

The STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

This stable and this manger are the divinely appointed place for this Child! True, circumstances determined it so: because there was no room for them in the inn! But God determined the circumstances. Here in this poor stable, in that humble manger, among the beasts of the field, on the very edge of the world, He sent His Son, made of a woman, made under the law. . . .

Do not destroy the sign, for it speaks!

It proclaims that in your heart and my heart, in human society, in all the world, there is no room for the Son of God!

Until He makes room for Himself!

Glory to His grace!

(Taken from "The Mystery of Bethlehem")

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THE STANDARD BEARER

Semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August.

Published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc.
Second Class Postage Paid at Grand Rapids, Mich.

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Editorial Policy: Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions for the Question-Box Department are welcome. Contributions will be limited to approximately 300 words and must be neatly written or typewritten, and must be signed. Copy deadlines are the first and the fifteenth of the month. All communications relative to the contents should be sent to the editorial office.

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Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506

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Subscription Policy: Subscription price, \$7.00 per year (\$5.00 for Australasia). Unless a definite request for discontinuance is received, it is assumed that the subscriber wishes the subscription to continue without the formality of a renewal order, and he will be billed for renewal. If you have a change of address, please notify the Business Office as early as possible in order to avoid the inconvenience of delayed delivery. Include your Zip Code.

Advertising Policy: The *Standard Bearer* does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$3.00 fee. These should be sent to the Business Office and should be accompanied by the \$3.00 fee. Deadline for announcements is the 1st or the 15th of the month, previous to publication on the 15th or the 1st respectively.

Bound Volumes: The Business Office will accept standing orders for bound copies of the current volume; such orders are filled as soon as possible after completion of a volume. A limited number of past volumes may be obtained through the Business Office.

MEDITATION

Christmas Peace

Rev. H. Veldman

"And on earth peace, good will to men."

Luke 2: 14b

The birthday of our Lord Jesus Christ is indeed a day full of contrasts. Jesus is born, and for Him of Whom the Scriptures declare that the ends of the earth have been given Him for an inheritance and that He is the King of kings, there is no room in the inn.

His birth is announced by angels, first by Gabriel, and then by an heavenly chorus. And it is announced to shepherds as they were watching over their flocks, and at night. Mary is the mother of Jesus and she is a virgin! The Babe is Lord of all, and yet the Servant of

servants. He is the Eternal Who is also temporal, the Infinite Who is also finite, the Almighty Who is also weak, God Who is also man.

It is ever thus when Christ is involved. We have here the Absolute Contrast, the Absolute Antithesis, the Either — Or. He is received or not received, worshipped and loved or hated and despised; you embrace Him or you reject Him; you lay your all at His feet or take from Him even the swaddling clothes, and finally nail Him to the cross.

The same contrast characterizes this Scripture: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men." On earth peace! Peace then? Peace now? Through Christ? What an amazing message of the angels!

* * * * *

Peace on earth — what an amazing paradox! The angels sing here of *peace* on earth. Peace is harmony, unity, agreement, fellowship, concord. The opposite of peace is discord, enmity, hatred, war, misery, and death. We read here of peace *on earth*. That simply means that peace has come upon earth, this earth. Peace upon earth, also today, and this in spite of wars and rumors of wars! Moreover, we simply read of peace on earth. Notice, there is nothing uncertain here. The text does not speak of a possibility of peace, or that the reality of peace is predicted for the future. Scripture here simply speaks of a fact; the text informs us that with the birth of Mary's firstborn peace has come upon the earth.

How amazing!

Imagine the setting of this announcement of the angels! The birth of our Lord Jesus Christ occurs in Israel's darkest hour. It is some four hundred years ago that the last prophet, Malachi, had proclaimed the word of the Lord. There had been no word of God since. The office of the high priest had become a plaything in the hands of Rome. The king, too, who sat upon the throne of David, was appointed by Rome. And at the time of Jesus' birth none other was kind but Herod the Great, a monster of iniquity, an Idumaean and not even a Jew. Rome exercised complete dominion; Israel appeared completely under the domination of the carnal element; the people of the Lord who looked and longed for the realization of the promise were so painfully few. Peace on earth? Where? Is it not a good thing that the announcement of Jesus' birth, this so-called Prince of Peace, was limited to a few ignorant shepherds, and this in the middle of the night?

What was the peace which this Child brought upon the earth, and as long as He was upon the earth? What was the effect upon Herod when the news was brought to him by the Wise Men from the east concerning Christ's birth? It is Jesus, we understand, Who

presents His credentials to Herod, through these wise men. The Babe of Bethlehem directs these Magi to Herod, to announce to the king the birth of the King of the Jews. And the result? Immediate steps are taken by King Herod to destroy the Babe of Bethlehem.

Besides, did this Jesus bring peace upon the earth? It seems that wherever He went and preached, the very opposite of peace was the result. To be sure, people followed and acclaimed Him, but only as long as they did not understand Him, as, for example, the Galilean multitude of John 6. People surely had the opportunity to express themselves with respect to Him. Jesus did not isolate Himself from the children of men, did not operate in some remote corner. He was constantly in the limelight. He taught in the temple, went up and down in the land; His Name was upon the lips of all. And their reaction to Him? He was called a gluttonous man and a winebibber; they called Him an ally of Beelzebub, a friend of sinners, a deceiver, a mad man with whom nobody could do anything. Did He bring peace upon the earth and was He received as such? We know better.

