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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;
he shall set me up upon a rock.*

—Psalm 27:5

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MEDITATION

And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, and took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians. And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them. But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.

—Exodus 14:23–29

It is a glorious thing to belong to the host of the Egyptians!

Or so the soldier in Egypt's host must have thought. Dare we stand in his sandals a moment? Dare we imagine his thoughts that morning? Here he is, a soldier in the premier army in the world. Here he is, outfitted with the finest weapons of war ever seen. His chariot is swift and deadly. The footmen behind him beat out a precise and orderly staccato with their marching. The pounding of the hooves of the horsemen before him is thunder in his ears. And just there, just through that gap in the walls of the desert, is that wretched mob of slaves. How he hates them! How they have ruined his life! His crop has failed, due to their hail and their locusts. His cattle are dead, due to their grievous murrain. And his son! His firstborn son! His son is dead, DEAD, because of their passover. But there they are, just ahead. There they go, walking on a dry path through the sea. His blood is up. He will have his vengeance. He will drive his chariot into them and destroy those Israelites! He pursues them into the sea. Into the sea...

It is a fearful thing to belong to the host of the Egyptians.

In the midst of the sea, the soldier finds something. It is not the Israelites. It is not his vengeance. It is certainly not his salvation. No, it is this: the face of Jehovah. And it is set against him! In the morning watch Jehovah looked unto the host of the Egyptians through his mighty, terrible, roaring, burning, billowing, towering pillar of fire-cloud. Nothing is worse! Nothing could be worse! The face of Jehovah reveals his heart, just as the face of a man reflects his thoughts. When Jehovah's face is set against a man, that man sees the infinite depths of the infinite heart of the infinite God set against him. The face of Jehovah set against a man is the curse. The face of Jehovah set against a man is hell. "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous...but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil" (1 Pet. 3:12).

By that terrible look Jehovah troubled the host of the Egyptians. In terror they fled. There is no fight when Jehovah sets his face against a man. There is only flight, and there is not even that. Jehovah dismantled their chariots, so that the troubled host was soon the overthrown host and the dead host. The face of God, through the hand of Moses, caused the sea to return to its strength. Egypt perished.

Why? For one reason: for Israel. Even the Egyptians knew it. “Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians” (Ex. 14:25). The Lord fighteth for them! The Lord fighteth for them against the deadly host of sin and death, which Egypt represented. The Lord fighteth for them against their bondage in guilt and corruption. The Lord fighteth for them in his mercy by the hand of his

servant Moses, picture of the great mediator, Jesus Christ.

And what of us? We see Jehovah’s face too. But not against us! Rather, shining upon us in the light of Jesus Christ. “The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: the LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace” (Num. 6:24–26).

—AL

FROM THE EDITOR

This issue of *Reformed Pavilion* marks the end of volume 1. Article gave way to article, and issue followed issue, and suddenly one year has passed since the first appearance of the magazine. It must be abundantly evident to all by now that this magazine does not exist by the strength of man but only by the grace of God. From issue 1: “How dependent we are on the Lord for all things, including a little place for *Reformed Pavilion*.”¹ Yes, indeed. God is good, and God be praised.

A hearty thanks to our readers for your continued interest in the magazine. God has broadcast this small publication widely over the earth. The website has been visited by readers from France to the Philippines, from Belarus to Bulgaria, from Malta to Moldova. The Spirit bloweth where he listeth, and we men cannot tell whence he cometh and whither he goeth; but the Lord knoweth them that are his (see John 3:8 and II Tim. 2:19).

—AL



¹ Andrew Lanning, “Welcome,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 1 (April 15, 2023): 5.

BOOK REVIEW

100 Years in the Covenant: Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1879–1979. Dallas, TX: Taylor Publishing Company, 1979. 124 pages, hardcover. [Reviewed by Rev. Andrew Lanning]

Thanks to a vigilant member of Remnant Reformed Church who is always on the lookout for good used books, the centennial anniversary book of Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church was recently placed in my hands. The book relates the history of Eastern Avenue from its origin in 1879 to its centenary in 1979. The book will be of interest to readers of *Reformed Pavilion* for at least two reasons and probably a third as well.

First, Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church was established just over twenty years after the founding of the Christian Reformed denomination in 1857. Therefore, one cannot tell the history of Eastern Avenue without sketching the fascinating histories of the *Afscheiding* in the Netherlands in 1834; the immigration of Rev. A. C. Van Raalte to Holland, Michigan, in 1846; and the founding of the Christian Reformed Church (originally called the True Dutch Reformed Church) in 1857. Each of these events receives a brief notice in Eastern Avenue's centennial book, brushing the reader up on his Dutch Reformed church history.

Included on page 8 is also a handy chart of the various Dutch Reformed events and denominations in both the Netherlands and North America, including the Synod of Dordt, the *Afscheiding*, the *Doleantie*, the Reformed Church in America, the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), the Netherlands Reformed Church, the Canadian Reformed Churches, and others. Although a few of the dates are off—1847 instead of 1846 for Van Raalte's immigration and 1953 instead of 1924 for the founding of the PRC—the chart nevertheless helps the reader visually trace the formation of many Dutch Reformed denominations still present today.

Of special interest in this section to readers of *Reformed Pavilion* will be the fact that the founders of the Christian Reformed Church were opposed to hymns in church services.

They had taken this action [of separating from the Reformed Church in America in 1857] because they believed that the Reformed Church in America was lax in following the creeds and in carrying out church discipline, and because they disapproved of using hymns in church services and admitting lodge members into full fellowship. (9)

When one traces the history of the Reformed churches from John Calvin in Geneva (1536–64) to the Synod of Dordt in the Netherlands (1618–19) to Hendrik De Cock and the *Afscheiding* (1834) to the establishment of the Christian Reformed Church in America (1857), one finds a consistent insistence upon the singing of psalms in worship and a consistent opposition to the introduction of hymns. The story of Eastern Avenue CRC, being so close in time to the foundation of the Christian Reformed denomination, brings the reader face to face with the Reformed heritage that is psalm singing. One cannot help but be reminded again that when Reformed churches introduce hymns into their worship services and when Reformed churches introduce principles other than psalm singing in worship, those churches depart from their Reformed heritage. And when Reformed churches oppose the introduction of hymns into their worship services and maintain the principle of psalmody in worship, those churches stand in line with their Reformed heritage.

The second reason that readers of *Reformed Pavilion* will be interested in Eastern Avenue

CRC's centennial book is that Eastern Avenue CRC was at the forefront of the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Herman Hoeksema was the minister of Eastern Avenue CRC from 1920–24, during the common grace controversy. Hoeksema's consistory in Eastern Avenue CRC supported and defended him in his stand for God's sovereign, particular grace. Hoeksema's consistory and congregation in Eastern Avenue CRC opposed the three points of common grace adopted by the Synod of Kalamazoo in 1924. In fact, what was then Eastern Avenue CRC essentially became First Protestant Reformed Church in 1925, when Herman Hoeksema and the consistory of Eastern Avenue CRC were deposed from office by Classis Grand Rapids East. A majority of the congregation of Eastern Avenue CRC stayed with Hoeksema and the consistory, so that most of what had been the congregation of Eastern Avenue CRC was from that time on First Protestant Reformed Church. A minority of members of Eastern Avenue CRC stayed with the Christian Reformed denomination, won the property of Eastern Avenue in the civil courts, and reconstituted their consistory as the continuation of Eastern Avenue CRC.

Eastern Avenue's centennial book devotes chapter three to the events of 1924. Entitled "1924: The People and the Issues," the chapter tells the history of Hoeksema, the synod of 1924, and the aftermath for Eastern Avenue, all from the point of view of the Christian Reformed Church. This chapter makes the book exceedingly worthwhile for those who love Hoeksema's theology today, giving the reader a glimpse of how the CRC views the events of 1924.

