

The **STANDARD BEARER**

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

... We see at the same time what a start God's Son enjoyed, what a cradle received Him. Such was His manner of birth, for He had put on our flesh to the end that He might empty Himself for our sake. So He was pushed into a stable and lodged in a manger, denied a place of hospitality among men, that heaven may lie open to us, not only as a place in which to lodge, but as an eternal home-land and inheritance, and that angels should receive us to dwell with Him.

John Calvin

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MEDITATION

The Shepherd's Visit To Bethlehem

Rev. H. Veldman

"Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger."

Luke 2:15-16

How wonderful, generally speaking, is the birth of Jesus Christ, our Lord! It was announced throughout the ages, and then by an angel out of heaven. Besides,

the birth itself is wonderful. Jesus is Immanuel, born of a virgin. How wonderful, too, are all the circumstances accompanying this birth. The birth is

announced, first by Gabriel and then presently by an entire heavenly host, singing the most wonderful, harmonious song ever heard upon the earth. But, this birth announcement by Gabriel and this song by the angelic chorus are brought unto a group of shepherds, of all people, and that in the dead of night, not in Jerusalem, but in the silent and lonely fields of Ephratah. And, is it not also wonderful that this Babe Immanuel should be lying in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes?

Wonderful is also the incident to which we now call attention. It is wonderful that these shepherds ever went to Bethlehem. It is wonderful that they saw what they saw. It is wonderful that they, returning, glorified God. And it is wonderful if we, today, are also able to go to Bethlehem.

AMAZING

Jesus, the Hope of Israel, born in Bethlehem!

Bethlehem, the city of David, was the "house of bread." This is the literal meaning of Bethlehem. Indeed, Bethlehem was to become *the* House of Bread, the place where the Bread from heaven would see the light of day, where He would be born, Jesus Who declared of Himself that He is the Bread of Life.

Throughout the ages believing Israel had longed and prayed, had waited, impatiently and straining at the leash, had looked forward to the coming of this Jesus, Saviour, their mighty Messiah, Who would be born of the seed of David, ascend His throne, lead His people to new and unprecedented heights of glory and power and salvation. Yes, unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour Who is Christ, the Lord. Could it be that these shepherds were discussing this wonderful prophecy of the Lord this very night while they were watching their sheep by night?

Is it not an amazing thing that these shepherds ever went to Bethlehem, yea, that they came with haste?

On the one hand, what did they see? It is true that "unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, Who is Christ the Lord."

But, please notice His sign, the sign of His birth: ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. The King of kings and the Lord of lords lying in a manger, in abject, utter poverty! And, mind you, this is *His* sign, peculiarly fitting to Him! If only this manger and these swaddling clothes were a temporary "helpout," because Mary and Joseph had come too late into the city of David, and that they would soon be replaced by earthly royal splendour and glory, one could overlook this rather inauspicious entrance of Israel's King and Hope into the world. But this is His sign, God's sign; thus it is and thus it

ever will be; in the midst of the world we must always expect Mary's Great Son as lying in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes.

How amazing that these shepherds ever went to Bethlehem! To see this! To be sure, many today love to speak of this babe as lying in a manger. Many anthems of praise are sung in His honour. But, of course, according to the world this babe did not remain there. Soon he attained unto a place of honour and power in the midst of the world. One may compare him to Abraham Lincoln in this respect; he, too, had a lowly birth. However, we must remember that these signs belong to Him, characterize Him — remove them, and you have no Saviour left. And presently the world will also take them away from Him, when they kill Him upon the cross of Calvary. But, who would care to visit such a king? Is this Israel's Hope? Would we not expect these shepherds to become indignant and furiously angry to be told of such a birth in the city of David?

But there is more. These shepherds left their flocks behind them. These sheep constituted their living, their all. They simply left them behind them. They did not leave them in the care of a caretaker. They simply left them, in the midst of the night, exposed to all the dangers of the night. And, they were in a tremendous hurry. This is emphasized in the text. We read, on the one hand: let us go *even now* unto Bethlehem, or: let us go unto Bethlehem right now, at once. There was no time to lose. And, on the other hand: they came with haste. How amazing is this visit of the shepherds!

Does this also characterize us? We understand what it means for us to go to Bethlehem. It means that we go spiritually, that we contemplate and meditate upon this thing which is come to pass. And we must hasten to Bethlehem, proceed in great haste. It must constitute the one great desire and longing of our heart. We must fill our hearts and minds with that mystery of godliness, God in the flesh, Immanuel, that Jehovah God has come into our flesh and blood.

How difficult this going to Bethlehem is for us! how difficult it is today to go to Bethlehem, really, in the midst of all the bustle and earthliness of our modern day celebration of the day of Christ's birth! Indeed, to celebrate this day, truly, we must cut through so many things, to see this thing that has come to pass, the Christ of God in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

GLORIOUS

"Let us see this thing which is come to pass." We do not read: "Let us see this baby which has just been born," but: "Let us see this word which has come to pass." The shepherds, of course, refer to the

word of the angel, Gabriel, in the verses 10-12. This word of the angel, this divine announcement of the birth of Jesus Christ, the Lord, this amazing thing that God has fulfilled His promise of the ages, the birth of Israel's Hope, this thing has happened. And now, let us go at once and see it.

Indeed, let us not fail to understand these signs. They are essential. They belong with this Child. God willed them. First, they are prophetic of this Babe's position in the midst of the world. All He has is a manger and the swaddling clothes. This, of course, was not caused Him willfully by the world. The world was unaware of His coming. God willed this sign, this sign of poverty. In fact, presently, at the cross, the world will even attempt to take this manger and these swaddling clothes from Him, will hate Him and kill Him. Secondly, Christ is born in this abject poverty because of you and me. He became poor in order that we, being poor, might become rich. He was born, in abject poverty, as symbolic of the extreme poverty and misery which characterize us. And He was born without worldly or earthy glory and splendour because His kingdom is not of this world, is not earthly but heavenly.

How glorious, then, is our visit to Bethlehem!

Indeed, we must not fail to interpret these signs correctly, and appropriate and apply them to ourselves. They do not speak to us of the greatness and ingenuity of man, as, for example, of a Lincoln, who by sheer courage and will power was able to work his way from a log cabin to the White House. The manger and swaddling clothes tell us that His kingdom is not of this world. They tell us that, as the world was not ready to receive Him then (unwittingly), so, spiritually, it can never receive Him. We are never ready for Him, never have a place for Him. Indeed, our hearts are closed to Him. He is always wholly unwanted by us.

However, it is exactly for this reason that this scene in Bethlehem is so glorious! He is Saviour, is He not? Are we amazed that we have no room for Him in our hearts? But, is He not Jesus, the Saviour? And this means that we must be saved, that we are lost, full of sin and darkness. Besides, let us look at these signs and rejoice! They speak to us of His rejection by the world, that the world always hates Him and will presently kill Him. But, is not that way, the way of His being killed upon the cross, exactly the way whereby He saves us from sin and guilt and death? Yes, He comes exactly as you would expect the Christ of God to come. Rejected by the world, He comes as the Son of God in our flesh and blood, struggles through the enmity of the world and of the wrath of God into the everlasting glory of the Kingdom of Heaven, makes room within our hearts where there was no room, that it may be known that

He is the Saviour and He alone.

POSSIBLE

The shepherds went to Bethlehem to see this wonder of God. How was this possible for them?

This was possible, first of all, by divine revelation. The Lord, we read, made it known unto them. This refers to the message of the angel. God revealed to them, not only that Christ had been born, but also that He was lying in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes. God revealed to them that these were signs of His birth. And, secondly, before this message was conveyed to them by Gabriel, another thing has already occurred. The glory of the Lord had shined round about them, and they had been sore afraid. They had been convicted of their sin in the presence of the glory of the Lord. To them, afraid and stricken, the message of the Christ Child, lying in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes, had been conveyed.

Do we understand?

Shall we go to Bethlehem? Shall we look at this wonder of salvation which the Lord has wrought? Shall we see these signs, be convicted anew of our sin and misery, recognize in Him our blessed Saviour and Lord, rejoice in His salvation?

However, this glory of the Lord must shine round about us and we must be afraid! We must see our sin and misery because the Glory of the Lord has shined all around us, and in us by His almighty grace. And if we then are stricken in our consciousness, realize our hopelessness, we will long for Bethlehem and be in great haste to see this Babe and fill our hearts with His salvation.

One more thing. The shepherds left their sheep behind them. Yes, if we would go to Bethlehem, really wish to see this Child, really rejoice in His salvation, we must leave everything behind us. Look at the Child, have nothing with you except your own sin and guilt. And we will rejoice, and return even as the shepherds returned, glorifying God and praising Him for the salvation He has wrought.

**AN IDEAL
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BEARER**

EDITORIALS

Prof. H.C. Hoeksema

James Daane on Decretal Theology -- Dead Wrong!

It is rather ironic, I think, that in the current discussion of reprobation in the Christian Reformed Church the late Herman Hoeksema and his view of predestination functions as a kind of catalyst. After all, for by far the greater part of his career Herman Hoeksema was not Christian Reformed. And the reason why he was not Christian Reformed was certainly closely connected with his view of sovereign predestination, and more specifically with his view of sovereign reprobation. Yet in the current discussion of reprobation in connection with the Boer Gravamen against the Canons of Dordrecht, both from the left and from the right there is reaction against Hoeksema's view in the form of an attempt on the part of both to put distance between their views and that of Hoeksema. From the left – and we have grown to expect this of him – this effort is made by Dr. James Daane. But now also from the right we observe a similar phenomenon: while they seem to wish to hold on to a kind of reprobation, they do not want those on the left to impute to them Hoeksema's view of predestination. A recent article by Dr. Fred Klooster in *The Banner* is an example of this (see below).

Strange, is it not?

