guilty and condemned. On the contrary, he is inherently good. He admittedly did not as yet reach the highest stage of evolution. He must be improved. But great opportunities he offers in his very nature. What we must have is not the old blood theology, that makes man totally depraved, presses him down to a condition whence he cannot save himself, and casts him upon the blood of the cross for his only salvation. What must be preached is that man is capable of great things, that his case and that of the world is not hopeless, that he must follow the example of the Man of Galilee. What we must do is combine all the forces of mankind in state, church, and society. With united effort we must labor for the uplifting of society, for the betterment of the world,

for the welfare of mankind. Jesus simply gave us a program to be worked out. That program must, at least in part, be realized. And a glorious future is waiting us and all the world. The glorious millennium of peace and righteousness will presently be ushered in!

My text warns: "All flesh is as grass!" All these purely humanistic attempts shall fail. All these human counsels that aim at the salvation of the world apart from the Word of God and the blood of Golgotha shall prove vain and futile. And today we may witness the truth of these words. If it is true that there never was an age in which human power did so assert itself for the salvation of the world as our own, it is also true that there never was a time in which things did look so dark. Even the most persistent optimists are today wavering in their hopes. The war has not brought the glorious age of freedom and democracy that was promised. Peace, though formally concluded because of the exhaustion of the nations, is more remote than ever. Hatred and jealousy, greed and envy are being nourished in the heart of humanity. The millennium is not in sight. The social problems become more involved as the days go by. Dissatisfaction, restlessness, unrighteousness, and avarice come to manifestation day by day. Never have things looked more hopeless from a purely humanistic point of view than in our own time. And although there still are prophets that are persistent in their predictions of a better age to come, nowhere is the man that shows us clearly the way to this glorious future. Surely, our time preaches the realization of this message: All flesh is grass and the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field!

Over against this passing word of man stands the Word of our God, enduring and imperishable. The Word of God shall stand! The original may very appropriately be translated: The Word of our God shall rise forever! The counsel of God's salvation, revealed in the Word of redemption shall rise again and again in history till it shall find eternal rest in the glorious Kingdom of our Lord! Sometimes it may seem as if that Word were defeated. Fears may rise up in our bosom that the Word of God shall rise no more. Fact is, that again and again it rises, rises in ever greater splendor of strength till all opposition shall have been crushed and it shall stand without being disputed and opposed. Ultimately, in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ it shall be fully accomplished and shall stand unchallenged.

And why shall it stand and rise ever again? Because it is the Word of God. That God is eternal and so is His Word. From all eternity He planned His counsel for the redemption of all things, for the gathering of all things in Christ Jesus our Lord. As the eternal counsel of God that Word stands back of all the

attempts of Satan and hell to frustrate it. Nothing is from that counsel excluded. Nothing takes that eternal Word by surprise. It may seem often as if the devil, sin, and death successfully oppose it. And, in fact, it is the intention of the Evil One to frustrate that Word of God. This constitutes his terrible guilt. But fact is, that also the counsel of the Wicked One, the attempts of the devil and all that stand on his side will ultimately prove to have contributed to the realization of that eternal Word. That Word shall stand, because it is the counsel of the Almighty God. He is never separated from His Word. He does not leave the realization of that Word of redemption to another. He Himself is in His Word. He Himself realizes it, accomplishes it to its ultimate perfection. Against Him nothing can prevail. And, therefore, that Word shall stand forever! What a beautiful word of comfort! A word of comfort and joy at least, if by faith we appropriate this word of our text and say: this God, whose Word shall stand is our God. For, then and then alone do we take courage in the midst of the world. And though times may be dark and conditions seem hopeless, we know that the Word of our God, the counsel of redemption in which also we have a place by grace, shall rise again and again and ultimately appear in glory everlasting!

Also this truth has often been illustrated in the history of the world. How often was the firmness of that Word of our God tested! How often did flesh rise up against it! It rose up against it when Cain killed Abel. It rose up against it in the period before the flood, when finally the Word of God was represented only in the family of Noah. It rose up against it when that wicked instrument of the devil, Pharaoh, made the deliberate attempt to destroy the holy seed in the land of Egypt. All through the history of the people of Israel in the land of promise did flesh rise up against the Word of God. Nations combined against it. Babylon gained renown in this respect. And dark it looked for the Word of God at the time when the prophet is called to preach comfort and deliverance to the remnant of God's people. And, last but not least, flesh rose up against the Word of God and His counsel of redemption when the powers of hell and the powers of the world combined against God and the holy child Jesus. Then especially the battle raged fiercely between flesh and the Word of God. And the end seemed victory for flesh. The Word of God is downed, killed, stored away in the grave of Joseph's garden!

But the Word of God always arose again. It appeared again and again and proved unconquerable. It appeared in Seth after Abel. It continued in Shem after the flood. It arose in Abraham and Israel. It appeared in the remnant that were delivered from the land of their captivity, to whom it was preached that

their warfare was accomplished and their sins atoned for. It reached its realization in Bethlehem, the Word become flesh, Immanuel, God with us, the culmination of the holy line. It arose and stood in glory, victorious over flesh on the morning of the resurrection. In principle that Word of our God has overcome already. And though also in the new dispensation the powers of earth and hell may rage to prevent the full realization of that Word of God, nevertheless, we have the sure promise that this Word shall stand forever! The day is coming that all shall have been accomplished and the counsel of God, the Word of Jehovah shall have rest and stand unchallenged in the eternal kingdom! Surely, vain is flesh and vain are they that put their trust in human power and counsel. But safe and secure are they whose trust is in the Word of our God. They shall not perish, but like that Word they shall stand forever.