Eastern Avenue's centennial book approaches the entire history of 1924 from the viewpoint of "Americanization." The book claims that the whole controversy over common grace sprang from the tension of a Dutch church learning to live in an American land.

At the root of the controversy was the issue of Americanization, an issue which predominated during the early years of the twentieth century and which produced

on-going argument as to how far a transplanted Dutch church, up to this point conservative and isolationist, could accommodate itself to the aggressive, pragmatic American society in which Dutch husbands were finding jobs and in which Dutch children were growing up. (30)

According to the book, examples of the battle over Americanization included "the use of the Dutch language for church functions...the use of the [American] flag in church...the social groups called Benefit Clubs, which were suspected gaming places...the introduction of movies...[and] the matter of labor unions" (30–31).

The story goes that Eastern Avenue CRC was advanced to the front line of the battle over Americanization because its third pastor—Rev. Johannes Groen—was progressive and outward-looking, while its fourth pastor—Rev. Herman Hoeksema—was conservative and isolationist. The contrast between the two is strikingly illustrated in the matter of the labor union.

The whole question of the relationship of the Christian to the world—out of which the Common Grace controversy of 1924 was to emerge, a development precipitated by the infiltration of American social trends and values into the conservative Dutch Christian Reformed subculture—was to emerge as a theological question of denominational concern in the matter of labor unions. Two opposing groups formed within the denomination—the conservative Separatist Calvinists, who advocated separate Christian organizations and independent action, and the American Calvinists, who urged accommodation and adaption to the American scene to the point of joining secular unions...The debate brought out the differing postures of Groen and Hoeksema toward the non-Christian community. On April 5, 1917, while Hoeksema was giving a public lecture on "Social Christianity and Calvinism" stressing the separation between the

kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world, Groen lectured on “Organized Labor and Christianity” at a local union meeting. Clearly, the social concerns of the day were forcing theological questions to emerge and alignments to form within the denomination. (31)

Eastern Avenue CRC’s centennial book goes on to tell the history of the common grace controversy and the resulting church split. Readers will find the familiar cast of characters: Ralph Janssen and his higher critical views of scripture, which Janssen grounded in the doctrine of common grace; the three protestants from Eastern Avenue who accused Hoeksema of being un-Reformed and who were placed under discipline by Eastern Avenue’s consistory; John Karl Van Baalen and his pamphlet accusing Hoeksema and Henry Danhof of being Anabaptist; the Synod of Kalamazoo and its three points; Classis Grand Rapids East and its demand that Eastern Avenue’s consistory place its pastor before the question of whether he agreed with the three points or not, under pain of being deposed; and the supreme court of the state of Michigan, where the property rights of the Eastern Avenue grounds and buildings were settled in favor of the CRC. This story has been told often before, but the reader will find this year—the one hundredth anniversary of the Synod of Kalamazoo and its three points of common grace—to be an appropriate time to refresh his memory on the events and issues of the controversy.

Eastern Avenue’s centennial book also offers an analysis of the common grace controversy. The analysis again focuses on the issue of Americanization. As one would expect from a Christian Reformed publication, the analysis thoroughly agrees with common grace and rejoices that the controversy allowed the Christian Reformed Church to become more open to integrating into American society.

Painful though the experience of schism was for Eastern Avenue, it was an experience which produced growth. It pushed the congregation to the forefront of the

struggle between isolationism and Americanization, a struggle which had both social and theological implications and out of which came a doctrine which more fully described the extension of God’s grace and sovereignty to all of His creation. (38)

The reader can draw his own conclusions and make his own analysis of the controversy over God’s grace. For this book review, allow this reviewer to make two points by way of analysis.