Finally, they disposed of Him upon the cross of Calvary. What a miserable failure He was, this Prince of Peace! In fact, He even opposed all efforts on the part of His disciples to unite behind Him and establish an earthly kingdom! And this is not all!

What happens with respect to the church after His death and resurrection and glorification? Persecution and tribulation are the lot of those who would follow after Him. And is there peace on earth? Wars and rumors of wars continue throughout the ages.

* * * * *

Jesus, the Prince of Peace and War — how real and understandable! He is surely the Prince of Peace! Peace, we have noted, is harmony, unity, agreement between two or more persons who are united in a bond of love and fellowship. Bethlehem's Babe is indeed the Prince of Peace. God is the God of peace. There is in God no discord. The peace in God is that perfection in the alone living God, whereby He, as the Triune Jehovah, in the bond of infinite perfection, is in eternal harmony and fellowship with Himself. Understanding this, we understand that the natural man is a child of war. He is that in himself, in all his heart and soul and life. He is a child of war and of hell, because he hates God; there is no fear of God in his heart, no will or desire to love Him, to seek Him; he hates the living God, always holds the truth, that God is God, under in unrighteousness. Christ alone is the Prince of Peace. He is that in Himself as the eternal Son of God, co-eternal and co-equal with the Father and the Spirit. And He is the Prince of Peace as Man. All men are by nature enemies of God and of

one another. He alone is at peace with God; He alone is in perfect harmony with God. Also, as far as His calling is concerned, He knows no other desire than to do the will of God.

Hence, Jesus and enmity are inseparably connected. What else can one expect in the midst of an evil and corrupt world! What else can we expect when the one and only Servant of Jehovah confronts the natural man who hates God? What else can we expect of a Herod, of the scribes and Pharisees and Sadducees? What else can be expected of you, of me?

Nevertheless, there is peace on earth. There is peace on earth — in Him! Indeed, the angels may surely sing: Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth. This peace is a fact, because Christ is born. Ever since Adam turned his back upon the Lord and allied himself with the father of lies, this earth has become a spiritual inferno of hatred and enmity; upon this earth God looks down from heaven to behold the children of men, and, lo, there is none that seeketh after God, none that doeth good. But now in Bethlehem a mortal is born, in whose heart and soul is peace, the first of His kind in all the history of the world.

And there is peace on earth, through Him. He is the Prince of Peace. And that He is the Prince of Peace means also that He bestows peace. He is the *Prince* of peace, leads us into peace, the blessed covenant fellowship with God in everlasting and heavenly immortality. He is this because He is Immanuel, God with us. That He is Immanuel means that God Himself came to us. We did not go to Him. God placed Himself, the Almighty God, the Everlasting Father, underneath the burden of our enmity and sin and guilt — this is the key to our salvation, the how and why of our salvation.

And as that Prince of Peace He realizes this peace. This happens centrally upon the cross. He realizes the state of peace. O, He does not change a hating God into a loving Father. For God so loved the world, . . . He reconciles us to God, bears all our sin and pays all our debt, and merits everlasting life. As the Prince of Peace, He also realizes this peace throughout the ages. No, He does not work or pray for the peace of the nations. As far as the wicked are concerned, He brings, not peace, but a sword, sets father against son, etc; He calls into being the red horse and the black horse of Revelation 6. He realizes peace, by His grace and Spirit, in the hearts of His own. He delivers us from our natural hatred and enmity against God, sheds God's love abroad in our hearts, and gives us the unspeakably wonderful assurance that all is well between us and the living God. And He will come

again upon the clouds of heaven. He will return, not as He came to us in Bethlehem. But He will come again, personally and bodily, in great power and glory, to realize for all His own God's eternal and heavenly tabernacle with man.

* * * * *

This peace, of course, is very particular. We do not read here literally: peace on earth, good will to men. But we do read this: peace on earth in men of good will. O, this does not mean: peace on earth in men who are kindly disposed. There are no such people. Then peace would never be ours. The text, however, means: peace on earth in the men of God's will, God's good pleasure, in them who are the objects of God's sovereign good pleasure and to whom it pleases the Lord to bestow His peace.

Now we see the beauty of this word of God. O, it may at first glance appear strange that the angels should exercise their talents before a few shepherds, and that the most wonderful choir should display its musical talents in the presence of a few humble shepherds who undoubtedly were not too musically inclined. What of it? This peace of God belongs only to a few. There is peace on earth only in those who are the objects of God's sovereign love and good pleasure. Now everything becomes beautifully understandable. There is peace on earth, now, in Bethlehem, only in the elect, for Christ is born, and Christ is the Head of the elect; He came for them and for them alone. There is presently peace on earth, only for the elect, also on Calvary. Indeed, do not be surprised that Jesus then stands alone, that all forsake Him, also His disciples. We have peace only through Him and apart from Him we are all enemies of God! How understandable that we should crucify Him. But He is the Prince of Peace for us. Also and particularly when we kill Him! For He came to save us, and, as the Prince of Peace, uses our enmity to realize His cross, and the eternal salvation of His own. Indeed, He loved us while we were yet sinners.

And so there is peace on earth, in the elect of the living God, throughout the ages. Be not alarmed about wars and rumors of wars; a world at peace would be far more horrible than a world at war. Christ, then, would never return, inasmuch as wars and rumors of wars are also the signs of His coming. Do you have and taste the peace of God in your hearts? Seek not the things that are below; trust not in worldly peace conferences; all these peace efforts are doomed to fail; God sits in the heavens and He laughs at them. Trust in God and in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who saved you, and look forward to the day of your perfect and everlasting deliverance.