III. That, then, is the message the prophet must bring, and that is also the message the ambassador of Christ in the new dispensation must bring to the church of God in the midst of the world. He must preach the Word of God. He must bring a word of comfort and salvation, of grace and deliverance to Jerusalem, speaking to the heart of Zion. And concerning that Word of the Lord he must say, that it shall stand forever, and that all flesh shall fail and prove futile.

He must speak. It is not left to his own choice whether he will bring that Word of our God. On the contrary, the voice comes with the command: Cry! There is no choice left. The prophet of the Lord cannot at will choose another vocation. It is not thus that he himself decides to deliver that Word. He is called by the Lord God, and, therefore, he must bring that Word. He is constrained to comfort God's people, to bring the message of salvation, to cry out that all flesh is grass and all the goodness thereof as the flower of the field, perishable and passing, but that the Word of our God abideth forever. He, therefore, does not derive the contents of his message from any other source. It is not man that calls him. It is not his own mind that teaches him. It is the Most High that calls him, and no other business he has than to proclaim what the Lord enjoins him to preach. He must condemn the attempts of flesh and uphold the certainty of the Word of our God.

He must cry! It is by no means indifferent to our God how His Word is delivered. The prophet must not merely learn it by heart and dryly, unconcernedly repeat it. He must not whisper it timidly. He must not sing it pleasantly. The command as to the mode of its proclamation is definitely: Cry! And this suggests three ideas. In the first place it informs us that the ambassador of God both in the old and in the new dispensation must bring the message of God

to Zion clearly and distinctly. Whatever is cried out is clear and distinct to all. And thus the Word of God must be cried out. It must be preached clearly. There must be nothing ambiguous, nothing hesitant, nothing uncertain about its contents. The audience must understand clearly what the preacher means. In the second place, it suggests that the message must be delivered with bold emphasis. The preacher must insist upon a hearing like one that cries. He must not allow himself to be silenced. He must not fear public opinion. That is not characteristic of one that cries out. He must be bold. Neither the world, nor all the powers of the world combined, neither the disobedient among God's own people may intimidate him. Persistently he must cry: All flesh is grass but the Word of our God abideth forever! And finally, it suggests that the ambassador of Christ must be a living witness. A cry rises from the heart, is living testimony. One who mechanically repeats a message does not cry. He that cries out is enthusiastic about the message he brings. Thus, then, it is with regard to the preacher of the Word. Christ did not order a million phonographs to propagate the gospel. He did not invent the printing press to print and scatter dead tracts. He commanded living witnesses to go out into the world and cry out: All flesh is grass and the goodness thereof as the flower of the field. But the

Word of our God abideth forever. It shall rise and rise. It shall prove victorious again and again. It shall ultimately stand realized in glory!

Thus, beloved, I conceive of my task in your midst. To this task I pledged myself when I entered first upon the ministry of the Word. To this task I pledged myself anew when last Tuesday evening I was connected with the Eastern Ave. congregation. I am aware of my own weakness. The task incumbent upon me, which I am constrained to perform, is a difficult one, in my own strength quite impossible of execution. But our help is in the name of the Lord. Weak in our own strength we are strong in the Lord. Timid by nature we are bold in Him. And, therefore, in His name we assume the task of delivering this twofold message. We will proclaim that all flesh is grass. We will witness against the attempts of human strength. And we will maintain that the Word of our God and it only stands forevermore! To young and old, at all occasions we shall deliver that message alone. Do not ask anything else. And the more persistently the world intrudes upon us with its arm of flesh, the more loudly and clearly, the more distinctly and boldly we shall in the name of the Lord of hosts cry out: Only the Word of the Lord standeth forever. In it alone is all our salvation!

Amen.

MY SHEEP HEAR MY VOICE

Letter to Timothy

September 1, 1979

Dear Timothy,

In my last letter to you we began a discussion of the nature of man. We proceeded from what Scripture teaches us in Genesis 2:7: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." We talked, in that letter, about what Scripture meant when it described man's creation as being from the dust of the ground.

There are a couple more remarks which I want to make about that expression before we go on to the other aspect of man's creation — that God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

You recall that I remarked about man's creation from the dust of the ground that this meant that man was created a part of this earthly creation. He was, like the birds and fish and animals, of the earth, earthy. But you must remember — and this is an important point — that *man* was of the earth earthy. The whole man was created as a part of this earthly creation.

I am not sure exactly how much emphasis I ought to give to this idea; but it seems to me that this is often misunderstood. The Scriptures teach that man is created with both body and soul. Perhaps in some future article we can discuss this more in detail — as far, at least, as the meaning of these terms is concerned. But it seems to me that sometimes we have the notion that man is related to this earthly creation because he has a body. His soul, so we like to think, is not of this earth, but is other-worldly. His body makes him a part of this present creation while his soul makes him a creature who does not fit in this world. His soul makes him heavenly and is a part of him which transcends the earthy.

But this is not true. Granted now that man is indeed created with a body and a soul, the fact remains that he, both with body and soul, is part of this earthly creation. If I may put it that way, even his soul is earthly. He is, with his whole nature, created only for this world.