And yet it is not so strange after all. We saw something of the same phenomenon during the 1960s in the so-called Dekker Case, concerning limited atonement versus universal atonement and particular love versus universal love. Both in writing and in the synodical debate, as I recall, there was repeated reference to 1924 and the debate concerning common grace and the well-meant offer of salvation. From the left again it was recognized that Herman Hoeksema represented consistently the Reformed view, and the left really completely disavowed particular love, particular atonement, and – already then – sovereign reprobation. But it was almost amusing how from the right men strove, while they were struggling somehow to maintain limited atonement, to put distance between themselves and

Hoeksema and to maintain the First Point of 1924. Now again, although there has not been much direct reference to the common grace controversy, there is repeated reference to Herman Hoeksema's (alleged) views. All of this serves to point up again the crucial importance of 1924 and its doctrinal deliverances.

Meanwhile, though there is considerable paper and ink expended in a discussion of the doctrine of reprobation, thus far no one has addressed the crucial subject of Harry Boer's complaint against the Canons, the subject of the Scriptural proof for reprobation and the exegesis of the texts cited by the Canons.

In two successive issues of *The Banner* (Nov. 9, pp. 9, 10; Nov. 16, pp. 16, 17) Dr. Daane presents some reflections on an earlier article by the Rev. Jelle Tuininga on "Boer and Reprobation." As usual, Daane cannot refrain from referring to the views of Herman Hoeksema. However – also as usual – Dr. Daane misrepresents the views of Herman Hoeksema and presents instead a caricature. This is not only a very serious wrong on Daane's part, but it also very seriously weakens his case against so-called decretal theology. Daane sets up straw men and then proceeds to take potshots at them, meanwhile imagining that he is shooting down true, Reformed, decretal theology. In so doing, Dr. Daane misleads many readers who accept as gospel truth what he writes about Hoeksema and other Reformed theologians without checking up on Daane's accuracy. I have written about this before, both in these columns and in our *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*. This is a very serious breach of ethics on Daane's part, and I admonish him that he ought to repent of this!

Daane claims to have an aversion for decretal theology "because 'decretal theology' is not the innocent term many people think it is. It does not merely indicate a theology that acknowledges and has room for God's decree. It refers to an unacceptable theology of such a decree." He then refers to Herman Hoeksema's theology as follows:

To illustrate: the late Herman Hoeksema used to say “our God is an electing God.” That sounds innocent enough, for God does indeed elect. But what Hoeksema meant by that statement was that God elects — and no less reprobates — because it belongs to His very nature or essence to do so. God must elect and reprobate; His very nature *requires* Him to do both. What God does in electing and reprobating is *dictated* by His nature. Indeed, Hoeksema contended that God *cannot* elect to save some people *unless* He also reprobates others. God’s nature determines that both occur.

In this view, Hoeksema was only reflecting the view of Francis Turretin, the best-honed theologian of seventeenth-century Reformed scholasticism. Turretin heartily endorsed decretal theology. He contended that God’s decree *is* God. God, in Turretin’s theology, does not *have* a decree but *He is* His decree. God’s decree is what God’s essence necessarily wills; it is the volitional expression of the divine essence. Thus both the *fact* of the decree and the *content* of it (which is said to govern everything that happens) could not be other than it is. Our world is thus the best possible world, being the necessary and unavoidable determination of that divine decree that is, in the strictest sense, an essential element of God Himself.

At this point Daane accuses Louis Berkhof of teaching the same thing: “He does not explicitly say God’s decree is God’s essence, but he implicitly says the same thing when he attributes divine attributes to the decree. He says, for example, that *in the strict sense* God’s eternity characterizes the divine decree.”

Now all of this is rather amazing. One begins to wonder sometimes whether Daane has ever carefully read the theologians whom he is so free to criticize, or whether he simply sucks things out of his thumb. One also begins to have increasing doubts as to Daane’s orthodoxy with respect to any aspect of God’s decree whatsoever. Is it now also wrong to attribute eternity to God’s decree? Then I submit that Daane plainly does not agree with the Reformed doctrine of election any more than with the Reformed doctrine of reprobation — just as I have suspected and maintained for a long time. And then he had better submit some more gravamina: for the Canons speak of an eternal decree and an eternal election.

But let us consider specifically his misrepresentation of Hoeksema.

1. Daane claims that “the late Herman Hoeksema used to say ‘our God is an electing God.’” I ask: when and where? That statement itself can be understood in a perfectly sound sense, of course. But Daane should not be so loose with his quotation marks. I dare say that I have heard more of Herman Hoeksema’s sermons and lectures than Daane has

heard (and he did hear a few in his day). I dare say, too, that I am rather thoroughly acquainted with Herman Hoeksema’s writings. But frankly, I cannot recall the statement Daane puts in quotation marks. I heard and read such statements as, “The decree of God is the decreeing God,” or, “The counsel of God is the counselling God,” — statements made by many a Reformed theologian. But let Dr. Daane cite chapter and verse. Otherwise let him keep such statements in his pen.

2. And what about Daane’s serious contention that Hoeksema meant by the above statement and that he taught (as also allegedly Turretin did) that *God’s decree belongs to His very nature or essence*? The truth of the matter is that Hoeksema contradicts this very idea so often that I had no difficulty turning to his *Reformed Dogmatics* off-hand and finding a passage in which he contradicted it. On pages 86 and 87 (the very chapter “On The Nature Of God”) he is discussing a distinction made by theologians between the “necessary or natural knowledge of God (*cognitio Dei naturalis* or *necessaria*)” and the “free knowledge of God (*cognitio Dei libera* or *visionis*).” After discussing a further distinction ascribed to Abraham Kuyper, he writes as follows:

This distinction has its merits within certain limits, in so far, namely, as it presents the knowledge of God concerning all things outside of Himself as the result of a sovereign determination of His will. Even as the world does not necessarily and pantheistically emanate from God’s essence, so the knowledge of God’s decree is not inevitable effluence of His Self-knowledge and Self-consciousness, but the result of a sovereign determination of His mind and will. It is, therefore, *scientia libera* (free knowledge, HCH). And, on the other hand, the knowledge God has of Himself is not in the same sense determined by His will, but is spontaneously given with His essence, and is, therefore, in this sense *necessaria*. However, it may be well to add that in another sense the *scientia necessaria* or *naturalis* (necessary or natural knowledge, HCH) is also *libera* (free) in the highest sense of the word: for God wills to know Himself as the Triune God, and with perfect and infinite delight the Father gives life to and objectifies Himself in the Son, the Son wills to be generated by the Father, and the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. There is no other necessity in God than that which flows from His own infinitely perfect Being; and that necessity is freedom in the absolute sense of the word. God’s will and His Being are one. And, on the other hand, even though the decree of God is absolutely sovereign, and although in the abstract it may be granted that God could have determined upon an infinite number of other universes, nor did He by reason of necessity or need determine upon any world at all, yet, the world as decreed is nevertheless the full and highest revelation of Himself, and His decree is characterized by highest wisdom.

Moreover, it must never be forgotten that the decree of God is eternal, and that *decretum Dei est Deus decernens* (the decree of God is the decreeing God, HCH). God is eternally a decreeing God. Although, therefore, the decree is the free determination of His mind and will, God can never be conceived without His decree; and in this sense the *scientia* or *cognitio libera* (free knowledge) is also *necessaria*, this time with a necessity that flows from the perfection of His own will.

Plainly, Hoeksema here teaches exactly the opposite of what Daane imputes to him. I don't have

the time to check up on Turretin, but I would dare guess that Daane misrepresents Turretin in the same way as he does Hoeksema. And if Daane's grounds are the same as those which he uses to indict Berkhof, then there is certainly not a Reformed theologian of note who could not be similarly accused.

Plainly, however, soundly Reformed theology has become so utterly foreign to Dr. Daane that he cannot even fairly represent those whom he attacks. And sometimes I begin to doubt whether Daane understands his own theology.

Daane the Scholastic

Dr. Daane is rather free to characterize theologians and their theology as "scholastic." When he does so, he uses the term in a pejorative, i.e., unfavorable, sense. Scholasticism is a bad word. Thus, for example, he refers in the quotation above to Turretin as "the best-honed theologian of seventeenth-century Reformed scholasticism." Along the same lines, Daane maintains that one may not conclude logically from the truth of election to the truth of reprobation.

Now I do not share entirely that aversion for scholasticism. Principally, yes. In so far as the principle of scholasticism is the principle of rationalism, scholasticism was and is a bad thing. In so far, too, as scholasticism engages in abstract reasoning and abstract distinctions, it is arid and unproductive.

And certainly I do not maintain that the only way in which one can arrive at the truth of reprobation is by way of a logical conclusion from the truth of election. I believe that Scripture itself teaches the truth of reprobation, and that the conclusion to the truth of reprobation is a Scriptural conclusion, a "good and necessary consequence," as the Westminster Confession puts it.

But for the moment I wish to point out that when Daane calls others scholastics, this is a case of the pot calling the kettle black. For Daane himself is guilty of a piece of scholastic abstraction in the very article from which I quoted above. He writes:

In my book *The Freedom of God* I argued that God's decree is an act of His freedom; God was free to decree to create or not to create, and free to decree to redeem or not to redeem a fallen world . . . In Biblical thought, God is free not to do what decretal theology contends God *must* do.

Now this bit of reasoning by Daane concerning the nature of God's freedom is plainly a piece of

scholasticism. In the first place, it is not at all "Biblical thought," as Daane contends. I would be interested to know what slightest Biblical proof Daane can adduce for this description of God's freedom. God could have not created or decreed not to create? Where does Daane find this? God could have or might have not redeemed or decreed not to redeem? Again, where does Daane find this in Scripture? In the second place, as is suggested also in the quotation from *Reformed Dogmatics* above, this notion of Daane is *abstract*. The simple fact is that God *did* decree to create, and He *did* decree to redeem. This is the concrete expression of God's freedom of which Scripture tells us. This is Biblical thought. To say that God also *might have decreed* not to create or not to redeem is pure speculation about which we know nothing. In the third place, the question is not one of what God *must* do over against what God *might or might not* do. It is a question of what God *did* from eternity. Neither is the question the abstract one of whether this world is the best possible world. And certainly not whether it is the best possible world as "the necessary and unavoidable determination of that divine decree that is . . . an essential element of God Himself." As Herman Hoeksema puts it in the paragraph quoted above, the question is whether the world as decreed is the full and highest revelation of God, and that, too, in the light of the fact that God's decree is characterized by infinite wisdom. But to speculate about "what ifs" and "what might have beens" is abstract and scholastic. In the fourth place, this speculative and abstract type of reasoning on Daane's part is exactly typical of the Schoolmen of the Middle Ages, when scholasticism had its origin and its golden age.