EDITORIALS

Our Australasian Tour (5)

Prof. H.C. Hoeksema

Besides the Sunday gatherings in Christchurch, there were three other meetings, two on Monday, June 30, and one on Thursday, July 3, on the eve of our departure from New Zealand.

Our first meeting, though small, was one of the most significant of our New Zealand tour. In the office at brother van Rij's home we met with the two elders of the Christchurch Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the brethren van Rij and Young. It was at this meeting that we received concrete and official evidence of the fact that the Orthodox Presbyterian Churches are looking to our Protestant Reformed Churches for ecclesiastical fellowship and help. For at this meeting the brethren of the Christchurch Session extended to us as emissaries of our churches, and through us to our churches, a Macedonian call, "Come over and help us." Rev. Hanko and I were rather overwhelmed by this evidence of the esteem in which our churches are held by these brethren, as well as by the tremendous implications of this request. We discussed the matter at some length, making plain that we were not empowered to commit our churches on this request, but promising, too, that we personally would recommend favorable action. Rather than leave the conveying of such a weighty request to our word-of-mouth, we advised the brethren to follow this oral request with an official letter to our Committee for Contact With Other Churches. This was done in a letter dated July 29. Hence, I am in a position to let their request speak for itself. Here is the letter:

Committee for Contact With Other Churches,
Protestant Reformed Churches in America,
c/o Prof. H.C. Hoeksema, Sec'y

Dear Brethren,
Greetings in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

By the time this letter is brought to your notice Professor Hoeksema and Rev. Hanko will, we trust, have furnished you with a report on their Australasian visit. That assumed, there is little need to introduce this letter, except to express our deepest gratitude to your committee and all who were used of God to

make this tour possible. Its memories remain as an unforgettable and unspeakably blessed expression of the mercy of our covenant God.

While in New Zealand, Prof. Hoeksema and Rev. Hanko met with the session of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Christchurch on June 30 to discuss possible future ties between respective churches. Further to that meeting, we would submit the following for the prayerful consideration and action of your committee.

1. Since the organization of our congregation in June 1974, we have been without a minister of the Word of God. From that time we have been constant and earnest in our prayers that God would mercifully lead us to a man well fitted to labour among us in this office.

2. Over the months, two things have become increasingly evident to us all:

(a) that professing "Reformed" Presbyterian ministers in New Zealand have shown little interest (rather scepticism) in the endeavors of the O.P.C. to stand uncompromisingly upon Scripture and the confessions.

(b) that as our knowledge and understanding of the Reformed Faith has grown, bonds of unity and likemindedness with the Protestant Reformed Churches in America have developed. The reality and degree of that unity will, we trust, be witnessed to you by Prof. Hoeksema and Rev. Hanko.

3. For some time prior to the arrival of the representatives of the Protestant Reformed Churches in New Zealand, it was the expressed desire and intent of the congregation in Christchurch to discuss with them the possibility of a minister from the Protestant Reformed Churches coming to New Zealand to help in establishing a Church in Christchurch faithful to the Word of God and the Reformed confessions.

4. This matter was discussed at some length with Prof. Hoeksema and Rev. Hanko, and upon their recommendation, the session of the O.P.C. in Christchurch would submit to the Protestant Reformed Churches in America through its Committee for Contact with Other Churches the following request:

"that an ordained Minister of the Protestant Reformed Church in America be sent to Christchurch,

New Zealand to serve as a minister of the Word of God to the congregation of the O.P.C. in that city, and to help in establishing a testimony faithful to the Word of God and the Reformed Confessions in that land."

Professor Hoeksema and Rev. Hanko are familiar with proposals concerning the support and duration of the ministry, and we are confident that they will wisely represent this request as they are led of God.

Meanwhile, we prayerfully await your consideration of this request, confident that "He who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

Yours in His Name,

A.W. Young
W. van Rij

I will not comment in detail on this request at this time; I prefer to let this letter speak for itself and to make its own impact. It is plain, I think, that this is a matter of tremendous import for our churches at their next synod. Our Contact Committee has gone on record unanimously as favoring this request in substance; and we are in the process of getting information and studying various details with a view to presenting a carefully worked out proposal to our next synod.

The second meeting, on Monday evening, and the third, on Thursday evening, were well-attended cottage meetings at the home of Mr. and Mrs. van Rij. Those who attended were mostly young people who have rather recently come to the Reformed faith. At these two meetings we did not have any fixed subject; but we had received in advance a long list of questions in which the Christchurch people were especially interested. These were questions both of a doctrinal and a practical nature. These young people take their Reformed faith very seriously, and they mean to put it into practice in their lives. But this very fact gives rise to many serious questions on their part. And many of these questions became the subject of our discussions at these two cottage meetings.

Tuesday, July 1, at 10 o'clock in the morning, we boarded the plane for Dunedin, at the south end of the South Island. Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Young accompanied us. Dunedin is the nearest we came to the South Pole during our tour; and frankly, the weather felt like we were near the South Pole. We were told that the temperature had hit a record low that morning of -13 Celsius. After a long ride in from the airport, we had noon lunch at the home of Dr. and Mrs. Andre van Rij, who were also Rev. Hanko's hosts during our brief stay. Mrs. Hoeksema and I had as our hosts Mr. and Mrs. Alan Kerr. Mr. Kerr is a student at the notorious Knox Theological College of the Presbyterian Church — the school where Prof. Geering (who denied the resurrection) taught. Some of you

may remember that a few years ago Prof. Hanko commented on this matter in *All Around Us*. During the course of our stay with Mr. Kerr, we learned that there is not a single faculty member who even holds to the doctrine of vicarious atonement. That will give you some idea of the low estate of Presbyterianism in New Zealand.

