

The **STANDARD BEARER**

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

“Christ’s burden does not oppress, but makes light, and itself bears, rather than is borne.” (Martin Luther)

See “Assuming Christ’s Yoke” — page 170

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THE STANDARD BEARER

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MEDITATION

Assuming Christ's Yoke

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Matthew 11:29, 30

This exhortation of the Lord Jesus is most closely attached to another that immediately precedes it.

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Not a general offer of salvation to all men is this word of the Saviour, as it has so generally been

explained. But it is a calling or exhortation directed to those and to those only who are burdened by the spiritual knowledge of their sin and guilt, and who desire from a regenerated heart to be relieved of that burden. To them the Lord presents the promise, "and I will give you rest."

In our text these same addresses are given the added exhortation to assume Christ's yoke. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, . . ." — so would they find rest unto their souls.

Significant and urgent calling!

There is great urgency here that the heavy laden assume Christ's yoke.

For the called, you see, are under a yoke that is too grievous to be borne.

A yoke is a figure of speech taken from the agricultural scene where a pair of draught animals, such as oxen, had a wooden or leather frame fitted over their shoulders and attached to a load they are to pull. Or, perhaps the figure referred to a cross-bar or frame fitted to the shoulders of humans whereby they were enabled to carry heavy burdens, such as water or other objects. Metaphorically the Scriptures speak of the yoke when they refer to a certain servile condition. Jeremiah speaks of breaking the yoke in connection with those who refuse to bow under the judgment of God. (5:5). Peter would impose no yoke on the disciples too heavy to bear, such as the Pharisees insisted upon in the keeping of the ceremonial law. (Acts 15:10). Paul speaks of servants being under the yoke who are to count their masters worthy of all honor. (I Tim. 6:1).

Such is also the implication in the text. The addressees are burdened under the yoke of sin and guilt. They labor and are heavy laden. They labor, toil hard for righteousness and seek for rest. Yet under the law, which aggravates their burden, making their burden all the heavier, they find no relief. For through the law is the knowledge of sin. So they are weary and heavy laden with the knowledge of guilt, while all their fruitless striving for peace and rest is vain. Certainly their yoke was heavy whom the Lord addresses here.

And the Lord now exhorts them to exchange their yoke for the yoke Christ will give.

In the deep sense of the word the yoke they are to assume is Christ Himself. The Lord is not referring to the commands of the gospel in distinction from the demands of the law; nor does He refer to the suffering and persecution which the becoming Christ's disciples would entail; though to be sure there are certain requirements of the gospel to be heeded, and reproaches to be borne, when we are associated with Christ. Rather, we stand in an entirely new relation when we assume the yoke of Christ. In the old relation we bear the burden. In the new, Christ bears the burden for us and in our stead. Luther, writing on this subject, correctly observes, "Christ's burden does not oppress, but makes light, and itself bears, rather than is borne." Or, as another pithily put it,

"What can be lighter than a burden which unburdens us, and a yoke which bears its bearer?"

It is particularly this truth that makes the exchange of yokes to be most appealing. O, indeed, if Christ meant that it is a matter of merely exchanging burdens, be it that the one was lighter than the other, there might be little or no appeal. But the case is quite different. In the one you are yoked to a burden that becomes increasingly heavier and at last impossible to bear. But in the other, when you are yoked to Christ, He takes the burden from you, and you are united with Him Who is the burden-bearer.

Now the urgency of assuming Christ's yoke rests, first of all, in the hearts and minds of those whom Christ addresses here. They have labored and toiled with the knowledge of their sin and guilt. They have been brought to see the immensity of their burden. They know that by their own endeavors they can never unburden themselves, but only increase their guilt and misery. And they have a spiritual longing to get rid of it. They have sensed with Augustine, who also wrestled with his sense of guilt, "Thou God, hast created us unto Thyself, hence our heart is restless, until it rests in Thee." They sense ever more deeply the need of being made right with God. And that means that they desire the removal of their burden of sin and guilt, and desire the perfect righteousness of Christ to be their eternal possession.

But, in the second place, this urging rests and is implied in the calling to come to Christ, the Burden-Bearer and Rest-Giver. Also here, as in the previous verse, the calling is efficacious. So efficacious is Christ's calling that they who are called come to Him. Here is not an impotent invitation on the part of Christ which may be accepted or rejected at will. Christ does not stand on the outside of the sinners heart pleading with him to let Him in. But the call is with power, just as when He stood at the grave of Lazarus and called the dead out of the grave back to life. So also here the called must respond. Christ does not say: I offer to give you My yoke if only you will take it. But He says emphatically and powerfully: Take it! And that word, that calling, moves you, draws you, to come to Him and assume His yoke.

Implicit in our coming to Christ and assuming His yoke is an act of faith. This explains, in the first place, the manner in which we assume Christ's yoke. This is not something additional to our coming to Him. The idea is not that we come to Him and then believe on Him. Nor is the relation such that our believing is an act before we come to Christ. But our believing, our act of faith, is implicit in both our coming to Him and in our assuming His yoke.

Here we must not forget what we suggested earlier that conscious faith is awakened, aroused by the call

of Christ. That call is efficacious! Faith, of course, as a seed is implanted in our hearts at the moment of our regeneration. The calling arouses and brings to conscious activity that faith, whether that calling comes directly, as here, by the word of Christ, or whether it comes to us by the preaching of the gospel. The powerful calling works on the faith within, making it to respond. So we consciously and spiritually come to Christ, the Rest-Giver. And so we consciously and spiritually appropriate the yoke of Christ — Christ Himself.

But, in the second place, the manner in which we assume Christ's yoke is through His spiritual pedagogy. Christ says: You must learn of Me!

If Christ is the yoke we are to assume, it stands to reason that we must know Him. And we come to know Him only when He teaches us, and by that teaching shows us Who He is. This makes us disciples who are taught and have learned. Literally a disciple is one who has been taught, and who follows, responds to that instruction. And that means that we are to listen to what He has to say.

And what does Christ have to say of Himself?

Certainly not that He is another Moses, who with the dispensation of the law imposes burdens upon you that make you cry out in your bondage for peace and rest. Nor is He as the teachers of the law, as the Scribes and Pharisees, who added to the law burdens which they themselves were unwilling to bear.

But this is what we must learn of Him, namely, that He is meek and lowly in respect to the heart.

And again, the idea is not that we are to learn meekness and lowliness from Him, or, that we are to learn to take up His cross which we are to bear with meekness and lowliness of heart.

Rather, we are to learn from Him that He is meek and lowly in heart. He is not a proud, haughty, vindictive task-master who can only aggravate your burden with fear. But because He is meek and lowly in heart, you may freely be encouraged to come to Him, Who condescends to bear your burden, and give Himself to you as the Remover of your guilt.

O, indeed, He is Lord and Master, and as such He would also be acknowledged! (John 13:13). As a reward of merit He has been highly exalted, after He had first deeply humbled Himself. (Phil. 2:8-10) Surely, therefore, every knee must bow, and every tongue confess that He is Lord! And the seer of Patmos, in prophetic vision beheld Him seated on the throne and every creature in heaven, on earth, and under the earth exclaiming, "Blessing and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever." (Rev. 5:13)

Yet that same Lord in our text stands before us exhorting us by faith to assume His yoke, and learn of Him that He is meek and lowly in heart. That means that in respect to His heart, that is, in the deepest part of His Being, He is gentle, benevolent, humble. He has humbled Himself to stand with you on your level, and become the sinner in your stead. Your Saviour, beloved reader, though He is Lord of heaven and earth, God of God, and the very second Person of the Holy Trinity, came down to visit you in your bondage, and to assume your nature and your guilt so as to remove it from you forever. He it is Who addresses you and calls you to Himself, standing as it were next to you in your misery, and saying to you, See, I am come to deliver you from your misery. I am not an austere Judge who is going to condemn you, but a lowly Saviour Who came to redeem you. I am not a cruel, despotic Master Who is going to exact my pound, but I am coming to you as the meek and lowly Jesus. So you need not flee from His august presence, but you may freely come to Him, and by faith appropriate Him as your sin-bearer.

And what will you discover when you so come to Him?

First of all, that His yoke is easy, and His burden light! His yoke is therefore pleasant and desirable. John Bunyon in his "Pilgrim's Progress" sensed the wonder of this when he described Christian with his pack of sin and guilt taken from him and rolled away at the cross. And perhaps this bit of verse will clearly express what you will find when you come to Jesus.

Jesus, Saviour, Lord Divine,
Burden-bearer, from above,
Thou hast removed all guilt, 'twas mine,
This Thou didst in sovereign love.

Meek and lowly in Thy heart,
Thou didst call me unto Thee;
All my guilt to Thee impart,
From my burden I am free.

Blessed Jesus, Freedom Giver,
Blest Remover of my shame,
From my burden Thou didst deliver,
Blessed be Thy Holy Name.

Indeed, His yoke is easy and His burden is light, because you have no burden any longer. He has taken it completely from you.

Moreover, ye shall also find rest for your souls!
Eternal rest!

And eternal rest is that glorious experience that beholds all the work of the God of your salvation, and forever to rejoice in it.

This is the eternal Sabbath!
Blessed boon!

EDITORIALS

Prof. H.C. Hoeksema

Dancing - Full Circle!

(3)

In this installment we continue, first of all, with our sketch of the Report on Worldly Amusements which was before the Christian Reformed Synod in 1928. That Report, because its principle was that of common grace, contained the seeds of the 1966 and 1977 decisions to open the door to the so-called "film arts" and to dancing and to bring these corruptions right on the campus of the denomination's Calvin College. We remind you that both in this sketch of the 1928 Report and in our comments we are leaning heavily on an article of warning written by the late Herman Hoeksema in Volume 4 of the Standard Bearer. We now continue the outline of the Report:

II. Application of these principles to the three forms of worldly amusements:

A. Theater attendance: (Note: in the Report theater and movie attendance are treated under one heading. cf. pp. 31, ff.)

1. The theater is in itself not evil. The committee is not prepared, at least, to condemn the theater as such.

2. But the theater as it exists in reality is certainly evil and wrong:

- a. There are still good dramatic performances that can be presented.
- b. But the committee advises believers nevertheless not to attend these: (1) Because it can give offense to the brother. (2) Because one cannot always have the assurance before seeing a play that it is not only clean throughout but beneficial. (3) Because some of the so-called good plays are more dangerous than the bad, because of false conceptions of religion and morality which they set forth. (4) Because theater attendance will develop a

taste for theater-going. Total abstinence is therefore also the safest.