But in so-called decretal theology God is free. "Our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased." Ps. 115:3

Klooster on Hoeksema's Views

It seems that *The Banner* tries to maintain somewhat of a balance between the pro-Boer and anti-Boer articles. At any rate, the November 23 issue contains an article by Dr. Fred Klooster entitled, "Predestination — A Calvinistic Note."

As I remarked earlier, Hoeksema's view seems to be the catalyst in the debate. From the left, they say: Hoeksema is the most consistent representative of the decretal theology of the Canons, and we repudiate that theology. But from the right, they seem to be afraid to have anything of Hoeksema's theology imputed to them. And so they say: the left is wrong in saying Hoeksema consistently holds the view of the Canons, and we repudiate Hoeksema but want somehow to hold on to the doctrine of reprobation.

Fred Klooster's article seems to be somewhat in that spirit. He says several good and true things about the Canons of Dordrecht. Yet he is at pains to put distance between himself and Hoeksema at all costs.

One example of this is Dr. Klooster's reaction to Berkouwer's characterization of Hoeksema's views. Klooster writes: "Hoeksema was once a Christian Reformed minister. This church saw him as a hyper-Calvinist, a strong supralapsarian, a logicistic thinker, a denier of common grace and of a well-meant gospel proclamation to all."

Well, now, that ought thoroughly to discredit Hoeksema in the eyes of any reader — especially any member of the Evangelical Theological Society, to which Klooster's paper was originally delivered. Once upon a time Hoeksema was a Christian Reformed minister, but he did not remain such. That church saw him as a hyper-Calvinist! Terrible! Still more, a strong supralapsarian! Watch out! A logicistic (not: logical) thinker! By all means, be careful! And if that is not sufficient, keep in mind that he was a denier of common grace and of a well-meant gospel proclamation (should be: offer) to all! Hence, no one must take Hoeksema's views as normative when it comes to the doctrine of predestination as set forth by the Canons and maintained by Reformed churches.

And in an article which is replete with footnotes

and references, Klooster offers no footnote and reference for the above characterization. How did Klooster's church see Hoeksema? Indeed, the CRC saw him as a denier of common grace and the well-meant gospel offer to all. At the same time, however, "this church" saw him *officially* as "fundamentally Reformed." I have a reference for this: the Acts of the Synod of 1924.

In the second place, Klooster speaks of Hoeksema's "supralapsarian reading of the Canons." He writes: "Berkouwer, Daane, and Boer seem to take Herman Hoeksema's supralapsarian reading of the Canons as normative. In my judgment this has thrown the entire discussion and the criticisms offered into hopeless confusion."

In my mind I can almost hear Herman Hoeksema laugh, "Oh-boy, oh-boy! My supralapsarian reading of the Canons! I wonder what that means." For Herman Hoeksema would be the first to admit that the Canons of Dordrecht were thoroughly infralapsarian. After all, he wrote (Reformed Dogmatics, p. 164): "The Canons, therefore, present very decidedly the infralapsarian viewpoint. However, it must not be forgotten that the Reformed fathers never condemned the supralapsarian standpoint, and that they certainly did not regard it as inconsistent with Reformed theology." And Herman Hoeksema — because he subscribed to the Canons of Dordrecht, after all — would also say, "I'll shake hands with a good *infra* any day, provided, of course, that he's a true *infralapsarian*."

No, the question is not one of *supra*- and *infra*-. And the escape from the criticism of Berkouwer, Daane, and Boer is not by way of saying they are criticizing only Hoeksema's supralapsarianism. They are criticizing the Reformed doctrine of election and reprobation, whether *supra*- or *infra*-. And if Klooster and others need some help and support in the battle against Boer's gravamen, they could do worse than to consult Hoeksema's writings.

But Hoeksema is still a pariah to the Christian Reformed conservatives.

THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

The Last Time: How Are We Living

Rev. R. Flikkema

That we live in what the Bible calls “the last time” there simply can be no question. The signs of Christ’s coming about which our Lord Jesus Christ spoke to us in a passage such as Matthew 24 are all being fulfilled: wars and rumors of wars, nation rising up against nation, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes. All these are occurring today in ever greater measure. With respect to Jesus’ statement that in the last time “false prophets” would arise, and that those false prophets would “deceive many,” one does not have to think too hard or too long to realize that what Jesus said is indeed true. There are many false prophets today, yes, even in what is called Reformed circles. Indeed, we, you and I, live in the last time.

I say once more, we live in the last time. We know that. But the question, the question which is so very crucial, is: how are we living in the last time? How? Are we living our lives as befits a Christian? Are we living our lives as pilgrims and strangers as our father Abraham of old, who sought a better country, that is, an heavenly? Are we keeping our lives unspotted from the world? In short, are we living our lives in this last time as Jesus would have us live? That is the question. Or is it the case that we so easily confess that we live in the last time, but, when it comes right down to it, do not live as though we live in the last time. Do we find ourselves giving in to the world? Do we find ourselves loving the pleasures and treasures of this life? Do we find ourselves seeking what this world has to offer, instead of zealously seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness? How are we living in this world in the last time? That is the question.

And as I said, that question is so very crucial for us today. Do not say to yourselves, “Oh, it really doesn’t matter how we live. We can enjoy the pleasures and treasures of this life for a season. The end is not yet. We have plenty of time before the end

comes, before we have to think about living our lives as Jesus would have us live them.” Oh, no! It is crucial as to how we live in this last time, so crucial in fact that our very salvation is dependent upon it. Our very salvation, for Jesus Himself says in Matthew 10:32-33, “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.” How are we living in the last time?

That we may answer that question in a right way, I have decided to use the space that is allotted to me in the *Standard Bearer*, not only in this issue, but also in the following issues, to call our attention to the Word of God as it comes to us in the book of Daniel. Yes, Daniel! And I have decided to do that exactly because the book of Daniel has so very much to say to us as to how we are supposed to live in the last time. In this issue we consider together the first seven verses of Daniel, chapter 1.

From Daniel, chapter 1 we discover the fact that one King Nebuchadnezzar, of Babylon, had come to Jerusalem, and having come, he conquered it. As a mighty conqueror, he returned to Babylon with all the spoils of war, including the vessels of the house of God. But that, however, is not all that Nebuchadnezzar brought back to Babylon. For Nebuchadnezzar also brought back to Babylon “certain of the children of Israel, and of the king’s seed.” That is, Nebuchadnezzar brought back to Babylon none other than the royal seed of David, of which Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were a part.

Oh yes, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, the royal seed of David, God’s children, Nebuchadnezzar took from Jerusalem, the city of David, to Babylon. And there he subjected those four children of God to a most horrible plot. I use that word

deliberately. Nebuchadnezzar subjected those four children of God to a most horrible plot. A plot according to which Nebuchadnezzar attempted to cause those four children of God to forget about the Lord their God, and to forget about their love for the Lord their God, and to forsake the worship of the Lord their God.

What was that plot? It was this, namely, that King Nebuchadnezzar instructed one of his servants to take Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah into the king's palace, and there to instruct them in all the wisdom, and in all the learning, and in all the knowledge of Babylon — and to do that, mind you, for three years. For three years Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were to be subjected to a thoroughly man-centered education — not a God-centered education, but most emphatically, a man-centered education. But that was not the end of it. For the subjection of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to his thoroughly man-centered education, necessitated that Nebuchadnezzar take those four children of God away from their covenant parents. And he did! Nebuchadnezzar took those four children of God away from their covenant parents at the very early age of fourteen or fifteen years. Imagine that, at the very early age of fourteen or fifteen years! No longer might they be instructed by their covenant parents. No longer might they be instructed by their covenant parents in all the knowledge of Scripture. No longer might they be told by their covenant parents about the faithfulness of Jehovah their covenant God, the God of their salvation, and about the fact that they must love and serve and worship only and solely Jehovah, their faithful covenant God. That had all come to an end. Imagine that! No more covenant instruction! But, once again, that was not the end of it. For not only did Nebuchadnezzar subject them to a thoroughly man-centered education, and not only did Nebuchadnezzar separate them from their covenant parents and the covenant instruction that they had received from their parents, but he also had the audacity to change their names. He changed their names! Their beautiful names which their covenant parents had given to them — those names Nebuchadnezzar changed. Daniel's name, which means literally "God is my Judge," became Belteshazzar. Hananiah's name, which means literally "Jehovah is gracious," became Shadrach. Mishael's name, which means literally "Who is what God is," became Meshach. And Azariah's name, which means literally "Jehovah is my Helper," became Abednego. All of these names had at least something to do with the heathen idol worship of Babylon. To be sure, Nebuchadnezzar, in his horrible scheme to remove and root out forever the memory of Jehovah from the minds of these four children, so to speak, did not miss a trick. He was

confident that if he subjected them to a man-centered education, and took them away from their covenant parents, and changed their names, which names reminded them of the Lord their God, that they would then be fit servants of Nebuchadnezzar. And not God!

Well, you say to yourself: "What a horrible thing. What a horrible thing Nebuchadnezzar did. How could he do such a thing? But that will never happen to us. We teach our children. We have Christian schools where the fear of God is taught to our children. Our government has not closed our schools and taken away our children. Such a thing will never happen to us."