There is no Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Dunedin at present. The people with whom we had contact were of a very mixed background. Some were from the local Reformed Church, of which the Rev. P. Berghouse is pastor. We also had the opportunity to meet a couple of serious-minded Reformed young men from other parts of New Zealand who are studying at the university in Dunedin. Others whom we met were from the mainline Presbyterian Church. And some were members of an independent People's Church. I should also mention that in Dunedin we noticed for the first time on our tour considerable influence of the AACS, or Toronto movement.

On the whole, we were not favorably impressed by what we observed in Dunedin. Nevertheless, we kept rather busy in the afternoon and evening; and we had opportunity to testify of the Reformed truth; and we may safely leave to the Lord the results of our labors there. During the afternoon Mrs. Hoeksema talked to a group of some 14 ladies concerning child training and Christian education. There is some interest in this area in establishing a Christian school; however, the movement appears to be rather AACS oriented. Rev. Hanko and I met with a group of students at the home of Mr. Kerr during the afternoon. We also had the opportunity through this meeting to learn firsthand what inroads heresy has made within the church. Sometimes it does one good to come into personal contact with these things to learn how serious the situation of the church of today really is. During that same afternoon we had occasion to visit for a while with the Rev. Berghouse. And while his reception of us was hospitable, he made it very plain that he resented the *Standard Bearer's* attack on Dr. Runia's doctrinal position and that he himself to this day does not believe Runia's position to be heretical. However, he declined our invitation to document his claim that Runia was orthodox in his teachings at Geelong.

In the evening there was a public meeting at St. Mark's Presbyterian Church. Although the weather was rather cold and damp, we had an audience of 29. We had been advertised as speaking on the topic, "Our Calling As the Salt of the Earth in Relation to the State." It was not a subject which lent itself to a direct discussion of vital issues of the Reformed faith. And although I attempted, in the limited time available, to draw the line of the antithesis, the line of sin and grace, of church and world, there was apparent in

the course of the discussion a disinclination to discuss vital issues. The questions of the evening centered more about politics, our calling in society, labor unions, etc. And again, there became evident not a little of the leaven of the AACCS in the thinking of some of the audience. While there were exceptions, we did not find in our contacts in Dunedin much dedication to the Reformed position. It is to be hoped that our brief visit kindled some serious thinking about these matters.

Lest I forget, there was one more event at Dunedin — an important one! While in that faraway city Mrs. Hoeksema and I received a cablegram informing us of the birth of our second grandson, Matthew Allan Kamps.

But we wish to finish our New Zealand tour in this article; so we must hasten on to Nelson, a beautiful harbor city at the north end of the South Island. We left the Dunedin airport a little after noon on July 2; catching our only glimpse of the rugged and snowy Southern Alps aloft, we arrived at Nelson in mid-afternoon. We were warmly welcomed at Nelson by the Rev. Ivo Bishop, the local Orthodox Presbyterian pastor, and were immediately taken for afternoon tea to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Scott Hunter, where Mrs. Hoeksema and I were to lodge. The flock at Nelson has a membership, if I remember correctly, of 30 to 40 souls. Pastor Bishop and his flock only recently separated from the Presbyterian Church (April of 1974), and did so at considerable material sacrifice. At our evening meeting at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Button, Rev. Hanko's hosts, not all of the congregation could be present. But there was a group of 21, to whom Rev. Bishop gave us a very warm and friendly introduction. The subject for the evening was Sovereign, Particular Grace, in connection with Ephesians 2:8. While our instruction encountered some opposition, especially with respect to the doctrine of predestination, there was evident a receptive spirit in the meeting and a willingness to be instructed from the Word of God. As Pastor Bishop himself made plain at the conclusion of the meeting, there is need for instruction and growth in the knowledge of the truth in this relatively new little congregation. All in all, we had a pleasant stay in Nelson; and we welcomed the opportunity to get acquainted with Rev. Bishop, with whom we had been in correspondence for a few years, dating back to the time when he was still in the mainline Presbyterian Church.

On Thursday morning, July 3, we had time for a fast sight-seeing tour of the beautiful countryside surrounding Nelson. The irrepressible Mr. Hunter was our tour guide; and he managed, I am sure, to show us as many sights as possible in the limited time available. Then it was back to the airport after noon lunch with the Bishops, and back to Christchurch at

about 4 P.M. It was our last evening in New Zealand; and at the conclusion of the evening's meeting we were presented with a few remembrances. Even without those remembrances, we shall long remember our stay in New Zealand and our fellowship with God's people there. And it was with a certain amount of sadness that we bade our friends farewell the next morning at Christchurch airport. But it was time to depart. Our Air New Zealand DC-10 took us to Melbourne, Australia, where we had a 5-hour layover; and from thence we flew to Wynyard, in the northwest corner of the island-province of Tasmania. That was the way we spent the 4th of July!

A few concluding remarks about this section of our tour are in order.

In the first place, we were deeply impressed by the experience of genuine fellowship with likeminded brethren and sisters in Christ nearly everywhere we went. Of course, in theory we knew all along that God has His people everywhere. But to experience this in actual fact is just a little different. In many places we stayed only a little while; but how often we had the feeling of being thoroughly at home in a short time and of talking and discussing with people of God just as though we had known them a long time. What we were experiencing, of course, was the communion of saints. And how blessed that is!