This ought really not to surprise us. After all, even animals have souls. We noticed this already in our last letter when we found that Genesis 1 speaks of the animals as living souls. And this truth is found in many different places in Scripture. To quote but one text, Leviticus 24:18 reads: “And he that killeth a beast shall make it good; beast for beast.” Here the expression, “beast for beast” is really “soul for soul.”

In general, then, the difference between man and animals is not that men have souls while animals do not; the difference is rather that men have different kinds of souls than animals. And the difference consists especially in this that men have minds and wills. Men can think and desire; animals cannot — at least in the high sense of the word in which men can do this.

But the point that needs to be made is that even this soul of man is related to the earth. If man were created only from the dust of the ground he could never know anything else but this present world. All his thoughts and desires would be limited to this creation. He is, with body and soul, a part of this world and this world only.

It is this truth which makes the additional statement of Gen. 2:7 so important: “and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” This is the other aspect to his creation. He is a creature who is more than merely of the earth earthy. He has another side to his existence which is explained by this part of the text.

What is this other aspect to his creation? Man is created in such a way that he stands in a relationship to God. And this relationship to God governs the whole of his life. He has a spiritual dimension in his existence which no other creature can possibly have.

He, of all God’s creatures, stands in a moral and ethical relation to God.

This is a marvelous aspect to his creation the importance of which ought never to be underestimated. After all, God is transcendent above all His creation. He is high and lifted up. He is enthroned in the highest heavens. He makes the heavens His throne and the earth His footstool. He dwells in a light unto which no man can approach. There is a chasm between God and man so great and deep that it can never be bridged by man or by his best efforts. Yet, God has created man in such a way that man can stand in a relationship to Him.

This is true by virtue of man’s creation. He was created in such a way that this is possible. He was formed by God so that he possessed a nature which enables man to live all his life overagainst God. This stems from the fact that God created him the way He did.

This relationship, as such, also embraces the whole of man’s nature. It is not true that man stands in a relation to the creation because he has a body, and in a relation to God because he has a soul. Just as man is related to the earth with both body and soul so also man is related to God with the whole of his nature — body and soul. We must be careful of all attempts to chop man into pieces. He is created as one living soul. And as such he stands overagainst God with body and soul just as he stands in this creation, related to it, dependent upon it, connected with it, in body and soul.

From a purely formal point of view, man stands in this relation to God whether he be saint or sinner. Nothing can alter that relationship. Man was created in such a way that he lived in a relationship of friendship with God. He was God’s covenant friend. He was servant of God in the midst of the creation. He loved his God with all his heart and mind and soul and strength. And indeed, this was the very purpose of his creation. But when man fell, although he became the enemy of God, the truth of man’s relationship to God remained. It is true that man now is a rebel. He hates God with all his heart and mind and soul and strength. He transgresses God’s law. He does all he can to destroy God. But the fact that he stands yet in a relation to God is not altered in the least. He cannot escape that relation, for he is created in such a way that this relation remains — even into all eternity be it in heaven or in hell.

There are several things about that relation. Because man has a mind he is created with the ability to *know* God. He never loses this either. Even though, according to Romans 1:18 he holds the truth in unrighteousness (suppresses the truth would be more accurately the idea), he can, after all, suppress the

truth only because he possesses it to begin with. God makes Himself known. We often fail to see the wonder of this. And, indeed, it is possible only because God Himself *reveals* Himself. That knowledge of God is possible only because God makes Himself known. But the fact remains that it is true. Every man knows God.

If at this point we may interject a very practical remark, it is worth pointing out that this is emphatically the case. Heresy, false doctrine, unbelief, idol worship, distortion of the truth, are not born out of ignorance of God — as is so often asserted. All corruptions of the truth — whether within Christendom where the truth of Scripture is known or in pagan lands where God is made known only through creation — are the direct fruit of man's efforts to change the glory of the incorruptible God into an image like unto corruptible man. Every distortion is willful, deliberate, done expressly to destroy God's glory.

That this has practical implications for dealing with sin goes almost without saying. It is exactly because of this that each man stands accountable and responsible for his own conduct. He cannot and may not blame others for what he does. He must give answer for his own acts. He may not and cannot shove the blame for what he does on others. If this were always remembered it would make considerable difference in the "treatment" of those who have mental and emotional problems.

But be that as it may, and we can return to that at some future time, man also stands in relation to God as a willing creature. He may not desire God as Adam did in Paradise and as the Psalmist did when he sang: "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." But he still stands with his will overagainst God. Only, as a sinner, he stands opposed to God. His will is the opposite of God's will. He actively seeks God's

overthrow and destruction.

But the same is true of his body. He stands with his body in relation to God also. And he does this by using all the members of his body to sin. His mouth curses. His feet are swift to shed blood. His hands are dirty with the filth of wickedness. His eyes covetously look for and search out evil. It is exactly because this is true that Paul admonishes the Roman Christians "not to yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin." Romans 6:13.

Because man is created as a creature who stands in a moral and ethical relationship to God, man is a creature who stands before the solemn obligation to love God. Nothing can ever alter that. That requirement never changes. And because he must love God he will have to give account to God for the whole of his life. He will have to answer to God whether he loved God with his heart. He will have to answer to God whether he loved God with his mind — and with his soul — and even with his strength. If he did he will be blessed for he will then have fulfilled the purpose of his creation. But if he did not he will have to suffer the fury of an angry God who will not permit the creature to deny the very reason for his creation but will surely punish every man who sins against Him.