B. The Movie:

1. There is no essential difference between the playhouse and the movie theater.

2. No intelligent person would condemn the movie on the sole ground that it presents moving pictures. The cinematograph is after all a wonderful invention, and there is no essential difference between a moving picture and a still picture.

3. But the movie theater as it actually exists, that is something else. That is evil and is in the same category as the playhouse.

C. Dancing:

1. Dancing as such is, of course, not to be condemned.

2. But *the* dance as it comes to manifestation in the world is immoral.

D. Card-playing and games of chance are to be condemned for well-known reasons.

At this point Rev. Hoeksema inserts another rather prophetic note "I would say that the only conclusion to which all this can lead is that we must take care that we get Christian theaters and Christian movie houses and dance-halls, which are established according to the demand of faith, where God's children can play and dance to the honor of God. But the committee thinks differently about this." Somewhere along the line, of course, the powers that be in the Christian Reformed Church drew the same conclusion. They brought the theater and the movie and the dance right to the campus of Calvin College — in the name of Christianity. Now we continue again with the sketch:

III. What must the Church do with regard to those

members who nevertheless participate in such amusements?

A. The Church must combat the spirit of worldliness and in particular the growing participation in these worldly amusements.

1. By instruction in the doctrinal and ethical principles which lie at the basis of this amusements-question.

2. By doing all it can to develop a stronger type of *spirituality* among its members.

3. By unceasing warning against the prevailing spirit of worldliness and worldly amusement.

4. By censuring those who have been admonished and who nevertheless continue to live in the sin of visiting such worldly places.

In order to carry out the above, the Committee advises the Synod:

1. "To urge all of our professors, ministers, elders and Bible teachers to emphasize in this age of prevailing worldliness especially those *doctrinal and ethical principles* which our people must clearly understand and firmly adhere to in order not to be swept away by this mighty tide. Strong emphasis should be placed on the covenant-position of Christians and their children, on the call to spiritual separation, and on those ethical principles which have been explained in the second part of this report.

2. "To urge all our leaders and all our people to pray and labor for the *awakening and deepening of spiritual life* in general, and to be keenly aware of the absolute indispensability of keeping our religious life vital and powerful, through daily prayer, the earnest searching of the Scriptures, and through engaging in those practical christian works which are the best antidote against worldliness.

3. "To exhort all our leaders to *warn unceasingly* against the prevailing spirit and forms of worldliness in order that our Reformed principles in these matters may be reemphasized; to insist that these warnings shall be given not only in the preaching, but also in our Catechism and Sunday School classes, in family-visitation and in personal contact; and to urge that these warnings shall be given also in our school-rooms.

4. "To remind consistories and other bodies, such as boards of Christian schools, city missions, etc., that in the nomination or appointment of those who occupy positions of responsibility in our circles, careful attention shall be paid to their conduct in the matter of amusements, and that *no one shall be placed in a position of trust and influence* whose conduct in this as well as in all other matters is not beyond reproach.

5. "To urge consistories to deal in the spirit of

love, yet also in view of the strong tide of worldliness which is threatening our churches, very firmly with *all cases of misdemeanor and offensive conduct* in the matter of worldly amusements; and where repeated admonitions by the consistory are left unheeded, to apply discipline as a last resort.

6. "To instruct consistories to inquire of those who ask to be examined *previous to making public profession of their faith* and partaking of the Lord's Supper as to their stand and conduct in the matter of worldly amusements, and if it appears that they are not minded to lead the life of christian separation and consecration, to refuse their confession."

B. The Committee does not consider it to be its task to suggest ways and means whereby our young people may be provided with wholesome amusements.

In his criticism, Rev. Hoeksema strikes at the basic error of the entire report as follows (I translate):

"And then our chief observation is that the Committee indeed has not correctly described the real place of the Christian in the world, and because of this it also has not grasped and correctly presented his calling and task. The basic view of the Committee is not antithetical but dualistic; it is really Anabaptistic. Let the reader judge for himself. According to the presentation of the Committee, the highest purpose of the Christian is to glorify God. For that purpose man was originally created. In order again to attain to that purpose God has also redeemed His people. Through redemption the Christian can again achieve his original purpose, namely, to praise and magnify God. That, then, is also his calling in the world.

"In this description of the highest principle of the Christian's life and calling there is no antithesis. Yet, for a right view of things, it was just exactly necessary that the Committee should from the very beginning grasp the antithetical idea. They should have expressed this thus, that it is God's purpose with His people in the world *that they should glorify Him over against a world that lies in evil, and thereby condemn the world*. His people are called to serve, to glorify, and to love Him antithetically. To cling to God and to reject the world; to love God and to hate Mammon. By walking in the light and testifying of the light he condemns the world. If the Committee had clearly grasped this and expressed it, it would have given another direction to the development of the main line of its report.

"Now the Committee gets dualism. For according to the presentation of the Committee, the Christian must glorify God *in* the world. And in that world, according to the view of the Committee, there is much good through God's common grace, but also much evil. And now it is the calling of the Christian to *avoid* that evil, but to cooperate with and go along

with the good. The ungodly also still does the good. That happens through Common Grace. And now the Christian lives a double life. On the basis of this common grace he lives along with the ungodly, he has fellowship with him, he does many things in common with him, he amuses himself with him and plays ball with him. But according to his regenerated life and according to the ungodliness of the unbeliever, he keeps himself far from the ungodly and he must *avoid* the evil in the world. In the latter respect the Committee is indeed Anabaptistic, for avoidance (flight) is exactly Anabaptistic."

Is it not ironic, by the way, that the very men who accused the deniers of common grace of Anabaptistic views here fall into that error of world-flight rather than world-fight themselves?

Hoeksema continues:

"This entire view is false.

"The correct view is that of the antithesis. It proceeds from the basic principle that the Christian is called so to serve and to glorify God, so to please Him and to confess Him, to walk in the light and in sanctification of life that, so doing, he condemns the world. The light must judge and rebuke the darkness, must fight against and overcome it. The sphere for this manifestation of the light over against the darkness is all of the life of this world, with all means and gifts and powers and talents. It is the sphere of state and society, of business and industry, of science and art, of music and song, of joy and pleasure, of amusement and relaxation. In all these areas the child of God lives according to this calling as a child of the light, showing forth the virtues of Him that called him. But the ungodly also lives his life always out of the principle of enmity against God, and he reveals himself also very really as an enemy of God. And now God's child does not want Anabaptistic avoidance, or world-flight. If he understands his calling, then he does not withdraw out of the world. Neither does he merely want to avoid the evil. But he wants to condemn it and do battle for his God in every area of life. Such is the correct line of the truth according to God's Word. And if this principle is maintained, then there is no possibility of playing with and amusing one's self with those who are the enemies of God. Who the composer was of that portion of the report in which the remark about ball-playing appears, I do not know; but whoever of the Committee members penned it, it is certain that he might well first follow his own advice and earnestly pray for a deepening and enrichment of his spiritual life, before he lives on such a footing with the ungodly that he with them and they with him can very well play a friendly game of ball!

"From this principle it also arises that the Committee does not absolutely condemn the theater and

the movie. The actually existing theater and movie, as we know them, — yes, that is wrong. But the presentation of a drama cannot be condemned in itself. We find this to be a dangerous piece of advice to the churches, especially in the time in which we live. For it is not only so that many children of God go along with the world, play with and amuse themselves with the ungodly, but they also haul the world into the church. They not only visit the theater and movie, but they bring the theater and many other things into the sphere of the Church. That is much worse still than theater attendance. Spiritual earnestness of life is missing. Young people can no longer have a banquet or party, or there has to be a drama, which is Christian in name, but in which nevertheless prayer and commandment are mocked. That is reality. And about this the Committee gives no advice. The Committee only concedes that the theater, taken in the abstract, can indeed be good. Well, then, what is more logical than that our young people should draw the conclusion from such advice that we are then called to present Christian dramas and to set up a God-glorifying theater! Of course, that is nonsense; but the nonsense is from the Committee."

It is at this point in his article that Rev. Hoeksema makes the prophecy which I quoted in my first editorial on this subject: "The report of the Committee is ambivalent, irresolute, and therefore very dangerous. And we predict that, if the Synod adopts this report in this form, it absolutely will not help the churches in the battle against world-conformity. It is an attempt to point the drowning Church to a few blades of grass on the bank of the stream, advising her to cling fast to them, rather than pulling her out of the stream and saving her."

That prediction has come true today — in full.

We say again: the seeds of the 1966-1977 stand on the movie and on dancing were present in the 1928 Report and Decisions. In a very real sense, those seeds were the Three Points of Common Grace and their consequent denial of the antithesis.

The battle to stem the tide of worldly amusements in the Christian Reformed Church was hopeless from the outset. It was only a matter of time before the whole church would be overwhelmed by that tide.

Such is the sad history of the amusements-problem in the CRC.

For the church as such, it is too late, far too late, to do anything about it.

For those who ruefully and sorrowfully view the spectacle of this debacle there is but one solution: Back to the principle of the absolute antithesis! But that is only possible when you repudiate the insidious doctrine of common grace!

TRANSLATED TREASURES

A Pamphlet on the Reformation of the Church

3. The fourfold way in which the church of Christ can be understood.

On the ground of the authority of Holy Scripture, the essence of the church must be considered as distinguished under four aspects. One can refer to the church as it is determined in the counsel of God; the church as her life is hidden in Christ; the church as it is realized on earth among men; and finally, the church as it shall finally rejoice before the throne in glory.

Confusion of these four makes clear insight difficult.

Not as if there are four churches. It is the same church which is ordained in God's counsel, which is given to Christ by the Father, which is created on earth, and which one day rejoices in glory. But this fourfold viewpoint must be distinguished because, according as one considers her as in God's counsel, in Christ, in the world, or in the glory of heaven, entirely different relations exist which change the answers to all further questions.

In God's counsel the church of all ages exists with the full number of the elect and it is completed according to a perfect plan from the foundations of the world. In that counsel it is ordained, called, justified, and glorified before the face of the Triune God.