First, Eastern Avenue’s centennial book wrongly uses the term *Americanization* to refer to the struggle over the doctrine of common grace. Eastern Avenue CRC is not alone in its use of this term. The published view of Christian Reformed historians is that the common grace controversy was simply one smaller part of the larger battle within the CRC over how Americanized the historically Dutch denomination would become.

However, this is a deceptive use of the term *Americanization*. A truthful use of the term *Americanization* would refer merely to the external, indifferent, non-essential circumstances of a Dutch church adapting to an American setting. Will sermons be in Dutch or in English? That is a true question of Americanization. Will the clothing fashions worn to church be traditional Dutch or modern American? That is a true question of Americanization. Will officebearers use the newly invented automobile in the work of visitation? That is a true question of Americanization. Although members of the church in those days would undoubtedly have had firm and forceful opinions on all the above, the fact is that all the above are merely questions of external circumstances that belonged to life in America in the early 1920s.

But Eastern Avenue’s centennial book uses the term *Americanization* to refer to things that are spiritual and essential: the labor union, gambling, movies, earthly patriotism in the house of God. The question facing Eastern Avenue CRC in the early 1920s was not merely this: Will we be *American*? But the question was this:

Will we be *worldly*? The labor union is worldly. Gambling is worldly. Movies are worldly. Flying an earthly nation's flag in the heavenly kingdom's assembly is worldly. One's position on these things was not the trifling matter of whether the saints would be Dutch or American but was the profound matter of whether the saints would be the church or the world.

The use of the term *Americanization* deceives the reader by camouflaging the essential matters of holiness and spiritual separation as if they were the same as the indifferent matters of language and fashion. The use of the term *Americanization* also implies that the rejection of worldliness was nothing but Anabaptist world flight, as if the Reformed man who lives in spiritual separation from the world by rejecting the labor union were the same as the Amish man who lives in physical separation from the world by not hooking up to the electrical grid. Indeed, this was the charge of the CRC's leading lights of the day against Hoeksema: Anabaptist! World flight!

What, then, would be an accurate description of the issues behind the common grace controversy? Not *Americanization* but *antithesis*. Hoeksema and the consistory of Eastern Avenue CRC were not arguing for physical isolation from America but spiritual isolation from the world. Let a Reformed minister preach in Dutch or in English—the native Dutch speaker Hoeksema mastered the English language very quickly and used it to marvelous advantage in his public speaking and writing. But let a Reformed minister not build a common grace bridge to the spiritual wickedness of the world and thus invite all the world's wickedness into the church. To speak in terms of 1924, let the Reformed man be a Dutchman speaking the English language to his American neighbor as he admires his neighbor's new Ford one fine morning in Grand Rapids; but let the Reformed man live as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven who does not ride along with his worldly neighbor to the drunken carousing at Reed's Lake on the sabbath day.

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell with them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. (II Corinthians 6:14–18)

Even the Synod of Kalamazoo in 1924, as it was adopting the destruction of the antithesis in its three points of common grace, could not help but recognize the danger to which it was subjecting the churches. After ridiculing the supposed world flight of opposition to common grace, the synod sounded a belated warning against worldliness, as quoted by Eastern Avenue:

No, we don't want a flight from the world. It is not our goal to build a high Chinese wall around our Christian Reformed Zion.

We don't want to forget, that we are in the world, although not of the world, and that we ought to be a sun and a light.

Nevertheless, we pray in the name of our Lord, that our people may walk carefully, as children of light.

While the days are evil.

—*Acts of Synod, 1924, p. 245 (40)*

Synod's prayer was rejected by the Lord, for God is not mocked. When the Christian Reformed Church built a common grace bridge to the world and ridiculed the spiritual antithesis of Hoeksema as "a high Chinese wall," God unleashed on the CRC a consuming flood of worldliness. To mention just one example, in the year 2024, one hundred years after synod adopted its

three points of common grace, the CRC is plagued by sodomites, who flaunt their sodomy and who dare the synod and the churches to do something about them. And although Christian Reformed synods might still wring their hands in dismay and might pretend to take a stand for a while yet, the people do not “walk carefully, as children of light” but walk as children of darkness.