This is the kind of creature man is. He is created in a marvelous way. No wonder the Psalmist sings: "Behold I am fearfully and wonderfully made." He stands in this world related to it, inescapably a part of it. But he stands also in relation to God. The highest of all God's creatures, the king of creation under God, image bearer of the Most High — man, the crown of God's work.

With this man you have to do as a pastor and shepherd of those who are God's sheep.

Fraternally,
H. Hanko



ALL AROUND US

Happenings at other Synods (Assemblies)

Rev. G. Van Baren

Across our land during the summer months, the various church denominations hold their meetings of synod or assembly. There are, of course, too many of these taking many and varied decisions, to note any with great detail. However, some of these meetings

are of interest in that they reveal the trends of our day generally, and, specifically, the trends evident within specific denominations. This article will point out only a few of these.

Denominations with "back doors"

It has often been said, "There are more ways than one to skin a cat." It is also true that what will not be able to go into the "front door," might well be brought in through the back. So it was at the Synod of the Reformed Church in America meeting in Holland, Michigan. For six years in succession that Synod had approved the ordination of women into the ministry of the Word and Sacraments. According to their own rules of order, two-thirds of their classes must approve that action before their constitution or church order can be changed in order to allow this. For six years the classes did not approve by the necessary two-thirds vote. Several times there was only one classis short of making this two-thirds majority. However, a few churches in the Eastern segment of our country decided to ordain women anyway. Thus, against the constitution, these

churches have had women in the ministry for several years. This year that synod approached the "problem" in a different way. There was a challenge raised to these illegally ordained women ministers at the synod. The synod's Judicial Commission ruled that the churches had acted within their rights when ordaining women to the ministry. The synod, by vote of 150-115, sustained their ruling. Thus, without amending the constitution (church order), a constitution which for the last six years they attempted to amend to allow for women ministers, the synod simply declared that installing women in office of minister is not contrary to their constitution at all. Very evidently, church orders would mean nothing anymore if any synod, by majority vote, simply declares an unconstitutional thing to be constitutional.

Sin vs. Germs

The Southern Presbyterian Church met in General Assembly at Kansas City, Mo. at the same time and

place as did the Northern United Presbyterian Church USA. Obviously, many decisions were taken. Two

such decisions struck my attention because of the striking contrast these presented. One might present it this way: the Assembly made decisions which give approval to sin but fight germs. There was first a decision involving the old question of homosexuality. The decision seems to place limits on what the homosexual can do within the church, yet allows homosexuals already ordained into the ministry to remain there. The following is quoted from the *Presbyterian Journal*, June 13, 1979:

Homosexuality loomed large on the agenda of the General Assemblies of both the Presbyterian Church US (Southern) and the United Presbyterian Church USA (so-called Northern) but both Churches took strong stands against the ordination of homosexuals despite bitter opposition in the floor debate.

In the PCUS Assembly, the only softening of a standing committee's report occurred when a "grandfather clause," removed from the study committee's report, was replaced by the Assembly. The clause provided that no punitive action would be taken by the Church against homosexuals already ordained.

In the UPCUSA, a decision against ordaining homosexuals had been made last year. This year, the decision was attacked through an overture which demanded that ordination questions be left up to the presbyteries to decide. The overture was overwhelmingly defeated.

During the PCUS debate, supporters of homosexual ordination argued that a sexual preference should not be elevated to the level of a seminary degree as a qualification; and that one sin should not be singled out above all others sins. . . .

However, while allowing ordained homosexuals to retain their ministerial status, the Assemblies put up a

very strong battle against germs. As reported in the same *Presbyterian Journal*, we read:

In actions relating to American corporations and businesses, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church US (PCUS — Southern) joined the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian USA (UPCUSA — "Northern") in endorsing a boycott of the Nestle Corporation, but refused to endorse a suggested boycott of the J.P. Stevens Co. . . .

Jan Long of South Charleston, W. Va., a high school youth advisory delegate, argued for a different approach than that of boycott. "I do not believe that our boycott affects the Nestle Company as much as our Christian concern and spirit," she said.

Victor R. Jones Jr., of Laurel, Miss., another high school advisory delegate, agreed. "If we really want to boycott a product where it will do some good and where we can see it," he said, "let's boycott alcohol." He was greeted with light laughter.

The deciding speech, in the opinion of some observers, was made by Dr. Lila Bonner Miller of Atlanta, Ga., who said she had practiced medicine for 50 years. "There is no way to prepare infant formula without sterilization and refrigeration," said Dr. Miller, whose family has included PCUS leaders at home and abroad. "With improper dilution, infant formula can cause brain damage and even death. There is no way under ordinary circumstances that mothers in Third World nations can properly use infant formula. The only thing we can do is *not* to buy Nestle products. . . ."

The vote, when taken, was 201 to 162 in favor of continuing the boycott. Youth delegates, allowed for the first time this year to cast "straw votes" for information only, voted against the boycott, 24-19.

Back to the drawing boards - again!

One of the bigger issues at the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church was the question of women in office — particularly in the office of deacon. In 1978 the Synod decided that women could serve in the office of deacon provided there was not the exercise of authority. The Church Order, which does not allow such ordinations, remained unchanged. Still, several churches hastily, and it appears, inadvisedly, elected women to serve as deacons. The decision of 1978 stirred up a storm of protest — so much so that the Synod of 1979 was forced to reevaluate its decision. The Synod decided, according to the *Banner*:

Synod finally decided that there shall be no

further installation of women as deacons in the CRC until at least after Synod of 1981. Synod further decided not to ratify any change in Church Order Article 3 which reads: "Confessing male members of the church who meet the Biblical requirements for office-bearers are eligible for office." This leaves those congregations who have installed women deacons living, in this respect, outside their Church Order. On this specific matter, Synod chose to say nothing.