If I speak, on the other hand, of the church in Christ, then that stately, majestic unity is immediately broken because the relation of the patriarchs and prophets under the Old Dispensation to the Mediator is one thing, and the relation of the believers of the New Dispensation to Christ is another. There was a moment in time when Christ became

flesh, a moment when He suffered and died, a moment when He arose; and therefore there was also a time when these wonders of mercy had not yet happened. The forgiveness and justification which are eternal in God's counsel thus enter history with Christ. Ransom becomes a fact for the church when He died. Justification first belonged to the church when He arose. And likewise, the relation of the church which is still upon earth to the Mediator differs from the relation in which the church in heaven stands to Him. While she is here the bride calls to her Bridegroom. There she is already entered into a holy marriage. This difference is so radical that here she still has need of reconciliation, but there no longer. Nevertheless the church is by no means divided by this distinction because the elect of ancient times as well as those who now live upon earth or are already entered into salvation, yes even the seed of the church which must still come forth, are all given to the Son from eternity. It is in Him one body with the Lord. When Christ died all the elect died in Christ, and when He arose all the elect rose with Him. Yes, all the elect, placed with Christ, sit with Him in heaven. "You are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." (Colossians 3:2) That is a holy, unfathomable mystery.

And again these relationships are entirely different if the church is considered by us not as it is included in the counsel of God or even as it is hidden in Christ, but as it is revealed upon earth during this dispensation. Then indeed the unity which the church has in the counsel of God is lost, as well as the holiness which she possesses in Christ; and the church goes through all these different conditions and has to move in all these separate relations which flow forth

from her contact with the world, from her contamination by sin; as well as from those changes and developments which are necessarily inseparable from her life in history.

Finally, this is true also for the church now already in heaven when all these earthly relationships have fallen away and room is made for new relationships of an entirely different kind. The church then is ruled by the distinction in glory between the preliminary glory in which the saved now already rejoice, and the more perfect glory after the resurrection which awaits Christ's return.

He who speaks concerning the church confuses himself and others if he does not continually and in all the discussion ask: in which of these four relationships does he refer to the church?

While treating concerning the reformation of the church, this writing has also to face the same question. And the answer can be no different from that in connection with the reformation of the church. We are not speaking of the church in God's counsel, nor the church as it is in Christ, nor even the church in heaven, because the church in this threefold sense is not deformed and thus cannot be reformed. But it is our purpose to treat only and exclusively of the church of Christ as she is manifested on earth.

4. Why one and the same church on earth is at the same time visible and invisible.

This church of Christ on earth is at the same time visible and invisible. In one and the same way as each man is a partly perceptible and partly imperceptible being without being two creatures, so also this distinction between visible and invisible does not in the least abolish the unity of the essence of the church. It is one and the same church which resides in the spiritual according to her hidden being and in this way reveals herself only to the spiritual eye, but which according to her external form appears visibly to the natural perception of the believers as well as of the world.

According to her spiritual, invisible side, the church is one upon the whole earth; and that whole church on earth is also one with the church which is already in heaven. In like manner, the invisible church is at the same time holy, not only because she is an artistic masterpiece of God which depends entirely upon His divine influences and works, but also because the spiritual defilements as well as the indwelling sin of the believers does not belong to her and, rather, wages a war against her.

According to her perceptible side, on the other hand, the church appears piecemeal and is thus always local; i.e., divided indefinitely. And the national churches exist first because between these local churches a mutual bond is established as the

nature of the church and the national relationships necessarily require.¹ Yet broader bonds of churches can never be anything else than temporal or extremely loose and elastic. Just as these churches (as visible manifestations of the invisible church) are not one, so they are not holy either. This is true because they share the imperfection of all earthly life and are polluted by the might of sin which continually undermines from within and without the well-being of the church.

It is true of the church of Christ on earth and indeed more so in her visible appearance, that the imperious demand for reformation concerns her as long as deformation is present.

Strictly viewed, this demand for reformation is also a continuous one because the church, in the strictest sense, is always deformed. It is never seen in pure and sound form, and always unholy elements are present in it. Yet reformation in this pamphlet is not meant in that absolute sense. There is a deviation from the spiritual essence of the church which lies in the nature of her appearance in the world, and without which the church cannot be manifested among men; and which therefore, as great as the deviation may be from the spiritual ideal, yet with respect to the visible manifestation of the church, is itself normal and continues present in her, at least as long as the mastery of the holy over the unholy and of the truth over the lie remains unharmed and pure. This necessary deviation from the ideal cannot be taken away through any reformation. He who tries this loses the church and founds a sect. In that respect the obligation to reformation does not apply. That becomes Donatism! Perfectionism. He strives for a church which possesses the holiness of angels upon earth! This is a striving in which, alas, beastiality as plunder is always brought in!

The church comes under the obligation of reformation in her visible manifestation only when deviation sinks beneath this normal standard, not only by bringing the unholy into herself, but by tolerating it through silence and failure to punish; or worse yet, through giving to the lie and to that which is unholy power and mastery over the truth and holiness.

On this ground, the reformation of the church can be described as: "the discharge of the obligation which rests upon the church in her visible manifestation, that is on the local churches of Christ; after Christ, both individually and mutually, as frequently as lies and sin throw off the yoke of Christ and go unpunished, to secure a new truth and holiness by her mastery over lies and sin by returning to her original form which is commanded in God's Word."

¹This reference to national churches must be understood in the light of the State Church which existed in the Netherlands at that time.

THE VOICE OF OUR FATHERS

One, Holy, Catholic Church

Prof. Robert D. Decker

"We believe and profess, one catholic or universal Church, which is an holy congregation, of true Christian believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by his blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Ghost. This Church hath been from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end thereof; which is evident from this, that Christ is an eternal King, which, without subjects, cannot be. And this holy Church is preserved or supported by God, against the rage of the whole world; though she sometimes (for a while) appears very small, and in the eyes of men, to be reduced to nothing: as during the perilous reign of Ahab, the Lord reserved unto him seven thousand who had not bowed their knees to Baal. Furthermore, this holy Church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed over the whole world; and yet is joined and united with heart and will, by the power of faith, in one and the same spirit."

Article XXVII, The Belgic Confession

Even the secular world of late has been forced to acknowledge a religious movement in our land which is claiming hundreds of thousands among its adherents. The movement has come to be called Neo (or the New) Evangelicalism. Several "big names" are associated with this movement, such as Billy Graham, Oral Roberts, Bill Bright, Charles Colson, Eldridge Cleaver, Mark Hatfield, *et. al.* This movement can be faulted on several counts. It is thoroughly Arminian in its theology, and much of it is characterized by the excesses of Pentecostalism, to say nothing of dispensationalism and millenarianism which also characterize its beliefs. All of these are serious departures from the truth of the Word of God. But perhaps the most basic error is the New Evangelicalism's disassociation from and indeed in many instances disavowal of the institute of the Church of Jesus Christ. The Church is said to be an archaic relic of the past which has long since served its purpose. What must be stressed is a personal commitment to Christ. One doesn't need the Church. He can pray and study the Bible and serve the Lord apart from the Church. One doesn't need formal worship, the preaching of the Word, and all the rest which goes with the Church. Thus the movement is characterized by an individualism and a subjectivism which at best disparage the Church.

We ought to be profoundly thankful for the voice of our fathers sounded in this article of our *Con-*

fession which so clearly and powerfully sets forth the Bible's teaching concerning the one, holy, catholic church of Jesus Christ. With this article and continuing through Article XXXV our *Confession* treats the subject of Ecclesiology or the doctrine of the Church.

It is essential to understand that the *Confession* considers the Church as an article of faith. The Church is one and catholic, a holy congregation of true Christian believers saved in Jesus Christ and sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit. This Church has been from the beginning of the world and will continue under its eternal King to the end of the world. Preserved and supported by God against the rage of the whole world is this Church. And finally this Church is not bound or limited but spread and dispersed over the whole world and yet is joined with heart and will by the power of faith in a common spirit. All this we believe and profess! That we believe and profess one, holy, catholic Church of Jesus Christ means that we cannot see the Church. Also Christ's Church belongs to those things which eye hath not seen nor ear heard neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive. The Church too belongs to the unseen realities which can only be apprehended by faith. Essential it is to understand this for else we shall be hopelessly confused in our study of the Church. We believe and profess, for example, the oneness or unity of the Church. The Church is one,

holy congregation of true believers in Christ, not many congregations. The Church is united in one Christ, one Spirit, and in one faith. And Christ is not divided, neither are there many Spirits or many faiths. But where do you see that? When one observes the Church in the world all one sees is brokenness and discord. The attempts at unity (the ecumenical movement) of the recent past have only resulted in the multiplication of denominations. In our day small remnants of conservatives have broken from several large, mainline denominations to form new denominations. Nevertheless we believe and profess one Church. That means we believe that God has chosen and saved a Church in Christ and that He preserves that Church and gathers that Church out of every nation by His Word and Spirit and will bring that Church to glory.

Therefore the *Confession* emphasizes the fact that we must not discuss the Church from the point of view of its life and manifestation in the world. That would lead to all kinds of erroneous conclusions. Rather we must discuss the Church as it is described for us in Scripture and, therefore, we must discuss the Church as it is the object of our faith. We cannot see the Church, but we do believe and profess on the basis of the Word of God one, holy, catholic Church.

In harmony with this the *Confession* discusses the Church from its ideal viewpoint, i.e., as it appears in the counsel of God, as it is preserved in the world, and as it will be ultimately perfected in glory. Hence in faith we are prepared to affirm what the Church is, just exactly what it is that we believe and profess. The Church is "one catholic or universal Church, which is a holy congregation of believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed in His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Ghost. . . ." Clearly the point here is that the Church is of God and not of man. Strongly that is stressed by the *Confession* and that is an emphasis much needed in our day. The Church is not in any sense a human institution. It neither has its origin nor does it continue in men. The Church is not a voluntary association of those who have some religious interests or profess to some religious experiences (a la Pentecostalism). The Church is chosen in Jesus Christ before the foundations of world (Eph. 1:3 ff.), saved by God through the cross of Jesus Christ, and sanctified and preserved by God through the Spirit of Christ, and glorified by God in the New Heaven and Earth. Much of the Church's life appears to contradict this. Yet in faith we witness to the victory of God's sovereign grace in Christ. God creates and builds and preserves a Church unto Himself.