Be not deceived. I assure you, that sort of thing that happened to those four children of God can, and not only can, but will happen to us. And it will happen to us exactly because Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon is in Scripture a type of this antichristian world: this antichristian world which hates Christ, and which opposes Christ and which does everything in its power to stop the cause of Christ's kingdom and covenant. And we live in that world. There will come a time when we will wake up in the morning to find that the doors of our Christian schools will be shut. There will come a time when we will look in our children's bed, and our children will be gone! They will be snatched away by the hands of wicked men. And by the hands of wicked men they will be subjected to a man-centered education. No longer will we be able to tell them about Jehovah our covenant God and about His faithfulness and wondrous ways. That will all come to an end. And by the hands of wicked men the names of our children will be changed, changed from the name "covenant children of God" to the name "children of the devil."

Be not deceived. But I am afraid sometimes that we are. I am afraid sometimes that we take so very much for granted. We have a tendency to take for granted our covenant schools and our covenant education. I ask you: how often do we think about our covenant schools? If we are at all honest with ourselves, we will have to admit that, more often than not, the only time we think about our covenant schools is when we complain about how high the school tuition is, and about how much we have to sacrifice to maintain them.

Do not do that. Do not take all of that for granted. And, most of all, do not take for granted our children, the covenant seed which God has given to us. Instruct them. Teach them. Fill them to overflowing with the knowledge of the Lord our God. Do that, for it is as Paul says in Romans 13:12, "The night is far spent, the day is at hand:" We live in the last time. But how are we living?

THE LORD GAVE THE WORD

News From Birmingham

Rev. Ron Van Overloop

November 1, 1979

Prof. R. Decker, the editor of this rubric, asked me to write an article for his rubric. His request was that I give a report of the work we have begun in Birmingham.

Personally, I am glad for this opportunity. It is needful for me to report not only to the South Holland Church and council and to the Mission Committee, but also to all who through their synodical assessments and prayers support the cause and work here. Reports of the actual work being done can arouse and educate the God-commended interest in missions. Besides, the more one knows of the various fields of labor, the better one can "pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you" (II Thessalonians 3:1).

Having been in Birmingham for a period of time not yet filling three months, we can only give the beginning details and first impressions.

The visible facts of the work are easily told.

Two worship services are conducted on the first day of the week. Thus far we have been holding these services in a meeting room of a centrally located motel. The centrality of this location is determined not by the residences of the people who are presently attending these services, but by the shape of the city of Birmingham. This was done so that the services would not be far from anyone in this area. However, we are currently putting forth efforts to find a meeting place which would be more suitable and more stable than a meeting room of a motel. These efforts, which have been going on almost from the beginning of our stay in Birmingham, have not met with positive success yet. This is a matter of much concern and prayer for us because another and more suitable meeting place would put us in a better neighborhood and would give evidence of permanency to those who might be interested in

attending our services.

Also, we are meeting together in various homes for mid-week Bible study. As was being done prior to our arrival here, we have been doing this Bible study in the light of the Heidelberg Catechism.

Having been in Birmingham for so short a while we can tell you only of our first impressions. And these first impressions have been more about the nature of the work than about the area in which we are working. I believe that it is important that the readers of *The Standard Bearer* go through some of these impressions of the nature of the work with me. Some might be obvious to all. Others of the readers might be conscious of all of these items already. Regardless, I believe it very important that we all consider again or for the first time what is involved in missionary work.

I think what has impressed us most is the difference between the work of a missionary and that of a pastor. Within an established congregation, things are just that: established. Almost everything that must be done is laid out before the pastor. There are, besides the two worship services, a certain number of catechism classes which meet on such and such a night and some societies which meet at their traditionally designated time. In contrast, the missionary finds nothing set and established. He must learn the community rapidly in order to find a place for worship. He must set the times for worship and obtain Psalters and a pianist (if the latter is available). He must set up the meetings as far as subject, time, and place. He must seek out the best means of advertising and then do it. Of course, all of this is under the supervision of and with the approval of the calling Church and of the Mission Committee, but the missionary must do it, for if he does not, it will not be done. It is impossible for the two supervising bodies to do such work.

Concurrently, the missionary must find and learn the nature of the community. Every group of

believers has its own character as a unique part of the Body of Christ. Not only is each member of Christ's body unique, but also each group of members is unique. For example, the hand with its members is different from the ear and its members. In part, the unique character of each group or congregation is determined by the community in which the group lives. A farming community is different from a city, and the churches in these varying locations will manifest this difference. Just as a pastor must, so the missionary must learn this unique character so that he can bring the Word of God in the best possible way.

Also, the missionary must get to know the spiritual pulse of the community. A pastor must concentrate on learning the spiritual pulse of the congregation, but a missionary has a whole community as the object of his work. Therefore, he must concentrate on making as tangible as possible such an invisible thing as the spiritual pulse of the community. Again, this is necessary so that the work may be done most effectively.

Then, of course, he must get to know the people who worship with him.

Let me try to be more concrete as to why such a knowledge is necessary. First of all, I think this knowledge of the community in which he works and of the people with whom he works is necessary for the missionary in order that he might know how to "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you" (I Peter 3:15). Most important in this ability to give an answer to those who ask for a reason of one's hope is a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. A knowledge of doctrine is necessary for an overall view of the truth of the Scriptures. But the Biblical basis for all of that doctrine must be on the tip of the tongue. Strangers do not want to hear the position of a Dutch or English theologian to convince them of the truth. It is only the Scriptures themselves which are able to make one wise unto salvation through faith and are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness (II Timothy 3:15, 16). Therefore, especially a missionary must be an avid student of the Bible. If someone should reject the words of a missionary, let it be a rejection of God's Word and not a rejection of a man.

Secondly, a thorough knowledge of the community is necessary that the missionary, though he be free from all men, yet he makes himself servant unto all, that he might gain the more. Paul summarizes it in I Corinthians 9:22b, "I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some." I pray that I might learn more and more what this means.

Closely related to the above, such a knowledge of

the people one might be or is working with is necessary because the missionary must know whether to bring the milk or the meat of the Word (Hebrews 5:12). It is important that one knows what is essential to the truth and what is not, what is a matter of Christian liberty and what is not. The truth of God's Word is an organic whole, each part connected with every other part. Because of that it is possible for a little leaven of error to leaven the whole lump (I Corinthians 5:16; Galatians 5:9). In this body of truth some parts are more important than other parts. For example, in our human bodies our heart is more important than a finger or a toe. Each member is important, but while my toe can be stepped on without permanent damage, my heart may not be crushed. On the mission field, it is very necessary and important to know what is the heart of the truth and what is the little toe of the truth — what may be stepped on for a while without eliciting an immediate and very vocal response; and what parts of the body of the truth are the "first principles of the oracles of God" (Hebrews 5:12) and must receive immediate defense.

Such a knowledge is necessary for obedience to Romans 14:1: "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations." Think about this for awhile. How does one become obedient to this command of God?

And on the mission field it is necessary to learn compassion. When Jesus "saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them" (Matthew 9:36). This must be not a natural response, similar to that which an unregenerate man experiences when he sees the hunger of the Cambodian refugees or of the Vietnam boat people. Nor must it be a condescending love. Rather this compassion must be of the highest spiritual quality for fellow saints who have needs, which needs you can supply because of the unmerited gifts God has given you.

I have mentioned the knowledge which must be gained for effective mission work. There is a very great need for this knowledge on my part. But the greatest and highest gift necessary is wisdom. One does not learn wisdom, it is a gift of God. It is for wisdom more than for anything else that I pray. Pray for our missionaries that they may be given wisdom.

I apologize for the personal nature of this article. But I found it unrealistic to write of that which I am learning and which has become such an intimate part of my life in an objective manner. Also, please understand that I do not present these things as if they are the final answer. I am just learning. And as anyone who has just discovered something, I am eager to talk about it. I would, therefore, welcome any correspondence on these things for mutual edification.

TRANSLATED TREASURES

A Pamphlet Concerning the Reformation of the Church

Dr. A. Kuyper

(In the last installment Kuyper has spoken of the authority which belongs to the office of believers in the church and the authority which belongs to the special offices in the church. He has discussed this question in a very general way and reserved particular discussion of it for future paragraphs. He now turns his attention briefly to the relationship between the authority of the church and the authority of the magistrates.)

21. How This Authority of the Churches Is Related to the Authority Of the Magistrate.

The authority of the church and the authority of the magistrate are entirely distinct in origin, essence, nature, and purpose. They are distinct in origin because the authority of the magistrate flows directly from the authority of the Triune God, while ecclesiastical authority proceeds from the Mediator as Head of His church.¹ They are distinct in essence because the authority of the magistrate concerns the external life of a man with respect to his body, his personal right, and his possessions; while ecclesiastical authority is related to the inward man and has regard to his spiritual existence. They are distinct in nature because the authority of the magistrate is an authority of rule and constrains by force, while the authority of the church is never anything but an official or ministering authority. The relation has to do with Christ and the believer. And, finally, they are distinct in purpose because the authority of the magistrate aims at the preservation of righteousness and the honor of God in this life, while ecclesiastical authority has as its goal the bringing of the elect to their heavenly blessedness.

Two conclusions follow directly from this. 1) All members of the church are subject to the authority which rules over them as citizens of the state without

respect to the question of whether the magistrate is a believer or an antagonist of the truth. 2) The magistrate as magistrate can never exercise any ecclesiastical authority in the church. The obligation which rests upon the magistrate to maintain the honor of God in the state is not an ecclesiastical but a political obligation which continues to exist even if the church should fall away, and which, in the abstract, applies for a William of Orange as well as for a Philip, for a Nero as well for a Constantine. He, under whatever title he may hold, who rules by the grace of God,² is bound to seek the honor of God in his entire rule. Also the limitation placed upon this obligation, viz., never to overstep its purpose nor oppress the conscience, requires that one never make a compromise between church and state. One must recognize these limitations as placed by God Himself in His bestowal of sovereignty. This is true because these rights are granted to the magistrate to rule not over the internal, but, in an absolute sense, over the external man only.

Thus, no more than the church may ever exercise a civil authority, may the civil magistrate ever assume to itself an ecclesiastical authority. Both spheres are completely distinct. There is indeed an area in which both powers overlap and meet each other because the member of the church is at the same time a citizen of the state. This can give rise to conflict because the church assumes to itself what is Caesar's, or because Caesar demands for himself and takes what belongs to the church. Meanwhile, it by no means follows from this that both spheres should not be sharply distinguished, but only that they are not always mutually successful in seeing sharply this distinction.