In the second place, a word about the Orthodox Presbyterian Churches in New Zealand. Let me put it this way. If I were in New Zealand and were faced by the question of my church membership, judging according to the marks of the church, I would not hesitate to cast my lot with the Orthodox Presbyterian Churches. Yes, they are small and struggling. From an outward and material point of view they do not have much; they face an uphill battle. No, they are not perfect by any means. There is much room for instruction and growth in the Reformed faith. They undoubtedly will face many problems in the near future. They are a young communion of churches. In some ways they remind one of the earlier days of our own churches. Some of their little congregations reminded me of some of our own struggling little churches. But one thing impressed me as we sojourned among them, and that was their dedication to and their interest in the truth of Scripture and the confessions. Personally, I am certain that if ever one of our ministers should go to labor in New Zealand, he would have no difficulty on that score: he would soon feel himself thoroughly at one with the brethren and sisters in principle.

In the third place, the little group of Orthodox Presbyterian Churches are to be encouraged to persevere. There is much work to be done among them and by them. They must expand their witness. They must themselves become more thoroughly founded in

the truth. In the not too distant future they should, I believe, complete their ecclesiastical organization, form a presbytery, adopt a church order. And we as Protestant Reformed Churches must encourage, and, where possible, assist them. Personally, I am convinced that if at all possible, we should loan them one of our ministers. On a longer range basis, one of the best ways we could assist them, if this could be implemented, would be to train their future ministers in our seminary. And above all, pray for them! In our prayers we often pray for God's church in other lands, wherever it is represented. To me personally, this tour has brought the reality of God's church in other lands a little nearer. And I hope that this report

of our visit to New Zealand has also made the churches there a bit more real to you, our readers. If the report has accomplished that, it has to a degree succeeded.

[Note: Our friend and brother, Bill van Rij, underwent open-heart surgery a few weeks ago. According to the last report which we received, the operation was satisfactory, but his convalescence was a bit slow. We are thankful that the Lord has restored thus far, and we hope and pray that He will continue to sustain our brother and, if it be His will, restore him to health and strength and to useful service in the labors of His church there.]

FEATURE ARTICLE

On Christmas Observance

Rev. Rodney Miersma

It is that time of year again when we celebrate what is called Christmas. One does not forget this day because the world will not let us forget. We are shown and encouraged to buy Christmas gifts already in the middle of the summer. Christmas, for all practical purposes, has become a secular holiday devoid of any spiritual significance. This brings us to the question as to what really is the origin, meaning, and purpose of the observance of Christmas.

The church did not always celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ by observing a particular day. Perhaps this is partly due to the fact that we cannot determine with any certainty the exact date of Christ's birth either from evidence in the Scriptures or from any sound tradition. Historical authorities place the time that Christmas was first celebrated somewhere in the middle of the fourth century. December 25 was chosen because, in the opinion of some, the universe was created on the vernal equinox, reckoned in the Julian calendar as March 25. Similar habits of thought would make the beginning of the new creation, the inception of the incarnation, fall on the same day, and therefore Christ's birth on the winter solstice, December 25. This date was a heathen festival day celebrating the birthday of the Mithraic *Sol Invictus*, the Sun-god. This was the day in which the unconquered sun, after the winter solstice, broke the growing power of darkness, and began anew his heroic career.

It is easily seen, then, how this heathen festival was turned into a Christian holiday. Christmas is the birthday of Christ, the Sun of righteousness, the Light of the world. Thus, according to St. Cyprian and St. John Chrysostom, the church grasped the opportunity to turn the people away from a purely pagan observance of the winter solstice to a day of adoration of Christ the Lord. Although Christmas was celebrated since the fourth century, it was not always called by that name. The word Christmas means Christ's Mass and was first used in England in the eleventh century. In German the word is *Weihnacht* (holy night) while the Dutch has *Kerstmis* (yule mass). The latter reveals a direct connection with the old heathen festival, for the word yule comes from the Anglo-Saxon *geol* which was a feast, particularly the feast of the winter solstice.

In light of the above facts we may begin to question ourselves as to whether or not there is any Biblical root for the celebration or commemoration of Christmas. The ancient church was not agreed on the answer and neither were the churches of the Reformation. The Puritans, for example, condemned the celebration and, from 1642 to 1652, issued a series of ordinances forbidding all church services and festivities. This feeling was carried over from England to America by the Pilgrims and it was not until the nineteenth-century wave of Irish and German immigration that enthusiasm for the feast began to spread

throughout the country. This caution is more than likely due to the fact that Scripture neither enjoins nor forbids such a celebration, and from the fear of falling into the practice of observing all kinds of holy days as was the prevalent practice of the Roman Catholic church.

What, then, is the meaning and purpose of Christmas observance? Does its value lie in the keeping of a day? Certainly not, for if its value were in the keeping of the day, God in His infinite wisdom would surely have made known unto us the exact day on which Christ was born. The regarding of a day as holy in itself or better than another day is condemned by Scripture, as seen in Paul's letter to the Galatians in chapter 4 verse 10. The Galatians had fallen under the influence of the Judaizers and were going back to the bondage of the law by observing days, months, times, and years. Certainly, then, the value of the celebration of Christmas does not lie in the observance of the day itself.