Synod adopted the following recommendations:

"1. That synod appoint a study committee with the following mandate:

"a. To review without prejudice the 1978 report

on 'Hermeneutical Principles Concerning Women in Ecclesiastical Office' and the decisions of the Synod of 1978 regarding the ordination of women as deacons;

"b. To study and define the office of deacon in the light of Scripture, the Confessions, its historical development, especially within the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition, and the 1973 'Guidelines for Understanding the Nature of Ecclesiastical Office and Ordination';

"c. To study the implications of the ordination of women to the office of deacon in the light of Church Order Article 35, giving specific attention to the concept of male headship and the nature of authority (Article 35 provides that "In every church there shall be a consistory composed of office-bearers," permitting a distinction between elders and deacons if there are at least four elders);

"d. And to report its recommendations to Synod by 1981.

"2. That Synod defer decision with respect to ratification of the proposed wording of Church Order Article 3 and its Supplement, and instruct con-

sistories to defer implementation of the 1978 decision, until the study committee has rendered its report to synod, and the churches have had opportunity to consider its recommendations."

Synod declares this to be its answer to all materials addressed to it on this matter.

So the Synod was minded to back off from its decision of last year — and doubtlessly largely because of the amount of static it caused. Yet, what a strange decision! The current decision likely gives the "conservatives" a measure of comfort that they have slowed the process of liberalization of the church. But how strange that after three study committees have studied the issue over many years, after Synods have considered these reports on many occasions — now another study committee is needed to consider all this "without prejudice." One could hope for the best — yet from this vantage point, it would appear that this can only be a delaying tactic. After two years the static might die down and the old decision will stand.

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Esther - God's Providential Care (1)

Rev. J. Kortering

There is no doubt but that the book of Esther sets forth most dramatically and with marvelous detail the account of God's preserving His people in a critical hour of need.

HISTORICAL SETTING

To the believing student of the Bible, the historical accuracy of the book of Esther is beyond dispute. It is an inspired record of events that actually happened. We accept this fact without the need for proof. Yet if one desires to confirm the historical accuracy of the book, this can be done. Ahasuerus, called Xerxes in

the history books, was a great Persian king. According to 1:3 it was in the third year of his reign that Vashti his queen refused to entertain the princes during their drunken feast and was subsequently divorced. In 2:1 mention is made of the king's wrath being appeased so that he sought out a new queen. According to historical records it was from the third year to the seventh year of Xerxes' reign that he was involved in war with Greece. Upon his successful conquest, he returned home and married Esther. She was his queen from the seventh year of his reign until the twelfth. If one examines the references to the city of Shushan, its gates, buildings and streets, all this was

rediscovered in unearthing this ancient city. The customs referred to conform to those mentioned in the writing of Herodotus: e.g., the extending of the king's sceptre as a sign of acceptance, and death to all he refuses, 4:11. Consider in addition the fact the author knew the names of the seven chamberlains, 1:10, seven Persian princes, 1:14, relatives of Haman, 5:10, 9:7-10. All this indicates that we must accept the book as a record of historical events that are recorded for us with divine accuracy.

We should take a moment to consider at what point in history these events actually took place. Xerxes became king in 485 B.C. Prior to this, in 536 B.C., Cyrus had decreed that the captives could return to Jerusalem. The temple was rebuilt about 516 B.C. So when Esther became queen in 478 B.C. the people of God had been in the land of Canaan for some 60 years. After her reign, Ezra the Scribe had yet to return to Canaan and read the law, and Nehemiah to build the walls (about 30 years later).

AUTHOR AND DATE

There is no way to determine who wrote this book. We cannot draw any conclusions from the book itself. The only suggestion that commentators give is Mordecai, a conclusion drawn from 9:20, 22 where we read that he sent letters to all the Jews to celebrate the Feast of Purim. Yet, 10:3 refers to Mordecai as being dead, the events recorded as being a thing of the past. Accepting the doctrine of inspiration, we know God could use anyone for this task and He determined that it should be included in the canon of the Scripture.

As far as the date of its composition is concerned, it is suggested that it may have been written somewhere around 400 B.C. In 10:2 the author reflects upon the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia. These must have been in existence then. They were destroyed by Alexander the Great in 322 B.C. Xerxes must have been dead when the book was written, he was assassinated in 465 B.C. Sometime over this 143 year period the book was written.