Second (continuing the analysis of Eastern Avenue’s centennial treatment of the common grace controversy), Eastern Avenue’s centennial book misses the main point of the common grace controversy. The centennial book treats the controversy as if it were mainly a question about the church. That is, the book treats the controversy as if the main question were, how should the church live in the world? The book calls this question the 1924 CRC’s “embryonic world theology.” The book says that Synod 1924 “did not work out a full theology of the world, but it took the first step” (39). By “theology of the world,” the book means the question of how the church should relate to the world, whether by isolation or immersion or some blend of the two.

But the common grace controversy is not fundamentally a controversy about the *church*. The common grace controversy is fundamentally a controversy about *God*. Not this: What is the church’s relationship to the wicked world? But this: What is God’s relationship to the wicked world? Not this: What is the church? But this: Who is God?

The question at the heart of the common grace controversy is whether God has any kind of gracious, loving, favorable attitude toward the reprobate. Synod 1924 said that God does have a favor for all men, not only the elect. Hoeksema said that God’s favor is particular and only for the elect, never for the reprobate.

Understanding the fundamental issue brings the controversy into its proper doctrinal focus. Rather than taking one’s starting point in ecclesiology—the doctrine of the church—one takes one’s starting point in theology—the doctrine of God. This starting point elevates the controversy

to the level of the sublime. Rather than being merely a sidetrack in a social controversy over so-called *Americanization*, the common grace controversy touches on the very nature of God himself. Is God at war with himself, on the one hand favoring the reprobate in common grace but on the other hand hating the reprobate in eternal reprobation? Or is God one with himself, perfectly and wisely directing even the good gifts that he gives to the reprobate to accomplish his everlasting purpose with them? What are we to make of God?

And what about God’s grace? Is God’s grace impotent, so that he favors and loves and blesses those whom he will never save? And if God’s grace is impotent in the case of some men, how can I be sure that his grace will actually save me? Or is God’s grace sovereign, so that he loves and favors and blesses only his elect people and sovereignly saves them in that love? What are we to make of God’s grace?

Understanding the fundamental issue in the common grace controversy also makes the answer to the controversy very simple: God is God! Such is the testimony of scripture: “But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased” (Ps. 115:3). Because God is God, he is never at war with himself, and his grace is never impotent. Because God is God, his will is one, and in his grace he sovereignly and infallibly saves his elect people. “Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth” (Rom. 9:18).

Eastern Avenue’s centennial book gets the starting point of the common grace controversy wrong and so gets the entire controversy wrong. May God yet open the eyes of men and women to see that the events of 1924 were fundamentally about God, and may God yet cause men and women to understand this glorious truth: God is God!

So much for this reviewer’s analysis of the centennial book’s treatment of the common grace controversy of 1924. The reader will undoubtedly have his own analysis to add.

The third reason that readers of *Reformed Pavilion* may be interested in Eastern Avenue’s

centennial book is that there are many interesting excerpts from the council, consistory, and deacon minutes of the first seventy-five years of the congregation. It is fascinating to read what a Reformed church dealt with from 1879 onward.

A few announcements especially caught my eye. On two different occasions in the early years, Eastern Avenue CRC went through pandemics that impacted a large portion of society. In 1905 there was a smallpox epidemic throughout Grand Rapids, Michigan. In 1918 there was an outbreak of the Spanish influenza throughout the United States. In both outbreaks the civil authorities required churches to close. Having so recently gone through the COVID-19 lockdowns, readers of *Reformed Pavilion* will undoubtedly want to know how a Reformed church handled such lockdowns a century ago.