Rather, the value lies in its special attention to one of the wonders of grace. In this case it draws attention to the wonder of God's grace with respect to the incarnation of the Word. We celebrate or commemorate the wonder of God's grace with respect to Good Friday, Easter, Ascension Day, and Pentecost. None of these would have any meaning for us if Christ first had not been born. This does not mean that we exclude attention to the incarnation at other times. No, this must be the heart of every sermon preached. Without the incarnation of the Word there is no salvation for us and no good news in the gospel. But a celebration of the birth of Christ does serve specifically to point to the wonder of the Word made flesh just as the observance of Good Friday and Easter point specifically to the death and resurrection of our Lord. So the observance of Christmas certainly has spiritual value for the true child of God.

Granted that the meaning and purpose have been established, we may distinguish various phases of such observances, first of all, in and by the church. Article 67 of our Church Order reads:

"The Churches shall observe, in addition to the Sunday, also Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension Day, Pentecost, the Day of Prayer, the National Thanksgiving Day, and Old and New Year's Day."

This is a complete turnabout from what such early Reformers as Zwingli, Calvin, and Knox thought. It was their conviction that festival days were not ordained by God, but were a human invention which minimized Sunday and led to paganistic celebrations and promoted licentiousness. Thus, the Synod of Dordt, 1574, discouraged the observance of all other days than Sunday. This soon changed, however. Monsma and Van Dellen in *The Church Order*

Commentary, page 274, write:

"The Synod of Dordt, 1578, Article 75, declared in substance that it would be desirable to celebrate Sunday only according to God's ordinance. But, inasmuch as Christmas Day and the day following upon Christmas, as well as the days following upon Easter and Pentecost and in some places also New Year's Day, and Ascension Day were legal holidays by authority of the governments, the Ministers should preach appropriately on these days in order to turn a fruitless and harmful idleness (*lediggang*) into a holy and profitable exercise."

Since then subsequent Synods have revised and changed the article till it now reads as found in our Church Order which was redacted in 1914.

In this way the Church Order declares that Christmas Day must be observed by us as churches. This implies official worship services which have as their center the official, authoritative, and pure preaching of the Word of God. Other than that, our Church Order does not specify how nor to what extent we must observe Christmas. This would lead us to ask ourselves whether or not we as churches are observing this day in the best possible way, or whether there is room for improvement. We know that as long as we are pilgrims here upon this earth we are not and will not become perfect. We must strive always to better both our institutional and personal lives. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit we must seek to glorify God more and more. Certainly we must not give way to what so many churches, even those of Reformed persuasion, are doing: replacing the preaching of the Word by programs of Christmas songs and pageantry and similar ways of celebration. These programs of song are not evil in themselves and surely can be a means whereby our hearts are lifted up, but they must never take the place of the proclamation of the gospel. Christmas observance without preaching is giving way to the anti-christ and his father the devil, who are continually trying to lead us away from the Captain of our salvation.

The same thing is true within our covenant homes and schools. We must guard against a pagan observance which is pushed upon us by every means available to the wicked world. It is indeed proper to accompany such a celebration with feasting and rejoicing and making merry. The Christian does not need to walk about on this earth with a long, sad face. He, of all people, is the most happy because of the lovingkindness of God made manifest to him by God's gift to His own, manifest especially in the incarnation and subsequent suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. And he may express that Scriptural and spiritual joy outwardly as well as inwardly. To do this we do not have to join the drunken reveling of this wicked world. No, we may

feast, rejoice, and make merry as long as in so doing we can always answer affirmatively the question of whether we are glorifying the name of our Lord God. Then we will not fall into the vice of licentiousness, but rather will praise God. This is the end unto which we were formed by God.

This same principle of God's glory will also govern our use of many customs that are connected with Christmas, such as Christmas trees, decorations, gift-giving, etc. The origin of most of these customs is pagan, but their origin should not have to affect our use of them. The danger, of course, is always present that these externals become all-important. This is the case with the world and the apostate church. All the emphasis is upon the giving of gifts, not to show the mercy of Christ, but to extol a benevolent human

society governed by the notion of good works. To stay free of this horrible error we must constantly fight, instructing our children as to the real significance of Christmas. This is not always so easy to do, for our children are bombarded from every side by the ideas of the world. But we must not give up and say that it is no use, that it is hopeless anyway. This is one of the burdens which God has placed upon us to strengthen us for the battle of faith. Such burdens are always accompanied by sufficient grace to bear that burden, as only a child of God can. May we in this Christmas season exercise our Christian liberty not as the Antinomians, unto licentiousness that grace may abound, but in the freedom of Jesus Christ, to glorify the name of our God by confessing the name of Jesus Christ over against the wicked world's Santa Claus.

STUDIES IN ISAIAH

False Guides and Crooked Judges (20)

Isaiah 3:12-15

Rev. Robert C. Harbach

The prophet had just expressed his great thought, "Say ye to the righteous that it shall be well with him," setting down a magnificent truth. It is well with the righteous because his greatest trouble is past. His present sufferings are but a pin-prick compared to the promised glories of heaven. It is well with the righteous because his next worst trouble is doomed. The penalty of his sin is removed. The power of sin, which always plagues him, is conquered. Indwelling sin is defeated in the blood of Christ. For the Cross is the spear thrust through the heart of sin. It is well with the righteous because his best things are safe. If your ship is wrecked, your treasure is not on board. If thieves break in and steal, they cannot get at your inheritance. It is reserved in heaven for you. If moth and rust corrupt your earthly things, an everlasting robe of righteousness awaits you. The best things of the righteous time cannot change, nor death rob of them. For the righteous, the worst things work together for good. He gains by loss, is healthy by sickness, wins friends by bereavement, is by defeat more than conqueror. With the righteous it is well in every way. He is well fed, on the flesh and blood of Christ; well clothed, in the best robe of Christ's righteousness; well housed, dwelling in God; well married,

to the heavenly bridegroom; well provided ("the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."). The righteous gets out of and gets good out of the worst evil. He knows how to get meat out of the eater and honey out of the strong (Jud. 14:14). It is well with the righteous in his death. When he crosses Jordan he shall be held up and comforted by Hopeful. With the righteous it is well forever.