That Church is a holy *congregation*, a "gathered" flock which belongs to God by right of purchase. This gathered flock hears the voice of God and responds in

faith. Both the Old and New Testament Scriptures emphasize again and again the pastoral or shepherd-sheep relationship which God sustains to His chosen. Jesus Christ is the good Shepherd to whom the Father gives the sheep. As the good Shepherd He knows His sheep and they know Him and they follow Him. And, as the good Shepherd He lays down His life for the sheep. (John 10) This same truth is implied in the terms used to designate the Church in the Bible. Repeatedly the New Testament calls the Church, "*ecclesia*," the ones called out by God. Christ used this term in connection with Peter's confession. (Matthew 16:18) It is used to designate a group of believers in a given locality. (Acts 5:11; 11:26; I Cor. 11:18; 14:19; 14:28; Gal. 1:2; I Thess. 2:14) In at least one instance it indicates a group of churches within a given area. (Acts 9:31) In a more general sense it denotes the whole body of Christian believers throughout the world. From this point of view the Apostle Paul discusses the doctrine of the Church in First Corinthians and Ephesians. Finally, in its most comprehensive sense the "*ecclesia*" embraces all who are joined to Christ, whether on earth or in heaven. (Eph. 1:22; 3:10, 21; Col. 1:18, 24)

In addition Scripture uses many figurative descriptions which illumine the nature of God's Church. The Church is repeatedly called the body of Christ. (Eph. 1:23; Col. 1:18; I Cor. 12:27) Christ is the Head of that body and the believers (elect) are the members. Out of Christ the members receive all of their life. And Christ rules them. And in their Head, Christ, believers are united and become one. Peter addressed believers as "living stones" which are erected by God unto a "spiritual house." (I Peter 2:5) Several times the Church is spoken of in Old Testament terms as the Jerusalem that is from above, the new Jerusalem, or the heavenly Jerusalem. (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 21:2) All of these figurative descriptions speak of the close association which the Church sustains to the eternal God in Jesus Christ. The Church is God's!

We are therefore constrained to speak of the Church in the light always of the believers' relation to God. From Him alone comes all of our salvation. The Church is the company of the redeemed. Christ is both its Savior and its Head. The only confidence of the Church lies in the eternal and immutable promise of God in Christ.

This means that the chief characteristic of the life of the Church is its *faith*. The Church is saved by grace through faith. That is ever the emphasis of the Bible. The Church lives by faith and perseveres by faith and by faith is brought into glory. From a practical point of view this means that because faith is God's gift and not man's response, we ought not speak of joining the Church but rather of being joined to the Church. Our believing is never the product of

our will but always the response worked in our hearts by the grace of the Holy Spirit of Christ. He plants the seed of regeneration in us, He quickens that seed by the preaching of the Word, He gives us faith and repentance. This in no way does violence to personal responsibility. The Bible everywhere says we must repent and believe. But those who repent and believe must always and do always acknowledge that "it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of his

good pleasure." (Phil. 2:13) Ours is the life of a faith-fellowship with Christ. Without this, none can claim the privilege of church membership. Nor may the Church tolerate within its fellowship those who refuse to live by faith.

The Church, therefore, is the elect in Christ Jesus, the Body of our Lord who are united to Him by faith, and in Him they are God's precious possession.

to be continued

STUDIES IN ISAIAH

The Sign of the Virgin

Rev. Robt. C. Harbach

ISAIAH 7:10-14

1. *The Command to Choose a Sign.* "And further Jehovah spoke to Ahaz, saying, 'Ask for thee a sign from Jehovah thy God; deepen (thy petition), ask, whether to a lofty place or the height.' " (7:10-11, Heb.). "And Jehovah added to speak to Ahaz" (v 10 and 8:5, literally). The word of Isaiah is the word of Jehovah. For where the prophets speak, God speaks. (Cp. 2 Pet. 1:21). The holy man of God speaks as carried along by the Spirit of Jehovah. In doing so, Isaiah himself recedes into the background, that Jehovah may be seen to be the sole Author and speaker of the infallible Word. Isaiah, as a steward of God's message, simply and only reports the words Jehovah had directed him to proclaim.

"Ask it from *thy* God." The words "thy God" are covenant language. Not that Ahaz was actually in the covenant, but he was under the dispensation and administration of the covenant. "Thy God" also reminds him of his covenant office and position as king and his responsibility to acknowledge God as his God. But Ahaz did not do this, for he did not believe (v. 9). However, Isaiah did so own God, as we see in his "my God" (v. 13). Ahaz was commanded by the Lord to ask a sign that he might be convinced that the promise about to be spoken would be fulfilled. Ask a sign, literally, "from with Him," that is, from His mighty power, yet not without the very presence of himself. God not only gives it, but is himself in the sign! A sign is a *mark*, or a reminder of something past, or a portent of something future. Through Isaiah the Moshiah (Messiah, 8:18) speaks, saying,

"Behold, I and the children whom Jehovah hath given Me are for *signs* and wonders in Israel from Jehovah of hosts." That is, we are such by the names God gave us, all with spiritual and happy significance. For example, *Isaiah*, the salvation of Jehovah; *Immanuel*, God with us; *Shear-jashub*, A remnant shall return; and *Mahe-shalal-hashbaz*, Hasten! booty! Hasten, plunder! God has made us types, live, video prophecies. From Heb. 2:13 we know this is Christ, the Moshiah, speaking of Himself and the Church given Him by the Father from eternity.

Ahaz may choose any sign in any place, from the depths to the height of heaven. The prophet has the power to work miracles, to open heaven, or cause the earth to open its mouth down to the pit.

2. *The Refusal in Pretended Piety.* "But said Ahaz, 'I will not ask, and neither will I tempt Jehovah!'" (v. 12). Pretended piety is frequently the "put on" of those who do not believe in the existence of a personal God. Or it is a hypocritical ploy for not obeying God's command. For Ahaz does not intend to serve Jehovah, but do things without disturbance his own way. The king at this point, humanly speaking, lost his chance to become a truly great king with the utterance of these well-sounding but self-hardening words. His insult to God is heightened by the fact that he designated positive response to God's command as tempting Him. Ahaz in his pretence of seeking God makes sly attempts to escape Him.

He pretends to faith in nothing more from God

than His bare Word. God both hates unbelief and delights in faith. It is so great a faith as not to be found even in Israel which relies on God's Word alone, to the exclusion of everything else. Ahaz has the gall to suggest that this is true of himself. But it is not tempting God to do, or say, what He orders. It is tempting God to attempt to do or ask anything His Word will not allow, and thus to go beyond His Word. It is therefore presumption and hypocritical piety, for example, to regard the sacraments as superfluous, making baptism and the Lord's Supper purely mental and spiritual, not at all consisting in physical elements, nor instituted in sacramental actions, so that all we need is "the Word . . . in the heart" (Rom. 10:8). This is mystical, rationalistic Quakerism. The same fallacious reasoning has been and is applied to the preaching of the Word. We hear it said, "We don't need preaching. We have the Bible in our hands, our homes, and in our hearts. We don't need it in church. The real church is in the home. We can be just as good Christians as any without going to church." This is Ahazian pietism, a wicked, false, hypocritical, and pretended sanctimony. The Lord, because of the weakness of our flesh, commands us to ask for and use as directed in His Word, and along with His Word, the signs of water, bread, and wine. Together with the Scripture, the written Word, and the preaching of the gospel, the oral word, these divinely appointed signs are the visible Word of God. It is wicked presumption, in thought, intention, or effect, to separate the holy signs from His holy word. To refuse the means of grace is to despise the grace of God itself, and to reject the whole gospel!

But there is an opposite extreme to avoid. For although Ahaz should have asked for a sign, and although Gideon, one of the great heroes of the faith, did ask, with God's approval, for a sign, we, nevertheless, are not to do as so many in the Roman Catholic Church and in the trend back to Rome in the charismatic movement. For they are always asking innumerable signs from God for the most childish reasons. The Lord has given to His church two kinds of signs: (1) extraordinary, supernatural, and temporary signs, and (2) ordinary, natural, and enduring signs, "until He come," and "even unto the end of the world." We must be satisfied with the signs the Lord has provided and caused to remain with us.

In this connection, C.H. Spurgeon (on II Chron. 16:9) is just too good to omit. He says, "Do not put forth your hand to iniquity. You may, in order to help yourself, do in five minutes what you cannot undo in fifty years; and you may bring upon yourself a lifelong series of trials by one single unbelieving action. Beware of . . . sending for help to Assyria, for these will distress you, but help you not. Cry, 'Lord, increase our faith!' That is what you greatly need in

the trying hour, lest you should like [Ahaz] first of all turn from confidence in God, and then, looking to an arm of flesh, should be tempted to use illegitimate means in order to induce the creature to let you rely upon it."

3. *The Reproof for Contempt of Prophecy.* "And He said, 'Hear ye now, House of David, (it is) a little thing from you to weary out (tire out) men, because ye weary (tire out) also my God!' " (v. 13). "And he said. . . ." It's already been enough for Isaiah to shut his mouth and never say another word in the hearing of Ahaz. But he has been commissioned (chap. 6) to speak, though the ministry of his word be a savor of death unto death. Jehovah had come to His people, the Jews, and commanded them to "believe on Him" (Jn. 6:29). They had responded, "We should believe? without seeing what it's all about? What sign showest Thou, that we may see and believe?" When the Lord gave them many signs to see with the command, "Look unto Me!", they shruggingly replied, "Look? who's looking?" and never bothered to look. Now, because of Ahaz's unbelief, it is not, "Ask *thee* a sign," but "hear *ye*, now, O House of David . . . the Lord himself shall give *you* a sign!" So now the Lord, against their will gives the whole organism of Judah a sign of His choosing.

It was a small thing for Ahaz to tire out and insult the prophet, and in general weary the entire nation, because he was in the habit of a much greater evil, exhausting the patience of God. In "thy God" we have Ahaz's calling, to which he never responded, to own God. But in "my God" Isaiah does own Him with great pleasure. Also with "my God" Ahaz is excluded from "thy God" and any right to any claim on God. With the change from "ask thee" to "hear ye," Ahaz is rebuked as not a true spiritual descendant of David, since he lacks the faith of David. In fact, Ahaz insults and disgraces the house of David, which with men like him, had sadly degenerated. The insult and disgrace lay in contempt for God's revelation. He debased Judah in doing everything he could to turn the nation from God. But then that was not, as you might think, the end. God did not react by wiping them off the map. Nor did He simply turn His back on them to forget them and have nothing more to do with them. Not at all; there is rather

4. *The Conferring of the Sign.* "On that account, the Lord, He himself, will give you a sign — Behold! the virgin: pregnant and bringing forth a son! and she calls His name Immanuel" (v. 14, Heb.). In this chapter is the prophecy of the Messiah about to be born; in chap. 9 He is actually born, and in chap. 11 He is reigning.