THE MESSAGE

Strange as it may seem, the message of this book must be drawn out of it by considering it in the light of the entire Bible. We refer to the fact that the book itself and its content do not celebrate God's providence. As you know, the name of God is not even mentioned in it and it is evident that the main characters, certainly Ahasuerus and Haman, but also Esther and Mordecai as well, are not even regenerated children of God. As a result they do not express God's greatness. Yet, God overrules all this and by the Holy Spirit has seen fit to include it in the canon of the Bible as a demonstration of His care for His

people. The central event is the decree of Ahasuerus to destroy all the Jews, 3:13. This meant that the returned captives as well as all Jews everywhere would be executed. The seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15) was in danger by the seed of the serpent. In these events Satan is doing all he can to kill off the line of David so that ultimately The Promised Seed, Jesus Christ, would not be born. Keeping this in mind, we can understand how God used Esther and Mordecai to intervene on behalf of the covenant seed. God's providence reaches into the palace of the mighty Xerxes so that he and his household must also serve the cause of Christ. Many passages of Scripture speak of this and we must consider the book of Esther in their light. "The Lord has made all things for himself, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil," Prov. 16:4. "To the intent that the king may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men and giveth it to whomsoever he will and setteth up over it the basest of men," Daniel 4:17. Finally, "The powers that be are ordained of God," Rom. 13:1. From this history of Esther, we are reminded that the same thing holds true today as well, all government and people in high positions of influence throughout the world ultimately serve the well-being of God's people and the coming of Jesus Christ even though they do not personally recognize this. The sovereignty of God is our comfort.

FEAST OF AHASUERUS (1:1-22)

This is the first of the great feasts mentioned in the book, the others being the Feast of Esther and the Feast of Purim. For 180 days Ahasuerus showed his princes of different ranks the great glory of his kingdom, 1:4. This was considerable both as to expanse, from India unto Ethiopia, and in worth, as can be seen by the description of the palace and its contents, 1:1, 6, 7. Other sources of history add that this same period of time gave the king the opportunity to show to his princes the military hardware he had accumulated in preparation for his foray into Greece which was about to begin. At the end of this period, the king hosted a week-long feast for all his princes. Two things are mentioned in particular to show the lavished splendor of this event, the beautiful court setting, including the hanging of royal color, the fancy couches upon which the men reclined, 1:5, 6. The second element is the drinking details: the golden goblets, each designed individually, and the quality and quantity of the wine. The Persians prided themselves in their vintage wine, 1:7, 8. Each was not constrained (by pledging or toasting) but could drink as much as he pleased, more than likely referring to more, not less, than customary.

Vashti (which means beautiful woman) hosted a

similar feast for the women in the palace itself, 1:9. This feast was interrupted during the last day by the presence of the seven chamberlains who communicated to her the order of the king that Vashti leave the women and present herself before the feast of the men, 1:10, 11. The reason given was, "to show her beauty, for she was fair to look on," 1:11. This was an extraordinary request, not only, but hazardous to Vashti for she knew very well the men were drunk with wine. Her sense of pride caused her to take drastic action; she refused the king in the presence of his princes, 1:12.

The king responded in rage. We can well imagine how his pride was hurt. Like Nebuchadnezzar (see Daniel 4:30) boasting of the great Babylon he had built, so Ahasuerus has been showing off Persia to his subordinates. Now his wife not only denies him the pleasure of showing off his prized possession, but more importantly, defies his authority. Even the ungodly know that if a man cannot rule his house well, he cannot be expected to rule others. In utter frustration, he seeks the counsel of the seven princes closest to him. These men are "wise men which knew the times," 1:13, an obvious reference to the astrologers and magi as they influenced the heathen king in making decisions. Memucan served as their spokesman and their counsel was that the king should deal decisively with Vashti since her refusal was an act of rebellion before the nobles of the land. The queen had set an evil example and if allowed to go undisciplined would encourage all the wives to despise their husbands and act out of contempt and wrath, 1:16-18. The solution is for Ahasuerus to divorce his wife because of this refusal, to give her estate to someone else, and to inform all the people of this action by royal decree. Only in this way would the evil be counteracted and the king once again restored to his position of authority in high regard, and order preserved throughout the land, 1:20.

The advice pleased the king and all the princes that were gathered at the feast. Action was taken immediately and letters dispatched unto all lands, written in their own language. The impact was that

every man should rule his own house.

It is interesting, as an aside here, to notice that from a formal point of view the ungodly know the value of the works of the law, see Romans 2:14, 15. God has decreed from the beginning that the husband rule his household. The woman must obey her husband. Yet, the wicked take this divine order and thoroughly corrupt it. Here, Ahasuerus wanted his wife to corrupt herself, or at least allow the possibility. She disobeyed for her own reasons and surely not in obedience to God. The result is that Ahasuerus shows himself an evil tyrant and Vashti a stubborn victim. The solution is divorce, which flies in the face of God's created and redeemed order. There is no common grace which produces order in this society, even the order of this society (wives, obey your husbands) is thoroughly corrupted by vain men. Depravity always works through.

FEAST OF ESTHER (2:1-7:10)

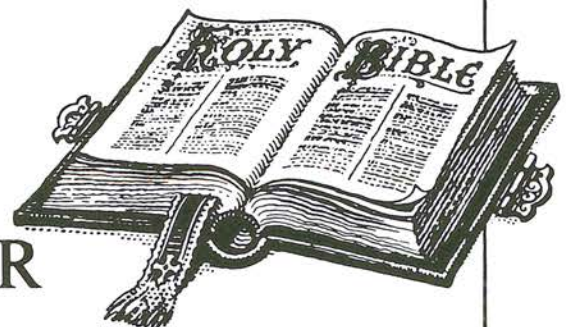
Events now lead up to another feast. After King Ahasuerus returns from his conquest in Greece he begins to think of a wife once again. How shall he go about securing a new one? The counselors are quick to supply the answer, let the fairest of virgins be brought to the palace and placed under the management of Hege, the king's chamberlain, who will treat them with oil of myrrh for six months and another six months with sweet odours and oils, 2:12. After this year of pampering, the King may choose whomsoever he will and spend the night with her and if she delight him, he may call her back and thus determine who will be his wife. The rest will be his concubines, 2:14.