1. We do not agree with this conception of Kuyper because it is our conviction that Christ, in His exaltation, has been appointed by God to be Lord over all. For this reason, the authority of the magistrate is also from Christ.

2. That the magistrate rules by the grace of God is an idea of Kuyper which arose out of his theory of common grace. However, even before the idea of common grace was introduced into the thinking of the church, the idea of the magistrate as ruling by grace was a common idea held in the church.

In such cases, alas, there is not one arbiter, and the struggle which then breaks out cannot be resolved except through reconciliation and compromise.

Nevertheless, one ought not to understand this as if there should not be implied in the obligation of the magistrate also the obligation to protect the true church. Just as each sovereign is called by the grace of God to maintain all that is true and godly, so also the magistrate must support the true church. This obligation rests on her also when she chooses for a false church, yes, also when she rises as persecutor of the true church of God. The question as to how she best acquits herself of this task is a question of application which in earlier times was solved only through the way of much trouble, but now is solved in the way of complete separation of church and state. This solution is because of the sad consequences to which these troubles led. The true church of God never thrives more luxuriantly than in that place where she receives opportunity freely to build herself up out of her own spiritual power. Moreover, the discharge of this obligation shall naturally take on different characteristics according as in a certain land nearly all, or the most, or but a part of the inhabitants, or only a few, belong to the true church. And, no less, the discharge of this obligation shall take a different form according as the magistrate himself is inclined to the truth and confesses it publicly, or if, indifferently, he lets the truth alone or publicly rejects it. But this does not essentially alter the obligation of the magistrate to protect the true church. It does, however, introduce a noteworthy difference in the execution of this obligation. The difference is broadened when a believing magistrate is a church member. As such he naturally holds a more influential position. In this case the majesty of God with which he is clothed is to be the more respected. Yet the church must, even though the magistrate is not a believer, maintain the magistrate's authority in such a way that his position of public right is recognized. The church must not rest content with being classified with other gatherings as if the authority in her midst is merely a matter of partnership. The church is set in the state by almighty God in order to make ready the eternal kingdom of God. It is there *jure divino*, i.e., by God's institution. And each magistrate who does not give honor to this church as possessing a civil right, a right which is the right of the church which she has received from King Jesus, falls short in its devotion to duty and commits sin.

Concerning this, a distinction must be considered between the influence of representative bodies which are not the magistracy. In Geneva and elsewhere, e.g., the citizens were represented in civil councils. Because the same citizens were also members of the

church, men permitted these civil councils, for the sake of expediency, to serve a double purpose. On the one hand, they looked after the civil interests of the people in the political sphere. And, on the other hand, they looked after the spiritual concerns of the people in the ecclesiastical realm. This was a merging, so to speak, of the electoral college and the congregational council. This is still possible in villages where nearly all the inhabitants hold to the same confession of the truth. And it is not rare for them to choose the same set of people to represent first the church under the name of deputies and afterwards to represent the citizenry as council members.³

If this can take place without injuring the conscience and if it actually furthers the well-being of the church, it certainly is the responsibility of the magistracy, as nurturing lords, to support the church of God with monetary means. If, on the other hand, after this is put to the test, it becomes apparent that the magistrate, through that monetary support, strengthens and maintains the false elements in the church of God and neglects the consciences of the citizens, then it is better to abandon this monetary support. This must be done in such a way that the magistracy always assumes her financial obligations in a just way.

The magistracy must never have a seat in synodical, classical, or presbyterian gatherings as an ecclesiastical power. Where the magistrate does appear at an ecclesiastical gathering, he never belongs to the body of the gathering but stands outside it. The gathering must not let the magistrate's interference extend any further than to see that no political questions are treated or to see that anyone's rights are curtailed. The magistrate must honor the church's right of existence by its presence.

And, finally, concerning the approbation of ecclesiastical appointment, the magistracy can never have a part in appointing or granting ordination. The appointment of an ecclesiastical person is entirely ecclesiastical by nature, and no ounce of ecclesiastical authority can ever be granted by the magistrate to an ecclesiastical office bearer. But there can be a certain approbation. This approbation, however, can extend to the determination of the amount of the salaries of the ministers when these salaries are paid by the magistrate. Further, it is the business of the national magistrate to decide concerning aliens; and it is the business of the local magistrate to decide concerning persons who move from one city or village to their city or village. They must decide whether they will

3. This actually took place in our own country in smaller Dutch communities where practically all the members of the community were members of the Reformed church.

recognize these people as office bearers in the church.⁴

The seigniorial rights of calling or assigning to an office, on the other hand, which, under the name of rights of patronage, or right of taxation, leave behind such sad memories that they are to be condemned out of hand as in conflict with the pure ecclesiastical principle.⁵ Even though one pretends that the church is then regarded as having lost or having given to someone else her right to call an office bearer, it must still be maintained that this transfer of power is illegal because the ecclesiastical authority of calling a minister is by its very nature inalienable.

Finally, concerning the magistrate's calling "to root out all idolatry and false worship in order to destroy the kingdom of anti-christ and to promote the kingdom of Christ." Here also the principle must

be very firmly held, but the principle must be very sharply and strongly distinguished from the application. Undoubtedly the obligation to promote the honor of God rests upon the magistrate; and, most of all, the magistrate is obligated to abolish idolatry. But in no sense does it follow from this that every means is to be considered lawful and effective to accomplish this end. If history had taught that violent extermination of idolatry and heresy actually bore fruit and held high the honor of God, this extermination would then certainly be a matter of obligation. Now, on the contrary, the nature of man is such that violence against moral evil is of no avail. The nature of idolatry and heresy is of such a kind that it is rather stimulated, by opposition, to new manifestations of strength. And, above all, the magistrate, as appears from the testimony of history, has almost always made a mistake in considering truth for heresy so as to condemn what is truth as idolatry. Thus it is convincingly proved that heresy is itself immune from the violent extermination of it because of the evil of human nature and because the magistrate is, at the same time, powerless and incapable of accomplishing this. This is the reason why the practice of the church in ancient times in this respect must be condemned and the magistrates warned to avert heresy in no other way than to grant the true church freedom. It thus equips the true church for the further unfolding of her spiritual powers.

4. This sounds strange to our ears, since we are accustomed to the separation of church and state. But it must be remembered that Kuyper is writing in the context of the Netherlands and an established church, and it must also be remembered that Kuyper is making this statement in connection with the custom of the payment of ministerial salaries by the magistracy.

5. The Dutch is somewhat obscure here but the idea is that Kuyper is referring to practices both in the Netherlands and in other lands in Europe where wealthy land owners who had many families working for them took to themselves the right to appoint ministers for their workers. These wealthy land owners established churches within their own communities and themselves appointed the ministers who would serve in these congregations.

THE DAY OF SHADOWS

Love at First Sight

Rev. John A. Heys

Jacob, as we begin to follow him in his journey from his father's house to Padan-Aram, is on the way to his mother's family. He needed no passport or visa,

and could easily cross the borders of the lands through which he had to go. Born in the land of Canaan he learned to speak the language of its

inhabitants and seems to have encountered no problem with speaking to those along the way, all the way to Haran itself. For he speaks to complete strangers at the well and is clearly understood by them.

His journey was a long one for that day. As the crow flies it was about four hundred miles from Hebron to Haran. And in that day this was quite a distance to walk. Figuring a steady three-mile-an-hour walk and being able to do so for ten hours a day, it will take him over thirteen days. And considering the fact that he must stop to eat, and even find food to eat, we may believe that it took him well over two weeks. For he could not walk as the crow flies but had to go around hills and ravines; and it was rather rugged country that lay between Hebron and Haran.

He is going to his uncle Laban for his life's sake, because he is the object of his brother's fierce hatred that had issued forth the threat to kill Jacob as soon as the days of mourning for their father's death were past. But he also went there, as sent by his father, to get a God-fearing wife. On his mother's part this was no mere guise to cover up the first purpose of fleeing for his safety's sake. She and Isaac had been deeply grieved by the fact that Esau had married heathen wives of the Canaanites. And Jacob knew both his father's reason, namely, to get a God-fearing wife, and his mother's two reasons, which were to flee for his life and meanwhile get that God-fearing wife.

Without a road map or compass, and in a land where there were no highway markings, or for that matter numbered houses on marked off streets, he found his uncle Laban without any trouble. He had never been there before. A picture of Laban's home had not been sent him — and did not all the tents of that day look alike, fashioned out of the same material and being of the same design? Yet Scripture silently slips over the journey from Bethel where God had appeared to him in a dream and his arrival in the very vicinity of Laban's home, and where his daughter watered his sheep.

The providence, and the grace of God are here, and we must not, as is so often the case today, rule these out or ignore them. The psalmist declares in Psalm 73, "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel and afterward receive me to glory." And David sang, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord." Psalm 37:23. Indeed, Jacob was a good man. In himself he was a conniving man with an evil nature, for he came from the corrupt stock of fallen Adam and Eve. But in Christ he was a good man, a man to whom Christ's goodness was imputed, a saint clothed with Christ's holiness, a born-again child of God who was in Christ a new creature. Such God guides by His counsel so

that they will be received up unto glory. Their steps are ordered by the Lord for the sake of His covenant and in faithfulness to all the covenant promises. And therefore it is not simply a case of divine providence that Jacob arrives where God ordered his steps to take him, but a matter of His grace.

He had spent some very lonely days and had a great deal of time to do a great deal of thinking. It cannot be doubted that his thoughts did run ahead to Haran, and that he gave much time to the matter of thinking about his errand to get a wife. He who had shown little if any interest in women and in getting a wife, even though his brother already had three, suddenly, in that providence of God, takes quite an interest; and one can almost feel a bit of eager anticipation in Jacob, revealed in his actions and words.