To go on with the state of the nation of Israel, 1. *Guides for leading in the right way led them out of the way* (v. 12). "My people! Harassers of it (come) from a boy, and women rule over it. My people! The ones leading thee cause to lead astray, and the way of thy paths they devour" (Heb., see Job 39:24). There are churches like this today. The minister is a play-boy, or a woman "preacherette" holds forth with her Jezebelian "sensitivity training" program. Highly dangerous is this programming and conditioning of those submitting to "sensitivity training." It is producing hordes of sex perverts, as mentioned in Romans 1. With "leadership" like this, the right path is swallowed up with not a trace of it left. The people could not find it if they looked for it. Where once the gospel was heard, now, with such blind guides, it is

neither seen nor heard any longer. Under the administration of modernism, the gospel has completely vanished from such churches. Their leaders lead astray. The path which God himself has paved with His own Word they have destroyed. That path has faded away without a trace by the erroneous preaching of false prophets. As with the deadened church, so with our sin-drugged nation: it does not know where to go nor where it is going.

Isaiah is not talking about the literal rule of women over the nation, but rather of womanish, childish, effeminate men, debilitated and cowardly. The nation would rather blindly follow men who are of no estimation, more insignificant than children, who corrupt everything. They would rather slavishly bear their tyrannical burdens than to seek the way of the Lord, which alone is perfect freedom, and to walk in it.

2. *Judges appointed to protect them oppressed them.* "Jehovah will proceed with the elders of His people, and its princes, with justice; and ye have consumed the vineyard (of the Lord, His Church). The spoiling of the poor is in your houses. What (is it) to you (that) ye beat in pieces my people, and the faces (persons) of the poor ones ye grind, saith Adonai Jehovah Tsebhaoth" (vv. 14-15, Heb.). The Lord brings judgment both on His people and upon the world. He proceeds in judgment against His people and the princes of Israel, as judgment must begin at the house of God. The rulers were chiefly responsible to warn the people against the punitive judgments of God, and to teach and lead them in the old paths and the right ways of the Lord. They were rich enough to be above bribes, with estates large enough to care little about coveting those around them. Yet, instead, they consumed the vineyard of the Lord. Not only were they not guardians of the vineyard as required to be, but they were not even good watch-dogs used to keep out cattle which might trample the vines. They were worse than a reckless goat in a cucumber patch. They were more like marauders who pillage and burn the vineyards (Ps. 80:15-16). They, being judges, thought no man had the right to be a judge of what they did, and that all men ought to approve and applaud their worst actions. And their worst was as bad as possible, for the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers took counsel together against the Lord and against His Messiah. They prevented the people from being gathered to Him. They beat the servants of the husbandman of the vineyard. They killed the Son and heir of the husbandman.

In the false, or in the fast-becoming-false church, there are leaders who have apostatized from the truth. They no longer conscientiously hold the doctrine and confessions of the faith, no longer take their ordination vows seriously. Nor do they go outside the church to reorganize a new church according to their

heretical views, with their deformed confessions and deformed ordination vows. No, they destroy the vineyard by infiltration, by replacing the doctrines of the Bible and the confessions with humanistic philosophies, by exchanging the gospel of grace for a social gospel and by humanizing God and deifying man. Gradually the supernatural revelation and the pure preaching of the gospel are supplanted, so that soon there is nothing left but the poor word of man. A thorough and complete work of ruin they have done in many denominations, so that any faithful remnant, faithful to the Scriptures, to the confessions and to the Christ of the Bible, has found itself outside the church, or the church has so completely gone into apostasy and spiritual anarchy that no honest person can remain in it and be true to the Christ of Scripture and the confession of the true church.

So by infiltrating the true church and undermining it at its foundations (its doctrinal standards) false guides have perverted and subverted the church. It has never been their policy to withdraw in the battle for truth and to start a new church, reorganize from the ground up, but they plotted and captured the old church to turn it into a synagogue of Satan. Then those who have the right to its heritage, its offices, institutions and material possessions are forced to relinquish all out of conscience to Christ and His truth. They must go out of what is now the false church, start a new and continuing church with the old, original confessions and the unadulterated ordination vows.

John Horsch in his "Modern Religious Liberalism" writes, "That the denial of the fundamentals within the church necessarily means disaster is not open to argument. Liberalism rejects the supernatural character of Christianity. Natural religion alone is to find favor. It is, by way of illustration, as if that which our Lord has planted — the grapevines — should be suppressed, and that which naturally grows — the briars, burdock, milkweed . . . be permitted to take possession of the vineyard in the hope that ultimately the first fruit will surpass that of the grapevines. Everyone knows what will happen if that which nature is planting in the vineyard be given the right of way. The grapevine has no chance where that which grows naturally is tolerated. Both in morals and religion the good plants require cultivation, effort and care. A general toleration of all plants in the vineyard would be an absurd proposition." (P. 310).