Such advice pleases this heathen king and he immediately sends forth the request of the princes that they recommend to him eligible virgins and to send them to Shushan, 2:3, 4.

Into this sordid picture appears Esther. Yes, the one whom God will use to preserve His people.

(to be continued)

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Book Reviews

THE BOOK OF REVELATION, by Harry R. Boer; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979; 157 pp., \$3.95 (paper). (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko)

This book is a very brief, basically amillennial, explanation of the book of Revelation. While some of the interpretation can be accepted, there are several weaknesses. Perhaps the most basic weakness is a dualism which pervades the book — a dualism which places the powers of sin outside God's control. E.g., on p. 46 Boer writes:

The Christian community must clearly understand that God does not decree sword and famine and conquest and war and pestilence and death and Hades. He did not create them; He did not plan them; He did not ordain them. All are opposed to him; all deny the goodness and the righteousness and the holiness for which God stands. The existence of evil is a mystery that Scripture nowhere explains. The excellence of the cosmic Christ is not that He brought an explanation of evil, but that He conquered it. He met sin and evil and death and hell and defeated them. The glory of the gospel is not an explanation of sin, but the declaration of its total conquest by the incarnate, crucified and risen Lord.

Yet, obviously, Boer cannot be satisfied with such an explanation, so he writes on p. 52:

The new, the wonderfully new, matter that is reported here is that the *Lamb* breaks the seals that introduce these dark events. All the events that flow out of the broken seals are in His hand. He permits them. He controls them. He limits them. And He stops them when they have served their purpose.

One wonders if this basic dualism is not directly related to Boer's denial of reprobation. One wonders also if all this is not related to a very meager discussion of the eternal punishment of the wicked.

MISSION TRENDS NO. 4 (LIBERATION THEOLOGIES), Gerald H. Anderson, Thomas F. Stransky, C.S.P., editors, Paulist Press, New York, Ramsey, Toronto and Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Mich.; \$3.45 (paper) (Reviewed by Prof. Robert D. Decker.)

Liberation theology is a rather recent development in contemporary theology emanating primarily from Latin America. This volume contains a series of essays purporting to be an analysis of this theology es-

One cannot even be very sure exactly what Boer means by eternal punishment. And, no doubt, there is a relation between all this and what Boer writes on p. 45:

There is more to history than the judgments of God on the evil of the world. There are also the peaceful years from birth to death which millions are privileged to live, the growth of the Church in numbers and in understanding, the history of nations, the achievements of culture, the development of the world's resources, the advance of learning and skills and exploration of the universe. Revelation itself speaks clearly of them: the kings of the earth shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:22-27). The kings who bring this glory into the new Jerusalem are the kings not only of political empires, but also of the empires of music, art, literature, science, commerce, and thought. . . .

There are also some rather strange interpretations in the book. E.g., Boer refuses to be drawn into a definite position on the question of the one thousand years mentioned in Revelation 20. He says the whole first section dealing with the binding of Satan and his loosening simply mean: "For a moment he draws the martyrs out of the shadows of the cross into the bright light of victory, peace and joy. He gives them royal honours along with the great martyr who is now Lord of lords and King of kings. They have suffered with Him, now they are glorified with Him. Weeping may endure for a night but joy comes in the morning. This is the picture that John draws." In other words, the whole section is interpreted as referring to the eternal blessedness of the people of God in heaven.

Each section is closed by a few paragraphs in which Boer applies the section with a "Meaning for Today." These applications are often rather far-fetched and have little to do with the text.

pecially as it affects North America and Europe. Contributions include representatives of the Black, Feminist, Native American, Asian American, and Chicano American experience. Among the writers are: Robert McAfee Brown (Union Theological Seminary), Pope Paul VI, Daniel Berrigan, Virginia Mollenkott (of feminist fame), and Cesar Chavez.

According to Brown the Christian gospel is not concerned about the emancipation of the oppressed in North America only, but about the emancipation

of the oppressed in every part of the world. This must be effected by radical revolution (defined as "change at the roots") of social, political, and economic structures. This must issue in a global community. This revolution may very well be accomplished in concert with Marxist (by definition atheistic, R.D.) ideology.

The liberation spoken of is not conceived of in Biblical terms as liberation from sin and death through the blood of Jesus Christ. It has to do purely

with this world. The theology is as one would expect neither Biblical nor Reformed.

If one wishes to know something about this "theology" he does well to read the book. If one is looking for a positive contribution to the Reformed faith he will be disappointed.

Eerdmans is not to be commended for publishing this sort of material. One would expect better things from its press.

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YOU ARE INVITED!
to the
2nd ANNUAL CHICAGOLAND REFORMATION DAY LECTURES
to be held,
the Lord willing,
at
Illiana Christian High Auditorium, Lansing, Ill.

* * * * *

This year's theme is:
"A SERIOUS CALL TO A REFORMED AND HOLY LIFE"

Speakers and topics will be:

Wed., Oct. 24 —

Rev. G. Van Baren: *"SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD"*

... setting forth the truth of the antithesis as concerning movie attendance, dancing, unionism and other forms of worldliness.