Consider that upon hearing that Laban's daughter was coming with a flock of sheep, and thus as an eligible candidate to be his bride, Jacob wants these men at the well to leave and to take their sheep away. He had not yet seen Rachel's beauty, for she is somewhat in the distance yet. And when Jacob says to the men, "Lo, it is yet high day, neither is it time that cattle should be gathered together; water yet the sheep, and go and feed them" he revealed how much he wanted them out of the way when this damsel in the distance would come to the well. His heart that was cold and unmoved before at the sight of a woman begins to beat rapidly and he is extremely eager to have a talk with this candidate for partnership for life with him as his wife. Suddenly he becomes quite interested in having a wife. Was he lonesome? Living so close to his mother and basking in her love before this, and now having been alone and without her love, did he long for a woman's companionship? One thing is very clear. He wanted to be with this young damsel alone, and not simply because she was his cousin. He is not thinking of a cousin but of a wife.

And when she came near and he saw her beauty and that she was well favoured, he fell in love at first sight! There can be no doubt about that. To him she was no more a candidate but the elected one. Note how eager he was to make a good impression upon her and gain favour in her eyes. To get those men away and on to their feeding grounds with their sheep, but also to show his prowess before this beautiful damsel, he single-handedly removes that huge stone that covered the well. He asked for no helping hand. He wanted no helping hand. Those eyes! That facial beauty! That well formed body! Jacob was overwhelmed; and this gave him that extra strength which enabled him to remove that stone, whereas no man ever thought of doing so by himself. They waited till all the sheep were there. It was too big a chore to be doing that every now and then. Let

it be done jointly.

Then, too, look how he tries in every way to serve this beautiful woman with her sheep. He watered them for her. He will be of service to her, and, once again, not because she was a woman and was his cousin, but because he is smitten with love at first sight. He will not need to look any further for a wife. She is it! Nor can he restrain himself, but he kisses this woman whom he had just seen for the first time a few moments ago. No cousinly kiss was this, although he quickly told her that he was her cousin before she flares up — as she was quite capable of doing — for this liberty which he took in payment for watering her sheep. He wept, for such was the custom of the day. A little later on in that same day Laban also kisses Jacob and embraces him, for that also was the custom of the day.

But love at first sight is not what the Word of God demands of us. We are reminded of what Paul wrote in I Corinthians 15:46, "Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual." Now Paul is speaking about the body we shall receive in the day of Christ. We receive a natural body first; and then at the resurrection a spiritual body like to that of Christ's. But the love of that natural body is first as well, and it so often rules one so powerfully that he never comes to the spiritual love of God in Christ. A pretty face, natural beauty will so take hold of a young man that he wants it so badly and will seek to get it even after he finds that there is no spiritual beauty in the soul of the possessor of a fair countenance and well-favoured body. Is that not exactly what spelled the ruin of the first world in such a short time, so that the flood was necessary for the preservation of the church? The sons of God married the daughters of men because they saw that they were fair. Genesis 6:2. That they did not believe in God, that they worshipped idols, that there was no fear of God in them made no difference. Love at first sight is always a love because of the flesh. And that was the case with Jacob. O, indeed, this was a daughter from a family of believers. But one must look at the spiritual qualifications of the individual. David had a very evil son in Absalom; and Hezekiah had a wicked one in Manasseh who did evil in God's sight until late in life. But for a long time he manifested himself to be anything but a child of God and revealed during this time that believers do not always bring forth children who will become believers. God's grace changed him in later life. Never, however, may we marry on the assumption that because one is born in the covenant sphere, that this one will in time become a believer. Let one be sure that this future husband or wife is a believer before marriage.

Let the truth be faced once again that apart from God's grace Jacob is like Esau, and Esau is like Jacob. Esau married unbelieving Canaanitish women — and no doubt because of their beauty — and then later on an unbelieving daughter of Ishmael. As far as Jacob's love is concerned he is marrying an unbeliever. Rachel in fact reveals anything but a life of faith. And, the Lord willing, we will come to these evidences such as stealing her father's idols and speaking anything but the language of faith when her second and last son was born. That is not the point here. The point is that Jacob loved Rachel for her beauty of face and well-favoured body. Indeed, he knew that she was Laban's daughter, and thus the daughter of a believer. He knew she was in the sphere of the covenant. But this is not the reason for his love for her. Nowhere in the book of Genesis, or elsewhere in Scripture, do we find one word that would even suggest that he loved her for her faith in God and love for Him. What we read is this, "Rachel was beautiful and well favoured. And Jacob loved Rachel." Genesis 29:17,18. Not one word appears between these two statements; they must be connected together to teach us the reason for Jacob's love for Rachel.

There is even more emphatic and definite evidence when we take the first statement quoted above together with what God connected it. The full verse of Genesis 29:17 reads, "Leah was tender eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favoured." Note that "but" in between. Two sisters are presented as far as their outward appearances are concerned. One is not homely but has a tender, kind look in her eye that revealed her to be a woman who could love deeply and be amazingly loyal and faithful to her husband. The other had black eyes that flashed with life and beauty in a well-moulded face. Jacob fell in love with the latter because of that physical, outward beauty. Later on he will find what that flashy beauty means as far as Rachel's disposition and inner spiritual condition of heart and mind are concerned. That, too, the Lord willing, we shall see.

But does not the love of God for His own from eternity shine forth here in Jacob's love at first sight? Before the children were born it was said of Jacob that God loved Him. He did. He loved him from eternity as one given to Christ, and as one for whom Christ would come to die. And Jacob's carnality cannot change God's love. At first sight God cannot love us, but catching sight of us as belonging to Christ He does nothing but love us. Jacob emulated Esau here and chose a wife for carnal, earthly reasons. The two brothers are alike in fallen Adam. But sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love of God in Christ makes the difference that one is blessed and serves as a father in Israel, and that the other remains outside the covenant sphere.

FROM HOLY WRIT

Exposition of Galatians

By Rev. G. Lubbers

THE WORKS OF THE FLESH MANIFEST Galatians 5:19-21 (Continued)

Paul masterfully continues to enumerate the “works of the flesh” of the reborn Christian. He speaks of three more evil works before he concludes with “and such like things.” All these voices fall under the breaking of the royal law of liberty. Let us continue to follow them in the order given by Paul in the text.

First, there is the sin of “envy.” Paul speaks in the plural: envyings (*phonoi*). This is again really the sin of outright hatred for the brother; it consists in not being able to rejoice with the prosperity of the brother. In Proverbs 27:4 we read, “wrath is cruel and anger is outrageous (overwhelming, a flood: in the Hebrew) but who is able to stand before jealousy?” Rachel envied Leah, causing her to be cruel even to Jacob, by saying, “Give me children or I die” (Gen. 30:14). We read that “the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph” (Gen. 37:11; Acts 7:9). Pilate knew that the Sanhedrin had delivered Jesus into his court “for envy.” He hoped they would be reasonable if he placed Jesus on the nomination with Barabbas (Matt. 27:18). Envy is really rotteness of the bones; here is terrible unrest which consumes a man’s very life, his marrow and bones. Where envy is the ruling passion of the soul, peace born from a tranquil heart is not present. It is the fount of the deep warring and unrest of the soul (Prov. 14:30). All the fulfilling of the *one word* of the law is absent: loving the neighbor as one’s self (Matt. 7:12). When we observe this sin of envy raging in our members, bringing us into captivity, as new born babes in Christ, we cry out, “Oh wretched man that I am.” “I count not that I have already attained” then comes from our sanctified lips (Rom. 7:24; Phil. 3:12).

Secondly, Paul mentions the sin of “murder.” No doubt the Heidelberg Catechism is correct when it

says that “envy is the root of murder” (Ques. 106). Murder is the desire to obliterate a man as image-bearer of God (Gen. 9:6). We do not speak of murdering an animal, do we? We kill, we slaughter, an animal. But murder is hatred for man as the image of God (Gen. 4:8, 14, 15). It is the sin of Cain in whom the murderer from the beginning, Satan, revealed himself (John 8:44). Veritable children of the Devil murderers are. Haters of God and of their fellowman (I John 3:14-16). In war, a soldier fighting under the banner of the king does not commit murder when he executes the will of the general. He obeys the orders of authority. It is not a personal vendetta that motivates him. Perhaps he fears and trembles to do it. But where we kill from hatred for the brother we do so from desire of revenge, so that I dishonor, hate, wound, and kill my neighbor, by myself or by another, as did David in that awful hour of sin (II Sam. 11:14 ff.). This is how our sinful nature is described by God in many passages of Scripture, in which every mouth is stopped and the entire world is guilty before God (Rom. 3:9-19). Such is our sinful flesh as it wars against the Spirit in us, so that we do not do the things we would.

Thirdly, the sin of “drunkenness” is mentioned. Paul employs the plural: drunkennesses. This means to be intoxicated with wine or any other alcoholic drink. Sometimes drunkenness is spoken of in the spiritual sense of the word. It then refers to a lack of all spiritual soberness and sobriety; all spiritual self-control is then gone. Such do not gird up the loins of their mind to be sober, hoping perfectly for the grace which is to be brought to us in the revelation of Jesus Christ in the last day. All joy unspeakable and full of glory is lacking. Such have no hope of seeing God as He is, and, therefore, do not purify themselves as God is pure (I John 3:3). They are as men, who grope at the wall, and who do not make their calling and election sure, having been

freed from deceitful and corrupt lusts (II Peter 1:8-10). Such walk in the night of sin, and not in the light of Christ Who gives light (I Thes. 5:7; Eph. 5:14).

However, Paul here in our text speaks of literal, physical drunkenness and stupor. They are overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, who are both drunkards and gluttons. Also such are not watchful unto prayer at every season, making supplication to prevail in the midst of all the woes which God sends upon mankind, and finally stand in glory before the Son of man (Luke 21:34). Also where this drunkenness is practiced as a way of life, it is evident that such will not inherit the kingdom of God, yea, they have no inheritance in the kingdom of glory. Here men live by the dictum: let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die. This is the iniquity which will not be forgiven you till you die (I Cor. 15:32, Isaiah 22:12-14; Luke 12:19). The Bible does not know of the innocence of the "social drinker" in distinction from the debauchery of the drunkard. The safe rule is given by Paul when he says "it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer" (I Tim. 4:4,5). This safe rule is the narrow way which few find. The social drinker walks with those who walk on the broad way which leads to destruction. Many are they in our day, in the church, who go into this wide gate against which Jesus warns (Matt. 7:13,14).