But why, at this point, is the Messiah mentioned at all? What is the reason for injecting Him into the

account? The reason is not hard to find. The scope of the passage embraces Israel's deliverance from proximate enemies, and Israel was always looking for Moshiach to bring them ultimate Deliverance and the full realization of His covenant. It is, therefore, perfectly natural, much in order and with good reason that Moshiach is suddenly mentioned here in this connection. This is what the Bible is all about, that God would do as He already has, send the Messiah, the Deliverer, to redeem His people. In the entire Scripture, Christ is no remote subject. He is the very heart of divine revelation, which Ahaz despised.

But though men despise and refuse, yet God will impose His own signs, promises, and prophecies. For there are those (His chosen) who will ask for and receive the entire prophetic package.

"On that account," that Ahaz refused revelation from God, Adonai, He himself will give you a sign — Behold! (indicating a future occurrence, a marvel at that), "the virgin: pregnant and bringing forth a Son!" What does the word *virgin* (*almah*) mean? To go into the "almah" concept we must wait until the next installment of these studies, D.V.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Fast-Moving History

Rev. Mark Hoeksema

Often in the routine of our daily lives we do not notice many things that happen round about us. We are so busy; there are so many places to go, so many things to do; there are church activities, school functions, entertainment opportunities, obligations to friends and relatives, the press of work. Often we are blithely ignorant of what is taking place in the world at large. As long as our own world is not disturbed or upset, we continue on our way with little or no thought of the events of history. If we notice them at all, it is but to pause a moment and then to resume the hectic pace of life.

But every now and then something happens to make us sit up and take notice. An event so startling and so unusual occurs that we cannot help but notice it, especially if we are bombarded with accounts of that event in the newspapers, radio, magazines, and television. Then we come out of our own little world and say in effect, "Something is happening!" But even then, do we really pause to consider what this "something" means? Do we as the people of God relate the events of history to our lives as His saints in the midst of the world? Do we carefully evaluate this event in the light of Scripture, and apply it to ourselves in the context of the end of the ages in which we live? Do we ask what God is saying to us in the events of history?

Just such an event has recently taken place. I refer to the course of history in the Middle East, particularly the prospects for peace between the nations of

Israel and Egypt. A great deal has been written and said about the events of recent weeks, far too much to summarize here. The news magazines have been full of stories and pictures of the historic trip by the president of Egypt, Anwar Sadat, to visit his Israeli counterpart in Jerusalem, Menachem Begin. The events before, during, and after this visit have been headline material for the daily newspapers. Virtually every radio broadcast contains some reference to the Middle East. And television, which itself played a part in bringing together the two leaders, has capitalized on the situation on the nightly news almost *ad nauseam*. All of this media coverage has made it almost impossible for anyone *not* to know what is happening on the stage of history from moment to moment. Also we as the people of God are touched, some more, some less, by these things, for we live also in the world and are part of its history. And when something so completely unanticipated takes place, then we, too, pause and take notice.

But what is it that we notice? Does the full significance of that to which we are witnesses strike us? While a case can surely be made for the necessity of the passage of time for the correct perspective on history, this does not preclude evaluation in the present time. We must have clearly before our minds what has happened in all its significance. With the events themselves we are (or should be) well acquainted. What will come of all of this we do not know. The very suddenness of the current peace

initiative should tell us as much as that. Peace is likely; peace is possible; peace is still remote; peace will include only Israel and Egypt; peace will include all the Arab nations and Israel; peace will come in Cairo or Jerusalem; peace will come in Geneva; or peace will not come at all. The choices are as varied as the situation is complicated. But what does it mean?

Pause and consider with me the impact of Sadat's trip to Israel and its implications and connected events. This peace initiative has broken 30 years of uninterrupted hostility and hatred. The state of Israel was born soon after World War II in the midst of war, bloodshed, and hatred, so much so that it required the superpowers of the world just to carve out Israel in the midst of Arab lands. Think of the fighting in 1956 in the Sinai. Recall the stunning victory of Israel that electrified the world in 1967; in six short days the beleaguered nation all but destroyed its enemies. Think of the 1973 war, with heavy casualties and losses on both sides, a war which nevertheless strengthened Israel's position once more. Think about the implacable hatred, the overblown rhetoric to which we have perhaps become callous, the hardship, death, suffering, sorrow, and loss that have been a part of everyday life for the past 30 years. Think of black and white, of oil and water, of east and west.

And then remember, if you can, the pictures you saw and the descriptions you heard and read about Sadat's mission to Israel. See the two leaders, in obvious friendship, shaking the hand of one another, embracing one another, eating and drinking and talking together. Think of the welcome given by the people of Israel to the leader of their bitterest enemies. See the flags of Egypt flying in Jerusalem. Hear the two leaders praising one another. And then recall that all of this happened virtually overnight. One day the situation was the same as it had been for 30 years. The next day the lines of communication had been opened and peace appeared at last on the horizon of history as a real possibility.

Or think back, as people of God, to your background of Biblical knowledge. If you do, then you will recall that the enmity between Egypt and Israel goes back much further than the past 30 years of war and bloodshed. It begins really at Babel with the division of the nations by the sovereign God. It continues with the oppression of the covenant people in the land of Egypt for many long years. Even Begin himself alluded to this by saying that he wanted to see the pyramids of Egypt. "After all," he said, "we helped to build them." The history continues with the record of God's mighty deliverance of His people from the land of bondage through the ten plagues. The history reaches its climax in Christ, Who with His parents fled to Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod, in order that the prophecy might be fulfilled, "Out of

Egypt have I called my son." Indeed, the history of Egypt and Israel goes back many centuries, and is of central significance for God's plan of redemption.

And then consider again the age-old enemies meeting and greeting one another in the spirit of brotherhood. Watch the amicable embraces, hear the words of praise and congratulation spoken to each other by the two leaders. And then consider what it all means, what it says to us, and what we must say about this.

What must we say? Should we join in the praises of the world for these two men? Should we engage in the adulation and exaltation of man, of his boldness, of his cleverness, of his statesmanship? Should we in the spirit of humanistic brotherhood envision vistas of peace over the Sinai desert? Should we enthrone the central figures in this drama of history upon the pedestal of popular acclaim and reckon them to be world saviors? You know better than that.

Or should we perhaps join with many who see all of this as a fulfillment of the prophecies of Scripture, especially the book of Revelation? Must we take the stand of the pre-millennialists who expect the restoration of the nation of Israel as an entity in the earthly sense of the word as a necessary condition to the second coming of Christ? Do we look for a restoration of the throne of David in Jerusalem, a conversion of the Jews, a coming of Christ followed by a one thousand year reign in the city of David, followed by the salvation of the church? If we have such an idea, as many do today, then surely the events of the past weeks are very reassuring. They confirm the establishment and security of the state of Israel and imply the imminence of the return of our Lord. But from a Biblical perspective this also cannot be our interpretation of these events.

What then do we say? It is impossible here to refute the theory of pre-millennialism, nor is that our purpose. Neither is it our purpose to try to fit these events into the scheme of the book of Revelation and therefore to make some predictions concerning the coming of Christ and the time of His return. But if nothing else, surely we are taught that the events of history are fast-moving. They move so fast that we can hardly keep up with them; almost every day there is a new development, so that the attention of the whole world is focused on two tiny countries. When we interpret this in the light of Scripture, then we see here a sign of the times. We are instructed in the book of Revelation that as the end of all things draws ever closer, the world rushes with increasing speed towards its destruction under the judgment of God, that events take place more and more rapidly, until in the course of development all things are ready for the advent of the Savior the second time. The recent events are a perfect illustration of this truth. They tell us, therefore, that we do indeed live in the end times,

for the signs of the end are all about us, so that anyone who has spiritual eyes can see.

But all of these things tell us also that our God is sovereign. It is clear that the rulers of the world do not really control the course of history, for even world leaders were caught off their guard. But our God is working in history, causing all things to move forward in His own way and His own time, but yet

with such rapidity that we are startled by it all. And in this thought there is comfort for God's people, too. Not just in the knowledge that our sovereign God controls all things, but also in the faith that he directs them in such a way that they must bring the coming of Christ, and bring it soon. In this consciousness we are encouraged to live as citizens of the kingdom which is from above, redeeming the time even unto the end.

GUEST ARTICLE

Christian Liberty - Its Place in Our Churches

Rev. C. Hanko

(This essay was prepared for the Officebearers' Conference held in October, 1977 at Faith Church, Jenison, Mich. It was prepared for publication in the *Standard Bearer* at the request of those present at the conference. It will appear in the *Standard Bearer* in two successive installments.)

I would define Christian liberty as the privilege and the ability to serve God in love with our whole life and being.

This stands diametrically opposed to the theories of Christian liberty advanced in our day. Some years ago, during World War II, I was invited to attend a meeting in the University of Chicago where the Queen of the Netherlands, then Princess Juliana, was present. The spirit of the entire meeting was that God was on the side of Juliana and the Netherlands, and that He would undoubtedly liberate them from the oppression of the Nazis. The meeting was concluded with the singing of Psalm 68, "The Lord shall arise and by his might put all his enemies to flight in fear and consternation."

This seems to be the theory of McIntire and others, who speak of Christian liberty as a purely political matter.

The result of all this nonsense is that freedom of speech, freedom from want or from war, and all the other freedoms are confused with Christian liberty, which is solely a spiritual matter.

For our present discussion, I refer, first of all, to

John 8:36, "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

This freedom of which Christ speaks is twofold. First of all, Christ delivers us from the *curse* of the law. I need only remind you that when our first parents fell into sin, they fell under the curse of God. God had said, "The day that thou eatest thereof (of the forbidden tree), thou shalt surely die." This death included the accursed death of hell. Therefore Christ had to come to bear that curse under God's wrath in torment of hell. He atoned for sins. He paid the debt. He merited for us righteousness and eternal life. Christ also assures us of that righteousness by His Word and Spirit. He forgives our sins, adopts us to sons, makes us heirs of salvation. In that sense the law can never touch us again. We can boldly say, "Law, you cannot touch me, you cannot condemn me: for I am righteous in Christ eternally."