I am delighted to report that Eastern Avenue refused to lock its doors in 1905. It was something of a surprise to the undersigned to learn that any church of a century ago had not complied with a pandemic lockdown. In our 2020 lockdowns, churches that were inclined to remain open were badgered with so many examples of churches long ago that had complied with health lockdowns that one got the impression that no church in the past had ever thought to stay open during sickness. Let the following entries in the consistory minutes of Eastern Avenue CRC in 1905 stand as a correction to that narrative:¹

This meeting was called by the president because of correspondence from the Board of Health. Tomorrow being Sunday, the church doors must remain locked because of the smallpox epidemic in the community. After discussing the matter, it was decided that the ruling was unjust, since churches should be allowed to remain open so that people can gather to pray for healing. Moreover, all places of entertainment have been allowed to operate as

usual. Thus it is decided to hold services regardless.

Because the service last Sunday was interrupted by the entrance of the Officer of the Board of Health, Dr. Koon, who demanded that the service be stopped immediately, two elders...were appointed to go to the Board to point out the error of its ways. Since the Board ignored their objections but would allow church services to be held outdoors, services will be held for the time being in the yard of Mr. Church, under the trees. Mr. Church will be paid up to \$10 per Sunday. Societies will continue to meet in the basement. (86)

Having begun well in 1905, Eastern Avenue capitulated in 1918. The details are scant, but the following entry is recorded:

Because of an outbreak of Spanish influenza, no services will be held. The members of the congregation will be visited by the elders and deacons. (87)

In Christ's church in the world, may the spirit of 1918 recede, and may the spirit of 1905 revive.

Finally, to end on a light note, there was one entry in the minutes that will bring a smile to one's face. It appears that from the beginning Eastern Avenue CRC had a problem with some of its young men being unruly and rambunctious during the worship services—which is not the funny part, of course. The young people often sat together, apart from their families, and the minutes through the decades continually record that men from the congregation had to be assigned to keep order in the balcony and in the back of church.

In 1907 there is this entry from a consistory meeting on a Friday: "Jan Dijkema is made Deputy Sheriff to keep order in back of church during services."

¹ For more reading, see Dewey Engelsma, "COVID (Protestant Reformed Churches) (PRC)," *A Strait Betwixt Two* (blog), April 19, 2021, <https://astraitbetwixttwo.com/2021/04/19/covid/>; Andrew Lanning, "Church and State...and Worship," *Beacon Lights* 79, no. 6 (June 2020): 14–17, <https://www.beaconlights.org/sermons/church-and-state-and-worship/>.

Apparently poor Deputy Dijkema was over-matched that Sunday, for this brief minute appears on Monday: “Jan Dijkema requests handcuffs and a club” (86).

With that, dear readers, I recommend Eastern Avenue’s centennial book as an interesting and instructive bit of history.

—AL

HERMAN HOEKSEMA’S *BANNER* ARTICLES

The Banner

October 30, 1919

(Pp. 677–78)

Our Doctrine by Rev. H. Hoeksema

Article LII. The Fallen King and His Kingdom (continued)

Thus far we reached, in our discussion of Rev. 20:1–10, the following conclusions:

1. The binding of satan mentioned in the text is a symbolic presentation of the restraint placed upon the devil with respect to the nations of Gog and Magog, the nations that live on the four corners of the earth. The purpose of the binding is that the devil may not deceive these nations and gather them for battle against the saints.
2. Gog and Magog represent the nations that live outside of the pale of history and civilization, the heathen nations in general. In the old dispensation it was organized heathendom that was in control of the world’s affairs. In the new dispensation the world is ruled by Christendom.
3. The period referred to in “the thousand years” is in general this entire dispensation. The number 1000 indicates first of all that the length of the period the devil must serve in his prison is measured out according to the counsel of God, and that this time must surely be fulfilled. While the expression “thousand years” at the same time makes us think not of a short but of a long period.
4. The souls that reign with Christ during these same thousand years are not resurrected saints that reign upon the earth with the Lord during a fancied millennium. But they are

bodiless souls, the souls of the saints that have gone before to the church triumphant. It is in this state, before the resurrection, that they reign with Christ in this dispensation.