Fourthly, there is the sin of revellings, which is mentioned. The Greek term *koomoi* is mentioned in close connection with the sin of drunkenness. These revellings (plural) refer to feasts and drinking-parties, that are protracted till late in the night, during which time there is continual indulging in revelry. This is the "rioting" which Paul mentions in Rom. 13:13, which refers to luxurious and profligate living. Such do not realize that the night is far spent, and that the day is at hand, and so they do not walk and hope in the daybreak of heaven's joys, but walk in the same recklessness as did the men in the days of Noah before the Flood. There the judgment of the Flood overtook them in their marrying and giving in marriage. This they did till the day the flood came, notwithstanding the preaching of Noah, a preacher of righteousness (Matt. 24:37, 38; Luke 17:26, 27; II Peter 2:5; I Peter 3:20; Jude 12,13). We must remember the wife of Lot, who was turned into a pillar of salt. We must crucify our old nature and walk in a new and holy life; we must not walk according to the flesh, but we must walk by the Spirit and not fulfil the lusts of the flesh!

THE APOSTOLIC VERDICT ON THOSE WHO PRACTICE WORKS OF THE FLESH (Gal. 5:21)

The word of God is as a two-edged sword. It does not only speak peace to the believers who walk after the Spirit, but it proclaims to unbelievers and to

those who oppose the Gospel, "that they shall not see life, but that the wrath of God *abideth* on them" (John 3:36; Rom. 2:8). God's holy displeasure is eternally upon such who are disobedient. Of such Paul speaks here in Gal. 5:19,20,21a. He is speaking of those whose entire life's practice (*hoi ta toiauta prassontes*) is doing the works of the flesh, the transgression of the law of God. Paul does not have reference to conscientious children of God, who are led by the Spirit, but who are overtaken in a fault, in a trespass. This does happen sometimes to God's elect children when in "some particular instances they sinfully deviate from the guidance of divine grace, so as to be seduced by, and comply with the flesh" (Canons of Dort, V. 4). This happened with David in the sin with Bathsheba, and with Peter in denying his Lord (II Sam. 11:1-5; Matt. 26:31-35). Of such a saint being overtaken in a trespass Paul speaks in Gal. 6:1-3. Of these Paul is not here speaking. He is speaking here of those who never truly repent of their sins in heartfelt sorrow, but who are unrepentant workers of iniquity. They are such that the spirit of the sons of disobedience is the only driving force in their life. They are the workers of iniquity (Jude 10,11).

Paul is speaking here of workers, practicers of iniquity, who are not under the blood which speaks better things than Abel. They do not walk in thankfulness, but they continue in their wicked and ungrateful lives. Such do not, as David did, turn to God in heartfelt sorrow, godly sorrow. At best they have the sorrow of the world which works death (II Cor. 7:10). Such is the horrible end, temporal and eternal death in all their sorrow which is not according to God (*kata Theon*). Evil trees such are, who are known by their evil fruits. And according to these evil works they shall be judged! And that divine verdict Paul gives here in this text under consideration.

Such who practice the works of the flesh are not sons of Sarah, Jerusalem which is above. They are not heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:15-17). They do not suffer for righteousness' sake with Christ and for His sake, and do not hope for the glory of God's grace which is to be revealed, uncovered, and displayed in the heir-sons (Rom. 8:17, 18; Eph. 2:7). Such are "servants," sons of the bond-women, and, therefore, do not ever abide in the house of the Father (John 8:35; Gal. 4:29-31). Such are servants of sin; sin is their total master and lord. And these are they who "practice such things of the flesh." They are adulterers, fornicators, covetous, haters, who do not serve one another by faith which works by love (Gal. 5:6b). These never say with all true believers, "We, by the Spirit out of faith expect the hope of righteousness," that is, the hope of the

final justification, the final receiving of the adoption of sons, who purify ourselves, even as He is pure, because we hope to see God (Matt. 5:8; I John 3:2).

Paul can, therefore, wield the keys of the Kingdom and say: they shall not inherit the kingdom of God (verse 21). Now the kingdom of God is the *heavenly* kingdom of God in Christ. It is the kingdom which is established in Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension. It will ultimately be manifested in Christ's return with clouds in the Parousia, and the consummation of the ages. Then shall the Son of man come in all His glory (I Peter 1:11,12; Matt. 25:31; Dan. 7:14,27). This is not a premillennial kingdom of Christ as an earthly kingdom in the earthly Jerusalem;

nor is it the postmillennial dream of a worldwide peace among the nations. It is the kingdom of God in the new heavens and new earth where righteousness shall dwell (II Peter 3:13). Outside of this kingdom will be the wicked; only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life, shall enter it as heirs, sons and daughters of the living God (Rev. 20:27). Those who work iniquity do not have inheritance with Christ, the chief heir, as the Son (Hebrews 1:2-4). Paul writes more than once, and that, too, very clearly and emphatically, that no fornicator, unclean person, etc. *has* inheritance in the Kingdom of God and of Christ. Such Paul denominates the "sons of disobedience." (See Col. 3:6; Rom. 1:18 and Rev. 22:15.)

FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

Of Holy Scripture

Rev. Ron Van Overloop

We continue our consideration and evaluation of the Westminster Confession on the subject of the Holy Scriptures. We have already considered the subjects of revelation (article 1), inscripturation (articles 2 and 3), and the authority of Scripture (articles 4 and 5). In the remaining five articles under chapter I, the Westminster Confession deals with other matters relating to the Scriptures.

First, let us carefully read these articles of the Confession and look up the Scriptural texts cited as proof-texts.

VI. The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.^a Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the word;^b and that there are some circumstances concerning worship of

God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed.^c

- a. II Timothy 3:15-17; Galatians 1:8, 9; II Thessalonians 2:2.
- b. John 6:45; I Corinthians 2:9-12.
- c. I Corinthians 11:13, 14; I Corinthians 14:26, 40.

VII. All things in scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all;^a yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.^b

- a. II Peter 3:16.
- b. Psalm 119:105, 130.

VIII. The Old Testament in Hebrew, (which was the native language of the people of God of old,) and the New Testament in Greek, (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the

nations,) being immediately inspired by God, and by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic;^a so as in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them.^b But because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto and interest in the scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them,^c therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come,^d that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship Him in an acceptable manner,^e and through patience and comfort of the scriptures, may have hope.^f

a. Matthew 5:18

b. Isaiah 8:20; Acts 15:15; John 5:39, 46.

c. John 5:39.

d. I Corinthians 14:6, 9, 11, 12, 24, 27, 28.

e. Colossians 3:16.

f. Romans 15:4.

IX. The infallible rule of interpretation of scripture is the scripture itself; and, therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture, (which is not manifold, but one,) it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.^a

a. II Peter 1:20,21; Acts 15:15,16.

X. The supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the scripture.^a

a. Matthew 22:29, 31; Ephesians 2:20; Acts 28:25.

Article six puts before us the Scriptural position of the sufficiency of Scripture. The Bible gives us not the whole counsel of God, but the whole counsel concerning that which is necessary for our salvation. The Scriptures give us all we need to know.

This implies that the Bible is a united whole, without a lack, and not too much. It does not contain too much prophecy or poetry. Nor does it have too little history or too little about the life of our Savior. Sometimes we want to know more about His childhood. Or we want what we think would be clearer descriptions of events or explanations of parables. Our curiosity reaches a peak when we read that "many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book" (John 20:30).

This article reminds us that the Bible is sufficient for us to "know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed" (Luke 1:4), and that we "might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name" (John 20:31). All we need to know for the glorification of God and for our own salvation is either set down explicitly or may be easily deduced for the Scriptures.

We need not turn to revelations, horoscopes, seances, tea leaves, or Ouija boards. As Paul says in Galatians 1:8, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." The Scriptures we have, in fact all of it, is profitable for us, "able to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (II Timothy 3:15-17). Therefore, nothing is to be added, for "if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book." And on the other hand "if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life . . ." (Revelation 22:18,19).

Yet the power of the Spirit within the heart is necessary for that faith necessary for understanding the Scriptures. Very strategically does the Confession add this, lest it be understood that all men can gain a correct knowledge from the Bible. Paul told Timothy that this faith in Christ was necessary for the Scriptures to make one wise unto salvation. The Spirit which knows the deep things of God alone enables a man to know the things of God, including God's saving work in Christ (I Corinthians 2).

Yet there are aspects of our life which do not receive specific attention and regulation in the Bible. Are we then to think that it is forbidden or is outside the scope of Scripture? Not at all, for though a specific regulation may not be given, still the general rules which the Bible gives cover every aspect of our life. Those guidelines are: "do all to the glory of God" (I Corinthians 10:31), and "let all things be done decently and in good order" (I Corinthians 14:40). The Bible does not tell us how long our worship services are to be, or at what hours of the day or how many songs should be sung, but it does tell us on what day we are to gather in worship. These other are to be decided upon "according to the general rules of the Word" mentioned above, in Christian wisdom and love.

The importance of this article is that it makes Scripture our only infallible rule and guide. And it determines how we approach the Scriptures. That is, not questioning or doubting, but with the presupposition that it is the Word of God.

Though closely related to article 6, article 7 of the First Chapter deals with the perspicuity of Scripture. All that is necessary for salvation is clearly given. With the Spirit-given, spiritual eye the believer can find all he needs for the knowledge of his salvation. The requirement for gaining this all-important knowledge from Scripture is not a necessary level of I.Q. Rather the sole necessity is the indwelling of the Spirit. And the Spirit can dwell and does dwell in

those naturally unscholarly as well as in those naturally scholarly. (We should note that the presence of the Spirit and the faith He gives not only makes one a believer, but also makes that one a scholar of the Bible.) That is how it is possible for a man unlearned in natural things to be wise in spiritual things. This wisdom is gained from Scripture. And the believer knowing that busies himself with a studying of the Bible which will make him wise unto salvation. Read and consider II Corinthians 3:13-18.