Moreover, Christ delivers us from the *power* of the law, which holds us in the bondage of sin. Sin, as you and I know from experience, is a cruel tyrant who makes us her slave. You know how miserable a drunkard or fornicator can be. He knows that he is destroying himself, his business, his family, and all that he holds precious. At times he suffers bitter remorse, resolves to break his miserable habit; yet he cannot. A power stronger than any magnet draws him irresistibly back into his sin, like a pig returning to his wallowing in the mire. Still worse, sin is an octopus that wraps its tentacles around us to crush us to

death. Sin breeds sin. One evil desire leads to another. Insatiable cravings silence the conscience and lead to deeper passions. Proverbs speaks of the man who returns to his sin as a bull allows itself to be lead to the slaughter. There is the point of no return. No firm resolve, no human will power, nothing that we can do can deliver us from the dominion of sin. God's law stands over us with its powerful testimony, "Cursed is everyone who does not abide in all that is written in the book of the law to do it."

Christ delivers us from that power also. Paul writes, "Sin shall not have dominion, for grace abounds." When a slave is freed, he is generally left to shift for himself. Even though he is given his liberty, he is not taken into the family. God delivers us for the very purpose of bringing us into His family. He even doubly frees us. He gives us a place in His family, and also changes us so completely that we are His sons and daughters, restored in the image of Christ to love and serve Him forever.

Thus our liberty means this: we MAY serve God, we have the right to serve Him. The living God banishes sinners out of His sight; He receives us as His children. We CAN serve God. We are restored in the likeness of Christ to be friend-servant in His house, using our gifts and talents to His glory. We WILL serve God. The psalmist sang, "'tis good to do His will." In the Dutch we used to sing, "Thy loving service has never yet wearied me." From all this follows the MUST. We may, and we also must. There is no conflict here. This *must* is as much the inner impelling of the Spirit as the outer command of God's law. The desire lives in our heart to serve the Lord our God, to hate sin, and to flee from it. This obligation we gladly assume.

Paul admonishes us in Galatians 5:1, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free." We are still by no means perfect. Sin still wars in our members, drawing us back into our former bondage. Satan does all in his power to take our liberty from us, to make the work of grace seem in vain. Therefore Scripture raises a warning finger against the dangers that threaten us. We are walking, as it were, on a narrow bridge without guardrails. On the one side are the murky waters of antinomianism; on the other side are the deep pools of legalism.

Returning once more to Galatians 5:1, we read: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." The Galatian church was in danger of being entangled in a yoke of bondage. The very fact that this is recorded in the Scriptures means that this danger is not foreign to us. The Galatians, maybe unawares, were bringing themselves once more under the bondage of the law. The law in the old dispensation was like a schoolmaster, as Paul tells us

elsewhere. The word "schoolmaster" actually refers to a governor, one to whom the child is entrusted all the day long. This governor awakened the child in the morning, laid out his clothes for him to wear, gave him his breakfast, took him to school, taught him, hovered over him when he played, and finally, having fed him once more, stowed him away for the night.

The law did that to Israel. It told them how to build their houses, what land they might possess, what seed they might use in their fields, what clothing they might wear, and even what they might eat and drink. The law demanded that the Israelite love the Lord his God with his whole being every moment night and day. And if he failed in any given instant, the law declared: "cursed art thou!" Every Friday afternoon, when the Jew washed himself and prepared for the Sabbath, he was forced to exclaim, "How can such a sinner as I am keep Sabbath? I have not loved the Lord my God as I should. I have transgressed all God's commandments, and kept none of them." He could only enter into the Sabbath rest in faith, trusting in the merit of the promised Savior. In anguish mixed with hope, he prayed. "Rise, help and redeem us, Thy mercy we trust."

The lesson of the old dispensation is that also we are saved in no sense by the works of the law. All our tears cannot atone for a single sin. All our good deeds merit nothing in the sight of God. Nor is this necessary. Christ fulfilled the law for us. It would be a denial of the perfect atonement of the cross to try to work out our salvation by our works. We are righteous in our Savior. Our Catechism teaches us that good works are the result, the fruit of our righteousness. Good works are the evidence of God's grace in us. We can, we may, we will, and therefore we must walk in all good works. We must beware that we do not become entangled in a host of do's and don'ts, because that robs us of our Christian liberty. One clear example of this is that while the Old Testament gives numerous civil and ceremonial laws, we do not have all of that any more. In fact, we do not even have a direct command to baptize infants. Nor are we told how often we should go to church on Sunday, or how often we must celebrate the Lord's Supper. Our Christian liberty prevents us from growing lax in these matters. We must beware that we do not bring ourselves back into bondage.

On the other hand, there is also the danger of antinomianism, or libertinism. Paul warns the Galatians (5:13), "For brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion for the flesh." The word "occasion" in this passage means literally "a base of operation." This implies warfare. In warfare the army has a base of operations where the soldiers are trained, the ammunition is stored, or where the missiles are sent out against the enemy.

Just as in World War II England was the base of operations for the attack against Hitler, so our warfare proceeds from a certain base of operations. You get the picture. The devil, the world, and our flesh are always at war with us to destroy us. Because of the sinfulness of our flesh, they use our Christian liberty as the jumping off point, the base of operations, the occasion to lure us into sin. This is done to you and me in many ways. For example, the argument is raised, "Where do you read in the Bible that dancing, movies, or the labor unions are wrong? Where do you read that we must attend church twice on Sunday?" You are placed before the question, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" — in order to convince you that neither you nor the church fathers ever understood the Scriptures. There are those who appeal to their sinful nature. They reason: no one is perfect. Others do it, and get away with it. You cannot blame me, for that's the way I am. Chain smoking, drinking, being a bit dishonest in business, living in hatred against my neighbor, that's my affair and no one need criticize. It is my Christian liberty to do what I want to do. I can go to church once on Sunday, I can watch TV, even the late late show; I can refuse to attend societies, or to give up my hard-earned money for kingdom causes — all on the basis of my Christian liberty. There are even those, like the Jezebel Society in Thyatira (Revelation 2:24), who advocated that one must have tasted the depths of sin to experience

a real conversion, and to know what that is all about. Young people can have their good times, can indulge in the pleasures of sin, in order to settle down and become better fathers and mothers in the church. It is the old theory of, "Let us sin, that grace may abound."

Scripture has something to say about that in I Peter 2:16, where we read, "As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness." I shall return to this passage later, but I want to refer to the "cloak of maliciousness" now. Just two remarks. First, "cloak" is literally a veil, a cover-up. The word "maliciousness" should be translated as "baseness, wickedness." The context speaks of opposing authorities. We refuse to obey those in authority because they are the world, they are wicked men. Peter, let us not forget, wrote this at the time when the ungodly rulers of the Roman Empire were in power and when Christians were persecuted far and wide for their faith. They were warned, even as we are, never to show defiance against the magistrate, or any other authority, no matter whether they are just or unjust, whether good or bad, whether we like them or not. There is only one reason why we can refuse to obey those in authority over us, and that is when they tell us to disobey our God. In that case we answer, "We must obey God rather than men," and take the consequences, even if that means starvation, imprisonment, or death. In a word, Christian freedom is never licentiousness, libertinism, antinomianism.

ALL AROUND US

Strange Editorializing

Rev. G. Van Baren

In the *Banner* of December 16, 1977, a strange editorial appears. In discussing the truth of "Word Became Flesh," editor DeKoster inserts comments about the Sadat-Begin peace efforts. The words are, it seems to me, strangely out of place even in the *Banner*. He writes:

Probably you noticed that, on international television, President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin both affirmed, as casually as you please, that their political behavior roots in their conceptions of the will of God. Granted the theological gulfs between them, and ourselves, we yet rejoice in their frank witness to a religious mandate laid upon themselves. What a healthy note to be sounded around our secularized world!! And how refreshing, especially for us Calvinists, to have a Faith lifted out of the realm of the emotional and into that of the political, where our own convictions and heritage have long been at home.

So it was, I trust, a worthwhile detour from our Advent reflections. Not really much of a detour at all, probably. For we have seen, in this latest act of the on-going Middle East drama, determined efforts by strong, religiously-motivated men to transform their convictions into history, and thus to make word into deed. And this is, after all, the heart of the Advent itself: "And the Word became flesh . . ."

DeKoster acknowledges "theological gulfs between them, and ourselves," but evidently not such a gulf as is found between believer and unbeliever; between godly and ungodly. He commends the "witness to a religious mandate" from a Moslem and a Jew. Because a Moslem and a Jew speak of their "political behavior root(ed) in their conceptions of the will of God," he mentions the "healthy note" heard in our secularized world. He speaks of all this as "refreshing" that "Faith" is lifted out of the realm of the

emotional into that of the political. He even speaks of "strong, religiously-motivated men" who make "word into deed," and he relates that to the wonder of Christ's entrance into our flesh.

How can one ever, and especially one who claims to be Calvinistic, commend the "witness to a religious mandate" — from idolaters? Or, the "refreshing" evidence of "Faith" — from idolaters? It is not faith but unbelief, not the "will of God" but the will of false gods which motivates these men. Is DeKoster glad because of that? Does all of this have any semblance of a tie to the manger of Bethlehem? God forbid.

The incident of II Kings 1:2 came to mind: "And Ahaziah fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber that was in Samaria, and was sick: and he sent messengers, and said unto them, God, inquire of

Baalzebub the god of Ekron whether I shall recover of this disease."

I could almost imagine DeKoster to comment: "What a healthy note to be sounded around our secularized world!! And how refreshing, especially for us Calvinists, to have a Faith lifted out of the realm of the emotional and into that of the medical, where our own convictions and heritage have long been at home."

But what did God say? "Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to inquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron?" I do not know what the result of the Sadat-Begin exchange will be. I do know that God can not be pleased when those who deny Him and His Son Jesus Christ nevertheless speak of a "religious mandate" that comes from their gods.