Before we proceed to discuss the idea of the first resurrection we wish to meet two objections that might be raised. In the first place the objection might be urged that very plainly the text does not refer to the saints of this dispensation, but only to those that worshipped not the beast and his image. We read, vs. 4: “And I saw the souls of them that have been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the Word of God, and such as worshipped not the beast, neither his image and received not the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.” Hence, thus it might be objected, the text refers not to the saints without distinction, not to all the saints of this dispensation, but only to those that live in the world during the reign of the beast, at the final manifestation of antichrist, to those especially that suffered martyrdom because of their faithfulness to the Word of God. Our view of this matter depends upon our conception of the beast and his development in the world. If it is our idea that for centuries in succession the beast does not exist, that, say during the first two thousand years of this dispensation there is no beast; and that rather suddenly he

makes his appearance towards the time of the very end, it must, of course, be granted that the saints referred to in the text include only those of the latter days in the strict sense of the word. But this is by no means the Scriptural presentation of the matter. The beast is in the world. Principally he is present all through the centuries of this dispensation. That this is true is evident from such passages as I John 4:3: "And every spirit that confessed not Jesus is not of God; and this is the spirit of antichrist whereof ye have heard that it cometh; and now it is in the world already." Here John asserts first of all that the principle characteristic of the spirit of antichrist is that it confesseth not Jesus. In another passage he expresses the same thing by saying that antichrist is he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ, (I John 2:22). Wherever, then, you meet with the denial of Christ, wherever you come upon the statement that Jesus is not the Christ, the Anointed of God, there you meet with Antichrist, there you have the beast. And in the second place, in that passage John asserts that the spirit of antichrist is in the world already. It was in the world in John's time. It came to manifestation at that early date. It is in the world all through this dispensation, and it reveals itself in different forms, now without any definite form, now in the form of the state, now again in the manifestation of the church; it will be in the world to the very end. There is, indeed, development. Never shall the beast reveal himself so powerfully as towards the time of the end, when his power shall be so great that even the elect would not endure were it not for the fact that the days are to be shortened. In other words, his fullest development the beast shall not reach until the very last. But this does not alter the fact that the beast is in the world, and that all the people of God have the calling to watch and fight the battle of faith against him. In that battle all through this dispensation some shall suffer martyrdom, others shall not. But all the saints shall be characterized by this, that they shall refuse to worship the beast and his image. And it is, therefore, to all these saints that the text refers. Here they

may suffer. But blessed they are, for they shall reign with Christ in glory presently, and the second death hath no power over them!

A second objection that might probably rise in our minds, is that the glory of the saints in heaven, the glory of the church triumphant is not something peculiar to this dispensation. It may also be said of the church-triumphant of the Old Testament. The text states that the saints lived and reigned with Christ the thousand years. If these thousand years indicate the period of the new dispensation, is there then anything peculiar, anything special in this glory? Did not also the saints of the old dispensation thus reign in glory? And our answer is negative. We often forget that there is development also in the glory of the church-triumphant in heaven. Yet this is actually the case. In order to realize this immediately you need but compare the glory of that church-triumphant at the time of Abel and Enoch with its glory of the present time. Then, there were only few saints in heaven, there was even a time when the first of God's people went thither and when he was there all alone. Now there is a veritable multitude singing before the throne of God and the Lamb. And if you remember that also the church-triumphant cannot be perfectly satisfied before the last of God's saints has joined them, before the whole body of Christ is complete, you will realize the truth of the assertion that there is development in the glory of the church-triumphant. But there is more. There is a distinct difference between the old and the new dispensation, also in the church-triumphant. Before the first advent of Christ, atonement had not been accomplished. In the counsel of God, they were, indeed, chosen in the Lord. And in Him they had also inherited glory. But actual atonement had not been made. They went before they had received the promise. The result was that all through the old dispensation the devil, the accuser of the brethren, claimed that he had a right to them, and that they had no right to the glory. The saints in the O.T. entered into glory, indeed, but they did not reign. It was war in heaven. Michael, the Prince of God's people, was ordered to fight the dragon