Contrary to the denial of the devil (Genesis 3:4, 5), the Word of God is so clear that a child and the blind can understand it.

This does not mean that there is nothing deep and profound in the Scriptures. Because it is the revelation of the infinite God it is deep, so deep it will take an eternity of joyful meditation to fathom Him. When the profound and difficult parts are approached with supposed profundity and false pride, they are wrested to one's destruction (II Peter 3:16). But when approached with humility and in the right way, then the Scriptures give a sufficient understanding

What is the right way just mentioned? Article seven says it is "a due use of the ordinary means." This refers to a daily searching of the Scriptures themselves (Acts 17:11). Of this, article nine speaks, where the only rule for understanding the Bible is given, viz., Scripture interprets itself. When Rome says that the Church must interpret the Scriptures, they not only destroy this Biblical rule, but also they deny the Scripture's perspicuity and sufficiency. Rev. G. I. Williamson in his work, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*, (published by The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company) gives a very enlightening quote of Pope Leo XIII which gives this proudful position of Rome.

Pope Leo XIII in 1893 declared that 'God has entrusted the Scriptures to the Church' by which of course he means the Roman Catholic Church. For this reason he says, the Church is 'the perfectly trustworthy guide and teacher,' so that the true sense of the Scriptures is to be considered 'that sense which has been and is held by our Holy Mother the Church, whose is the judgment of the true and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, so that nobody is allowed to explain Holy Scripture contrary to that sense or to the unanimous opinion of the Fathers.'

Scripture must be allowed to interpret itself. When a question of the interpretation of a hard text arises, then we must go to other, similar texts which are more easily understood. It is for this reason that I so highly recommend the filling of the margins of our Bibles with lists of parallel texts. Then we are truly letting Scripture interpret itself.

A caution must be given. Today, as has happened time and again in the history of the Church, there are

those who take the position that the principle of Scripture interpreting Scripture denies the use and place of creeds. To ignore the creeds of the Church is itself a denial of the principle of the perspicuity of Scripture. The setting aside of these creeds is based on the assumption that no one before us has been able to see the truth in God's Word. The existence of creeds is proof that the Bible is clear. Not to be viewed as infallible, the creeds are useful and authoritative in so far as they are in agreement with the Word of God.

Article eight deals with the matter of Hermeneutics. In this rubric we have not the time or place to give a thorough consideration of this subject. Besides, recently Prof. H. Hanko has very adequately dealt with this subject at length in his rubric.

Briefly, this article teaches that the Bible was originally written in Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament), and that these original manuscripts being inspired were authoritative. The contents of these original manuscripts have been under the preserving care of God so that we may be assured of the purity of the copies on which our translations are based. The world and modernists say that, because we do not have the originals, we do not have the Bible. But such an attitude shows an absence of faith and forgets God's providential care. Our faith is based upon the God Who revealed Himself and preserved that revelation. Why believe in a God Who has revealed Himself and then does not preserve it? Do we doubt the ability of our God to exercise His divine and Fatherly care over us in giving to us His Word? No, we have the very Word of God, not the product of men.

This article proceeds to show us that, because these original tongues are not known, they must be translated into the language of every nation. Thus all believers can read and search the Scriptures as we are commanded (John 5:39). Thus God may be acceptably worshipped (Colossians 3:16), and thus believers are given patience and hope (Romans 15:4).

Article ten teaches that there is but one supreme judge in all religious controversies: the Scriptures. Jesus gives us an example of this when He answered the Sadducees, who deny the resurrection, by accusing them of "not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God" and then proceeds to give proof for the resurrection from the Old Testament scriptures (Matthew 22:23ff.). Our Savior did the same when He answered the devil's temptations by quoting from the Old Testament (Matthew 4:1-11).

This is the application of the truth that Scripture is the sole rule of faith and life. It is not to be supplemented or explained in any other light than that which it itself gives.

It is a very important principle of the Reformation that is brought out here. Rome binds the consciences of its members to its interpretation. Here the Westminster Confession in the line of the Reformation refuses to allow the conscience of the believer to be bound by anything except the Word of God itself. This article does not say that councils and doctrines are wrong. In fact, this article implies that a Church which follows this Reformation principle will set forth what the Word of God says. It is the place of the Church to declare the Word of God in such a way that the individual believer with "the anointing which

ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you," (1 John 2:27) can know God's will. The declarations of synods and councils are not legislation, but a help (in as much as it agrees with Scripture) for the proper understanding of the Bible.

Thus we see that the Westminster Confession gives us a very beautiful and useful presentation of the Scriptures as being the Word of God, infallible, authoritative, sufficient, clear, and our sole rule for faith and life.

Book Review

STORY BIBLE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN, by Anne De Vries, Paideia Press, 1978, 254 pages. (Reviewed by Gertrude Hoeksema)

Originally written in the Dutch language, under the title of *Kleuter Vertelboek voor de Bijbelse Geschiedenis*, this story Bible was recently translated into English. It contains selected stories from both the Old and New Testaments, and was written for children from four to eight years old.

Although the author's charm as a story-teller has lost some of its appeal in the translation, his style is gentle and warm and sincere, and the stories are generally faithful to Scripture. However, in

simplifying the Biblical narrative for young children, Mr. De Vries has at times departed from Biblical facts, as, for example, when he mentions Hagar and Ishmael, not as wife and child of Abraham, but merely as living there. In his efforts to get down to the level of a small child, the author tells the stories rather superficially, with no insights or explanations which even a small child would be able to understand. He misses the antithetical elements present in Scripture in such stories as the fall, Cain and Abel, and Noah.

However, with these limitations, for basic, simple, and selected stories, this book can be recommended.

NOTICE!!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday morning, January 9, 1980, at the Holland Protestant Reformed Church. Material to be treated at this session must be in the hands of the Stated Clerk at least ten days prior to the convening of this session.

Jon Huiskens
Stated Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On January 1, 1980, our parents, MR. AND MRS. SIMON ONDERSMA, will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary. We thank our heavenly Father for preserving them for each other and for us, and pray that He will continue to bless them in the years to come.

Their children,
Gordon and Elaine Ondersma
David and Nancy Ondersma
Harvey and Marilyn Holstege
Ray and Barbara Van Til
and 19 grandchildren.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Junior Mr. and Mrs. Society of Hope Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, MI, expresses their sincere sympathy to Dave and Mary Kregel in the loss of their son, BRADLEY HERMAN.

May the God of all mercy comfort them according to His Word as found in Romans 14:8 — "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."

News From Our Churches

At this writing, there are a number of calls outstanding from a number of our churches. Rev. Dale Kuiper has received the call to serve as pastor of our Hope, Walker, Michigan congregation. Rev. Wayne Bekkering has received the call to our church in Redlands, California. Our church in Lynden, Washington, has extended a call to Rev. James Slopsema of Edgerton, Minnesota, to serve as home missionary in the Northwest Washington area.

Rev. Arie den Hartog was installed into the office of missionary in a morning worship service in Doon, Iowa. (The South Holland bulletin says this occurred on November 18. The Wyckoff, New Jersey bulletin says November 11.) Rev. den Hartog then preached his inaugural sermon in the evening (afternoon) service. Rev. den Hartog plans to leave for Singapore as soon as all the legal paperwork for work permits and visas is completed.

Rev. Ronald Hanco was installed as pastor of our Covenant Church in Wyckoff, New Jersey, on Friday evening, November 9. Four generations of Hankos were present and three participated in the installation service on this rather joyful occasion. The 'new' Rev. Hanco was ordained by his father, Professor Herman Hanco, and his grandfather, Rev. C. Hanco.

In mid-November Rev. Ronald Van Overloop, who is serving as home missionary in Birmingham, Alabama, informed his calling church (South Holland, Illinois) that he has been able to rent a building in which to conduct church services. Now that a 'regular' place has been found to conduct services, Rev. Van Overloop plans to do more in the way of public advertising of services in Birmingham. The rented building formerly served as a church.

Rev. David Engelsma, pastor of our church in South Holland, exchanged pulpits with Rev. Carl Haak, pastor of our Southeast Church in Grand Rapids, on October 21. Rev. Haak is a 'son' of the South Holland congregation.

This is the time of year when most of our churches hold their annual congregational meetings. Officebearers are elected and a budget established for the coming year. Some times there are additional

proposals presented to the congregation for approval. Hope Church in Walker, Michigan decided to give \$5,000 each to the buildings funds of our churches in Houston, Texas, and Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

A special congregational meeting was held in Frist Church, Grand Rapids, on November 15 to consider a proposal relative to the future location of the church. The proposal read as follows; "The Consistory of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids proposes to list for sale our property at 1145 Franklin (church) and 1139 Franklin (old parsonage), including the parking lot, and purchase 22 acres of land adjacent to the northwest corner of East Paris and Burton SE for the sum of \$130,000." The proposal was approved by 73% of those present at the meeting. This property is in the City of Kentwood and is just east of Calvin College and north of Woodland and Eastbrook Shopping Centers. The grounds for this proposal included the following: A. To give direction to the young people of the church. Since the present location of the church is not in a desirable neighborhood, young families do not move near the church, but rather locate near one of our other churches and transfer their membership. B. The congregation has decreased considerably in size during the past 15 years. C. The location of the church is not desirable — high crime area, poor accessibility, and few of the members live near the church. D. The building is in need of extensive and costly repairs and remodeling. E. The existing church building is too large, resulting in large utility and maintenance costs for the size of the congregation. Thirty years ago the congregation numbered in excess of 500 families. Today there are 124. The down payment on the property will be made with funds presently available. A cash drive will be conducted in the congregation in December. The balance will be borrowed over two years, the payments to be made through weekly per family assessment (added to the general fund budget).

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We would extend to you and yours best wishes for a blessed holiday season.

K.G.V.