First Tango at Calvin

Some interesting and pointed comments are made in the *Banner* of December 9, 1977 by Harry R. Boer concerning the proposals of the Board of Trustees on "social dancing in a Christian manner" at Calvin College. Though the article drips with sarcasm, a good point is made. Dr. Boer gives no evidence of opposition to dancing or movie attendance itself — only to the manner in which these have been introduced into the C.R.C. Listen to what he has to say:

... Such an event took place at the recent May meeting of the Board of Trustees of Calvin College and Seminary. Report of the meeting appeared in *The Banner* of July 29. The first half of it is humdrum, the second affected, nauseant, but for all that instructive. It begins with "The area of concern for student life most discussed and debated at this session of the Board was the matter of social dancing."

Shades of 1928 these forty-nine years ago! In that fateful year the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church, with great righteousness and the release of full ecclesiastical sanctions, promulgated the blessed or the notorious, depending on your bent, Report on Worldly Amusements. . . .

Even so, not in vain did the Synod "instruct" consistories to "inquire" of those wanting to make profession of faith "as to their stand and conduct in the matter of worldly amusements." Consistories were further "reminded" that "careful attention" should be paid to this matter in making nominations for office-bearers, and it "suggested" that "Boards of Christian Schools, City missions, etc., heed the same matter in their appointments." . . .

The C.R.C. fought a losing battle against "worldly amusements" from the beginning. She caved in first on the movies. This happened in two stages. When she could no longer resist the pressure to deal with the disparity between church law and church members'

practice, the Synod of 1951 judged that "although Synod (of 1928) did not pass judgment as to whether or not theater attendance, card playing, and dancing are always sinful in themselves it did urgently warn, in no uncertain terms against theater attendance, card playing and dancing, and did not condone participation in them." Having placed this jewel of equivocation on the record, along with half a dozen other resolutions all of which stopped short of condemning theater, card and dance, the synod, "grateful for the wonderful unanimity with which these decisions were reached . . . sings the doxology."

From this point on, a correct reading of the message that was written between the lines led to the not unwarranted conclusion that you could dance where you wished, go to movies as you pleased, and play cards with the shades up so long as you were satisfied that you were not doing something that was "sinful in itself." This did not happen in a month or a year. But it happened so inexorably that in 1966 the Synod of the C.R.C., without a by-your-leave, adopted an extensive report on "the Film Arts." . . .

And that was that. The portals of hell had imperceptibly become the gate of heaven.

Now, twenty-six years after the basic destruction of 1928 and eleven years after the ultimate *coup de grace* of its most salient concern, our wise and courageous Board of Trustees, having judged the time to be felicitous, has undertaken to speak in different accents and modulations about dancing than we have been wont to hear. . . .

At any rate, it has:

a. Instructed Calvin's Art, Music, Drama, and Physical Education Departments to provide leadership and direction "in using the social dance in a Christian way."

b. Warned against a tendency to adopt uncritically "a dance style that ignores the richer dimensions of the social dance."

c. Exhorted the Calvin community to work positively and constructively "to fulfill the cultural mandate."

What must we think of this conversion and dedicated commitment on the part of the board to the cultural values of the social dance? How must we assess its unqualified blessing on a form of recreation that members' fathers unqualifiedly condemned? . . .

The following observations seem to me to be called for on the surface of things:

1. One would be less disposed to consider these pious declarations as so much insincere eyewash if there were some show of repentance for all the hypocrisy in which the Christian Reformed Church involved its membership in the twenties, thirties, forties and well into the fifties by its attitudes to "worldly amusements." Of this there is not a word. . . .

2. The board's action must not surprise us. The Christian Reformed Church has long been and is not ceasing to be a thoroughly politicized ecclesiastical community. Its synodical and board decisions on sensitive issues are, more often than we like to think, not prophetic declarations for our time but rather careful calculations of what the current tolerances will bear or a new ground swell demands. . . .

3. There is little reason to doubt that the church whose synods fathered the equivocation of 1951 and the syrupy Film Arts theology of 1966 will in 1978 place her benediction on the Trustees' application of 1966 principles to this facet of the newly found cultural mandate in the area of 1928's "familiar trio." It may even be found appropriate to climax the long, perplexing journey from 1928 to 1978 with a ringing synodical doxology.

Perhaps the C.R.C. should express a word of deep

thanks and appreciation to Dr. H. Boer for his striking analysis of events re "worldly amusements" in the C.R.C. He certainly has a point. Have there been none in the past who were placed under censure, even excommunicated, because of their seeking of the "familiar trio"? Have not some in the past been suspended and expelled from Calvin College in connection with their enjoyment of this "familiar trio"? Yet now the same can be done in a Christian manner in fulfillment of "the cultural mandate"? It certainly does not take a great deal of intelligence to recognize the inconsistency. If now the C.R.C. is fulfilling its "Cultural mandate" in concentrating on the movie and the dance, then in the past it sinned terribly by condemning this very thing, yea, ecclesiastically punishing those who were fulfilling their "cultural mandate." Boer is correct: let the C.R.C. at least be "man" enough to stand up and confess, "We have grossly sinned in the past in condemning what God approves and punishing saints of His who were, after all, walking in great godliness." Let them in all honesty before God remove what must surely be a terrible blot on their past. Let them address all those whom formerly they condemned, and let them confess that they sinned against God and them. Surely before God they can not continue this radical shift in direction without some sort of confession.

What Boer does ignore is that the decision on the "Film Arts" and indirectly that on the "social dance in a Christian manner" was to a large extent based upon the idea of "Common Grace." That goes back to 1924. Perhaps the inconsistency was between 1924 and 1928 — and now that inconsistency has been removed.

FROM HOLY WRIT

Exposition of the Book of Galatians

THAT INTERESTING QUESTION OF THE "FOUR HUNDRED THIRTY YEARS" (Galatians 3:17) *Rev. G. Lubbers*

Although we have touched upon this question already in our exposition of verse 17, we believe that the matter calls for a little discussion and analysis in depth. This does not mean that it will affect the argument of Paul one iota. Yet, we ought to give a little reply to those who constantly stand on the alert to try to find some flaw in the Sacred Scriptures, inspired by God. Such ought to have their mouth stopped. Their insidious question, "Are there mis-

takes in the Bible?" ought to be met with a little solid argumentation and refutation. By the critics of the Bible and all unbelievers, it is pointed out that Paul here made a rather serious error in his computation of history, and in his quoting of the Law and the Prophets.

Let us try to see whether Paul was really in error in Galatians 3:17. Is the Bible here inerrant or not? Do

we really have here a serious error in Biblical chronology?

Paul writes that the Law became "four hundred and thirty years" after the *promises* (plural) were spoken to Abraham. This means that Paul is not thinking of any definite, single occasion in which God spoke to Abraham over a period of some thirty or forty years. There were many of these "promises," which ended in the great confirmation of the promise by oath on Mt. Moriah. (Hebrews 6:10, 11) The Hebrew writer speaks of "those who through faith and patience inherited the promises." This includes Isaac and Jacob also. God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (Hebrews 11:9) They were heirs of the same promise. And Hebrews 6:17 says that the oath was for "the heirs of the promise." When Paul, therefore, writes that the "promises" came to Abraham four hundred and thirty years, this is a general statement, it is of wide historical reference in the lives of the patriarchs and their patriarchal pilgrimage. That time of the pilgrimage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lasted till the Lord himself allowed Jacob to go down into Egypt. At Beersheba the LORD appeared to Jacob: "I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation." (Gen. 46:3) This was the *terminus ad quem*, the parting of Jacob from the days of the Promises, to that of the fulfilment. It was the fulfilment of Gen. 15:13. Here God placed an historical period back of His own work of the patriarchal dwelling in the land of promise. The hour on God's clock was striking the ushering in of a new era in the coming of the kingdom of God, and the fulfilment of the promises. That period was approximately two hundred thirty two years, when the promises *are* given.

Now Moses writes something very great and significant in Exodus 12:40, 41; here is recorded for the church and all their posterity the solemn and great work of God's fulfilling the promise to Abraham, in bringing Israel forth out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage. And then we read the solemn and sure words of the inspired writer, "Now the sojourning of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the house of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. It is a night to be much observed of all the children of Israel in their generations." Truly, this is a very great and memorable occasion. It was remembered in each Passover feast. (Exodus 12:14-17)

Now it is a fact that the Jewish translators of the Old Testament Scriptures, which translation is called *The Septuagint*, had the brazen courage to interpolate into the text the phrase, "and in the land of Canaan"

(*kaix en gee Chanaan*). These were Alexandrian Jews, after the time of Alexander the great, and some two hundred years before Christ. They lived centuries after Moses. By what right did they insert this into the text? Did they feel that Moses did not know what he was writing so emphatically? Or was it that they did not understand the very relationship of the Exodus to all the promises? Did they count the years in the account of the genealogies given in the Bible concerning the people who lived in this period of the Old Testament, and then make their own computations? And ergo: the period of four hundred thirty years must include the time of Israel's living in Canaan too. The trouble is that Israel as "a nation" did not live in Canaan. They were formed into a nation in Egypt. (Gen. 46:3)

And, to compound the folly, various "interpreters" of Galatians very learnedly assert that Paul was quoting the *Septuagint* here. Fact is, that Paul is not quoting at all. He is asserting a fact from the record in Exodus 12:14-17, in which Moses wrote in pure Hebrew that it was four hundred and thirty years.