Wed., Oct. 31 —

Rev. M. Joostens: *"HONORING MARRIAGE"*

... setting forth the biblical teaching on marriage, the idea of faithfulness in marriage even as God in Christ is faithful in love to His church; taking up such matters as divorce and remarriage; warning against the evils of marital unfaithfulness; calling the saints to marital fidelity.

Wed., Nov. 7 —

Rev. D. Engelsma: *"REMEMBERING THE LORD'S DAY"*

... setting forth the Bible's teaching on Sabbath observance, warning against desecration of the Lord's Day, calling the saints to good Sabbath keeping.

All meetings begin at 8:00 P.M.

Question & Answer period after each address

Cassette tapes of each speech will be made available

Sponsored by:

Protestant Reformed Church
South Holland, Ill. 60473

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On September 28, 1979, our parents, Mr. and Mrs. Peter A. Poortenga will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary. We, their children and grandchildren, are thankful that God has preserved them for us and pray that God will continue to do so in the years to come.

We rejoice with the Psalmist of old: "Thou shalt keep them, O Lord, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever." (Ps. 12:7). "It is God that girdeth me with strength and maketh my way perfect." (Ps. 18:32).

Ruth and Charles Underwood
Dolores Jean
Elaine and Dewey Van Der Noord
Shirley and Alvin Poortenga
Janice and Peter Poortenga Jr.
Dyer, Ind.

Sandra and John Heys
Linda and Robert Poortenga
Lindsay and David Poortenga
Lois and David Nelson
Karen Jane
and 23 grandchildren

NOTICE!

The League of Eastern Men's and Ladies' Societies will hold a meeting October 9 at Southeast Church. Prof. H.C. Hoeksema will speak on "The Declaration of Principles, Its History, Content, and Value for Us." Everyone is welcome to attend.



News From Our Churches

Candidate Ronald Cammenga has accepted the call extended to him from our Hull, Iowa congregation. Candidate Carl Haak has accepted the call extended to him by our Southeast Church in Grand Rapids.

Rev. Arie den Hartog has received a call from our church in Doon, Iowa, to serve as missionary in Singapore. The duo revised from a trio also included Rev. Jason Kortering. Rev. den Hartog has also received a call from Hudsonville to serve as 'minister on loan' to Christchurch, New Zealand.

Rev. George Lubbers celebrated his 70th birthday on August 6. Even though "retired," Rev. Lubbers has been active preaching this summer. Upon request, Rev. Lubbers preached in Randolph, Wisconsin on August 5. Rev. Lubbers was the first pastor of the Randolph congregation, serving from 1944 - 1958. He was also scheduled to preach in Hope (Walker, Michigan), Hudsonville, and Holland during the month of August.

Also this summer, Professor Robert Decker preached in Doon and Hull, Iowa, and Edgerton, Minnesota churches. This was a kind of 'home-coming' for Professor Decker, as Doon was his first charge as pastor after graduating from seminary.

Hope Church (Walker) with the Mission Committee is responsible for mission activities in the Lansing, Michigan area. Candidate Steven Houck (who has also received the call to serve as home missionary here) is presently working in this area. A note in their bulletin invited the Hope congregation to attend the mid-week Bible classes held on Wednesday evenings at their meeting place, the University S. D. A. Church, 149 Highland, East Lansing. The Houck's address is 5737 Pine Ridge, Haslett, Michigan 48840.

The Hudsonville consistory has decided to initiate two changes in the order of worship. First, there will be silent prayer before the service in unison after the consistory and pastor enter the auditorium. The pastor will announce the silent prayer which will be concluded with the playing of the organ. Reasons for the change include: 1) to avoid the confusion of prayer while others attempt to enter a specific row of seats; 2) to encourage also the children to participate in this prayer; 3) to promote unity and oneness in

prayer; 4) to conform with the practice of many of our other churches. The second change will be the reading of Scripture after the congregational prayer instead of before the prayer. This is also the practice of many of our churches. It brings the Scriptural passage into a closer relationship to the sermon about to be preached.

Beginning in September, the consistory of our Faith Church in Jenison, Michigan, has decided to allow the deacons to sit with their families during the worship service.

The convocation service of our Seminary was scheduled for September 5 in Southwest Church. Professor H. C. Hoeksema was scheduled to speak on "Pass the Word."

With the approval of the Church Council, the Evangelism Committee of our church in South Holland, Illinois is planning the second annual series of Reformed lectures for this fall. The dates are October 24, October 31, and November 7. The theme for this series of speeches is, "A Serious Calling to a Reformed and Holy Life." Scheduled speakers are Rev. G. Van Baren, Rev. M. Joostens, and South Holland's pastor, Rev. D. Engelsma.

In preparation for the fall meeting of Classis West, the congregation of our church in Isabel, South Dakota was requested to come to church the evening of Friday, August 31 to help clean the church.

Due to an anticipated large increase in visitors attending worship services the last two Sundays in July, our congregation in Redlands, California, met in the University of Redlands Chapel. The reason for the influx was the annual Protestant Reformed Young People's Convention hosted by Redlands. The convention included three main speeches: "Redeeming the Time in the Age of Ignorance," by Rev. M. Kamps; "Redeeming the Time During the Sex Revolution," by Rev. D. Kuiper; and "Redeeming the Time in the Fun Loving Generation," by Rev. R. Miersma.

Rev. Kamps, Rev. Miersma, and Rev. C. Hanko preached in Redlands these two Sundays. Rev. Kamps and Rev. Hanko are former pastors of this congregation.

K.G.V.