in defense of the saints that had entered into glory before atonement was actually accomplished. And it is only when Christ ascends to heaven, when he appears in the midst of the saints, when He receives a name that is above all names, and reigning as King receives the book of the seven seals as the Lamb that had been slain, it is then, that also the dragon is cast out never to appear as the accuser of the brethren again. And, therefore, the glory of the saints of which our passage in Rev. 20 speaks is peculiar of the thousand years. The war in heaven (see Rev. 12:7–12) came to an end with the appearance of Christ in glory, and henceforth they reign with their King the thousand years.

Now, then, how must the expression “this is the first resurrection” be explained?

Strange though it may sound, we would nevertheless make the assertion that it is the millennialist that does not believe in a first and second resurrection, while we do. What the millennialist knows is after only one and the same resurrection, applied to those that shall rise before the dawn of the millennium (first resurrection according to him) and to those that shall receive their bodies after the close of the millennium (the second resurrection). I am aware that some entertain still different views regarding the resurrection, that some even believe in many different resurrections of this kind. But the fact remains that all these resurrections are after all of the same nature. It consists of the raising of the body from its state of separation from the soul. What the millennialist means when he speaks of the first resurrection is not a particular resurrection at all but merely the resurrection of the body applied to a certain group. In other words, the difference between the millennialist and us may be stated as follows: he believes in one resurrection applied to different groups of people (the resurrection of the body); we believe in different stages of resurrection applied to the same saints.

We maintain that it is the latter idea that is expressed in the text. The text does not speak of the same bodily resurrection applied to particular groups of people, but of a first stage of resurrection applied to the saints in Christ.

That this is true is plain in the first place from the very expression: “**this** is the first resurrection.” What is the first resurrection? Of course, the resurrection that is described in the preceding verses. “**This**” refers back to those verses. What was told us there? Simply that the souls of the faithful over against the beast and his image reigned in glory with Christ. What then is the first resurrection? The passing of the saints from the church-militant into the church-triumphant. That is the plain implication of the text. It is exegetically incorrect to proceed from the idea of a bodily resurrection in order to carry that idea into the preceding verses. “This is the first resurrection” reflects back upon what has been stated before. And, therefore, if you want to know what is the first resurrection, you must turn to those first of all. And, therefore, once more, the passing on of the saints from the church-militant to the church-triumphant is their first resurrection. Neither is this so strange. Believers in this life still lie in the midst of death. With a thousand ties they are connected with their old nature, and through that old nature with the first Adam and with a sinful world. These ties that bind them to death itself are broken when they pass into the church above. It is their deliverance from the body of this death. And, therefore, it is not strange at all that the text calls this the first resurrection of the saints. Thus you grasp at the same time the comfort there is implied in this passage. It is this: believers never die! They merely pass through different stages of resurrection. And the first of these takes place at the moment of their passing away from this world.

That this is the correct conception of this expression is plain, too, from its contrast with that other term: “second death.” Second death is not the same stage of death applied to different groups of people, but it is a certain stage of death. Just as believers pass through different stages of resurrection, so the unbelievers pass

through different stages of death, till they arrive in their final stage, in the pool that burns with fire and brimstone, where are the beast and the false prophet. Thus the contrast is maintained correctly. First and second death are two different stages of death applied to the same persons. But then, it must be admitted that first and second resurrection must be understood in the same sense, namely, as referring to two different stages of deliverance from

death for the same saints. The first, according to the text, is the deliverance of the soul from death, the severing of all the ties that bind her to spiritual death in this dispensation, the complete deliverance of the new man, if you please. The second is the resurrection of the body.

There is one more objection that may be raised on the basis of vs. 5.

But about this next week.

—Holland, Mich.



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