It is of interest, no doubt, to all who are further interested in this matter of the accuracy of the Scriptures here in Galatians 3:17, to notice what Keil and Delitzsch write in the *Commentary On The Pentateuch*, Vol. II, Pages 30, 31. These learned and highly regarded scholars of the Bible show rather conclusively that we must believe the text in Exodus 12:14-17 where we are instructed that Israel dwelt in Egypt four hundred and thirty years. We can summarize their arguments as follows:

a. The text in the Hebrew is authentic. It stands by good critical standards as the text written by Moses in Hebrew. And that is really the keystone in the entire argument. Moses definitely states this. And it undergirds the institution of the Passover to be *observed* in the generations.

b. The number (430) four hundred thirty years is in harmony with the round number employed in prophetic style in Genesis 15:13, where God speaks of the four hundred years, after which the sin of the Amorite will be full.

c. The interpolation of the Jewish translators is not based on the text, nor is it corroborated by the computation of the years given in genealogies. Fact is, that in these chronologies and genealogies there are no continuing links. The Bible does not give us mere family-tree records, but gives us the development of the kingdom and priesthood of God in Israel. The tracing of genealogies is a vain endeavor. It has no spiritual value. (I Tim. 1:4; 4:7)

d. To corroborate this Keil and Delitzsch write the following noteworthy arguments from the Old Testament Scriptures. We quote the following:

"For example, the fact that there were more than the four generations mentioned in Chapter 6: 16 sqq. between Levi and Moses, is placed beyond all doubt, not only by what has been adduced at Chapter 6:18-20, but by a comparison of other genealogies also. Thus, in Num. 26:29 sqq. 27:1, Josh. 17:3, we find six generations from Joseph to Zelophehad; in Ruth 4:14 sqq., I Chron. 2:5, 6, there are also six from Judah to Nahshon, the tribe prince in the time of Moses; in I Chron. 2:18 there are seven from Judah to Bezaleel, the builder of the tabernacle; in I Chron. 7:20 sqq. nine or ten are given from Joseph to Joshua. This last genealogy shows most clearly the impossibility of the view founded upon the Alexandrian version, that the sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt lasted only 215 years, for ten generations, reckoned at 40 years each, harmonize very well with the 430 years, but certainly not with 215." (Page 30, of work cited.)

Thus we see that the Bible here is not in error, and Paul need not have quoted the Septuagint when he refers to the period from the time of the promises, which concluded when Jacob is given revelation at Beersheba, ere he goes down into Egypt. Had Paul written that the exact time was 1430 years he would have been in error. Had he written that the exact time from the *days* of Abraham to the giving of the law was 430 years he would have been in error. But now the time was 430 years. Only it was more. And so the argument stands. The mere citing of this figure gives the distance from the "promises" to the "law-giving" to show that the latter could not remove the former. It was a later and subsequent act of the Lord by many years. The promises stand!

THE IRREPRESSIBLE QUESTION: WHY THEN THE LAW? (Galatians 3:19)

With sure hand, as a master interpreter of the Scriptures, Paul leads us deeper into the profound implications of the law-giving in relationship to the promises. If the law could not change the "promises" ratified by God in Christ to Abraham, then why give the law on Sinai's heights through Moses, "the law-giver." (John 1:17) This question is not only of interest, but it is of the utmost importance to ask and

to answer. The answer is forthcoming. It is crystal clear: "It is added for the transgressions." Yes, the law was "added"; it never is part and parcel of the "promises." It is of a wholly different character and with an entirely other *pedagogical purpose* of God. It was divine pedagogy. It was to glorify grace in the Cross.

But we are anticipating on the text. The term "added to the" promise is of interest to us. In the Greek it is "*prosetethee*." It means: place, give next to. Sinai was placed next to the promises given to the fathers, particularly to Abraham, the father of all believers. Since it was "added" in such a way that it could not change the promises and their ratified character in Christ, they could disappear when the time came that the promises would be fulfilled in Christ, the Seed.

What was the "function" of this law which was added? Was it to make the people better, or to provide a way to salvation? This, as Paul teaches in Gal. 3:10 is impossible. The law puts each one under curse, ratified curse of Mt. Ebal. What then? It was "because of transgression." This means that the law simply makes greater and more pronounced sinners of men. That is the clear teaching in Rom. 4:15, "Because the law worketh wrath" and "where no law is, there is *no transgression*." And in Rom. 5:20 we read, "Moreover the law entered (came in beside) that the offense might abound." Paul teaches in Rom. 7:11, "For sin taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me." I Cor. 15: of the law as the "strength of sin." It is the very dynamo of sin in us, this law which was added for the transgressions' sake. The law, "written on tables of stone, killeth." (II Cor. 6) That is the "letter" and it is not the "Spirit," as the fulfilment of the promise of God.

The apostle writes in the text in the plural: "the transgressions." He has in mind all the transgressions of Israel under the law, as this law brought out the very sinfulness of sin in God's people. The term used here in the Greek is "*parabasis*." This means to overstep, neglect, violate, transgress. It points toward sin which is excessive, enormous. That is the implication of the teaching of Paul in Rom. 4:15. It is sin intensified in all its enormity!

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Consistory of the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church hereby expresses its sincere sympathy to two of its members, Mr. Gerrit Holstege and Mr. Arnold Haveman, in the loss of their brother and brother-in-law, MR. BEN HOLSTEGE.

May the God of all grace be their only comfort in their bereavement.

Rev. G. Van Baren, Pres.
Harry Zwak, Clerk.



Book Reviews

EERDMAN'S HANDBOOK TO THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY, Tim Dowley, Organizing editor; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977; 656 pp., \$19.95. (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko)

I can best describe this book by quoting from the blurb on the paper jacket.

(This book) presents a comprehensive, colorful, reliable account of this exciting story (of the Christian Church). The bestselling *Eerdmans Handbook to the Bible* (to which this is a companion volume, H.H.) has opened up the Bible in a new way for many people. This new Handbook, similar in design and format, opens up the dramatic events which have helped make the Christian faith what it is today.

The eight major sections introduce the history of Christianity, period-by-period, from its earliest days to the late twentieth century. Specially commissioned main chapters by expert historians form the framework within which many shorter sections appear: on people, movements, and subjects of particular interest. Over 450 photographs, many in full color, give the feel of each period. And useful maps, diagrams, and charts help the reader to understand and interpret the story, giving a bird's-eye view of events.

The emphasis of the Handbook is on growth and vitality rather than on institutions, giving a broad understanding of each historical period, and then spotlighting key Christian movements and outstanding personalities of the era.

(The book) has been written by an international team of 70 contributors drawn from 10 countries. They write both as professional historians and as committed Christians eager to introduce every reader to the richness of the heritage they have themselves discovered.

We highly recommend this book. It has value for every home and can easily be consulted for information on the events and persons of Church History. It has, however, particular value for our schools. Each school should have a copy in its library. It can easily be used on the Junior High level.

Its weakness is, in this reviewer's opinion, that it is insufficiently Biblically-oriented. By this I mean that the events, movements, and works of God in the history of the Church are insufficiently discussed in the light of Scripture. Nevertheless, as a sourcebook for much historical material, it is of great value. Buy it and use it. Money spent on good books never goes to waste.

UNION STRIKE, UNGODLY AND UNCHRISTIAN, by F. Rottier; Published by Ecclesiastical Press, Portland, Oregon; 133 pp., \$2.95 (paper). (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko.)

This severe indictment of the entire labor movement, including the C.L.A., is written by one who played a role in labor activities for a number of years. He was a leader in the C.L.A. in Lansing, Illinois, but became a minister in his mid-forties and now labors independently of any denomination. His criticism of the union is particularly centered in the strike, which is also condoned by the C.L.A., but his book ranges over a number of subjects of an economic and political nature. His criticisms of the union are often on target; but his book is weakened by a serious lack of organization and by repeated references to visions, dreams, and appearances of angels which gave him his "insights." How much better it would have been if the book were a carefully organized discussion of the teaching of Scripture on these points.

SOUTHWEST PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCH

Southwest Protestant Reformed Church of Wyoming, Michigan would like to borrow up to \$100,000.00 to finance the construction of their Phase I building project. Those interested in loaning \$1,000.00 or more for periods of five years, ten years or fifteen years at interest rates of 7%, 7½% and 8% respectively are requested to contact Mr. John Vander Woude, 7085 Sunset Dr., Jenison, Michigan, 49428 (Phone 616-457-0553) for particulars.

News From Our Churches

December 14, 1977

Report of Classis West

On December 13, Classis West held a special meeting in Randolph, Wisconsin, to examine Mr. Kenneth Koole, who had recently accepted the call to the Randolph Protestant Reformed Church. Rev. G. Lanting presided over this meeting of Classis.

The examination was conducted by ten ministers and ten elders of Classis West, in the presence of three delegates of Synod from Classis East: Rev. C. Hanko, Rev. G. Van Baren, and Rev. R. Van Overloop. In keeping with Article 4 of the Church Order, Classis examined Mr. Koole in Dogmatics; Practical qualifications; Knowledge of Scripture; Knowledge of the confessions; and Controversy. Mr. Koole also preached a full sermon before Classis on Proverbs 3:5, 6: "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

With the concurrence of the synodical delegates from Classis East, Classis unanimously approved the examination and advised Randolph to proceed with Mr. Koole's ordination.

After he was informed of Classis' decision and congratulated by the president, Mr. Koole heard the Formula of Subscription read and signed it in the presence of Classis. Classis then sang the doxology, "May the grace of Christ the Savior." Rev. Kortering led Classis in a prayer of thanksgiving, after which the delegates and visitors congratulated the candidate and his wife individually.

The Classis thanks God for this gift of a pastor for His Church.

Prior to adjournment, early Tuesday evening, Rev. Lanting expressed to Rev. Van Overloop, soon to leave for New Zealand, that the Classis prays for God's blessing upon him, his family, and his work in New Zealand.

Since the special Classis was held in Randolph, the March 1, 1978 meeting of Classis will be held in South Holland, Illinois, the Lord willing.

Rev. David Engelsma, Stated Clerk
Classis West

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The Consistory of Randolph had arranged that Mr. Koole be ordained in a special worship service of the Randolph congregation, the evening of December 13. The delegates of Classis and the synodical delegates from the East attended as a body.

Rev. J. Kortering, a former pastor of Mr. Koole, led the congregation in the opening parts of the service and in the congregational prayer. The counselor of Randolph, Rev. D. Engelsma, preached the sermon — "Preach the Word," from II Timothy 4:1-4. Rev. G. Lubbers, also a former pastor of the ordinand, read the form of ordination and ordained Mr. Koole. Rev. G. Lanting, the young man's uncle, exhorted the ordained minister and the congregation.

This is always a moving service, particularly the young man's answer to the questions concerning his calling, his belief of the Word, and his faithfulness in his office, "Yes, truly, with all my heart;" the laying on of hands by several ministers; and the conclusion of the service by the Rev. Koole's pronouncing the benediction upon the congregation.

As the prayer in the form of ordination expresses, may God qualify Rev. Koole by the Holy Spirit; may the Randolph congregation becomingly deport themselves towards their minister; and may we all bless our merciful Father for providing the Church with a faithful minister.

D.E.

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Rev. David Engelsma of South Holland, Illinois, declined the call extended to him by First Church in Grand Rapids to be their pastor.