As in the days of the prophets and the apostles, the religion of Jehovah is despised and rejected by the turncoat leaders of the denominations infiltrated with modernism-liberalism. The greatest enemies of the Christian faith are men who hold responsible position in these churches, using their position to flood the churches with the lie of their antichristian philoso-

phies. Christ's worst enemies were the ecclesiastical leaders in the religious body He was a member of by birth. In His day, the masses of the people followed their ecclesiastical dignitaries rather than the Carpenter of Nazareth, or the fishermen of Galilee, or the tent-maker of Tarsus. The apostate church has always despised the faith of Scripture. Now that harlot church is so vile and corrupt it can never recover, but shall be utterly destroyed under the divine judgments of the seven seals, seven trumpets and seven bowls of the wrath of the Lamb of God.

3. *God himself became the Prosecutor, Judge and Executioner.* "The Lord stands firmly to plead a

cause, and takes a stand to judge (the) peoples" (v.13, Heb.). When times are as evil and wicked as they are in the world today, and especially as they are in our nation, the temptation is to suppose that God sits idly, doing nothing about it. The fact is, God is always executing His terrible judgments all throughout time, up to, and as well as at, the end of time. People in general may not care any more about anything. Nothing distrubs them. Nothing shocks them. Few bother to speak one word against any abuse or evil. But God daily judges the wicked by punishing sin with sin. It is a judgment on the nation that we have people in government, in the universities and in the schools with no morals, weak minds and useless lives.

VOICE OF OUR FATHERS

Divine Providence

Prof. Robert D. Decker

We believe that the same God, after he had created all things, did not forsake them, or give them up to fortune or chance, but that he rules and governs them according to his holy will, so that nothing happens in this world without his appointment: nevertheless, God neither is the author of, nor can be charged with, the sins which are committed. For his power and goodness are so great and incomprehensible, that he orders and executes his work in the most excellent and just manner, even then, when devils and wicked men act unjustly. And, as to what he doth surpassing human understanding, we will not curiously inquire into, farther than our capacity will admit of; but with the greatest humility and reverence adore the righteous judgments of God, which are hid from us, contenting ourselves that we are disciples of Christ, to learn only those things which he has revealed to us in his Word, without transgressing these limits. This doctrine affords us unspeakable consolation, since we are taught thereby that nothing can befall us by chance, but by the direction of our most gracious and heavenly Father; who watches over us with a paternal care, keeping all creatures so under his power, that not a hair of our head (for they are all numbered), nor a sparrow, can fall to the ground, without the will of our Father, in whom we do entirely trust; being persuaded, that he so restrains the devil and all our enemies, that without his will and permission, they cannot hurt us. And therefore we reject that damnable error of the Epicureans, who say that God regards nothing, but leaves all things to chance.

Article XIII, The Belgic Confession

We live in tumultuous times. There is in our land and in the world at large abounding lawlessness. One gets so accustomed to the terrible manifestations of sin that nothing shocks him. There are staggering and insoluble problems facing mankind such as the depletion of natural resources, overpopulation and a dwindling food supply. Millions suffer hunger and deprivation. The nations of the world are an armed camp and the threat of a nuclear holocaust is more than imaginary. The result is fear, tension, and anxiety among men. They know not where to turn. Many madly pursue pleasure and "drown their troubles" in drink or the lusts of the flesh. They become cynical and nihilistic and argue that nothing

in this life makes sense. But the child of God is unmoved by these circumstances. He is not afraid. In fact he can and he does rejoice even in these things. That is true of his personal life too. Experiences which would shatter and destroy a man — the loss of a dear child through death or of a marriage partner — he bears with quiet faith. Why? Why is he not afraid in the face of all the fearful phenomena of the world? Why is he able to face and bear even the deepest tragedies, even death itself without being overcome? The answer is, he believes: "... that the same God, after he had created all things, did not forsake them, or give them up to fortune or chance, but that he rules and governs them according to his holy will, so that

nothing happens in this world without his appointment . . .” He knows that his God: “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.” (Eph. 1:11)

It is this truth, providence, of which Article XIII of our Confession speaks. The term, providence, is not found in the Bible. It really is not a very good term, for it does not express the idea of this great doctrine. The word is derived from the Latin and literally means: to see beforehand. This, God neither does, nor reveals concerning this doctrine. God does not merely see ahead what shall be or not be and then adapt Himself to these circumstances. God determines what shall be and He “rules and governs them according to his holy will, so that nothing happens in this world without his appointment.” Nothing, absolutely nothing, happens by chance. Everything great and small, good and bad is governed according to God’s holy will and happens by His appointment.

Three elements are usually distinguished in the doctrine of providence. Providence includes preservation. By this is meant that God continues to give existence to all creatures. Moment by moment God sustains all creatures by His powerful Word. Should God cease this preserving, creation would cease to be. God causes the sun to shine, gathers the clouds together and makes the rain to fall. It is God Who makes the seed sprout in the earth and grow to bear fruit. God causes the creatures of the earth to be born, to live for an appointed time and then to return to the dust. He preserves the mighty lion but also the tiniest insect. God is simply everywhere in all His mighty power preserving all things.

This is true not only of the brute creation but also of man. God determines and controls even the moral acts of men and angels. This element of God’s providence has come to be called by the unfortunate term, cooperation. Unfortunate, we say, because the term cooperation is really incorrect. The impression is left that God merely works with men. This is simply not true. God and man do not work together in some kind of cooperative effort. The Confession states it beautifully when it says: “For his power and goodness are so great and incomprehensible, that he orders and executes his work in the most excellent and just manner, even then, when devils and wicked men act unjustly.” Scripture itself leaves no doubt as to this great truth. The Lord says through His prophet to Cyrus: “I have holden to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut . . . For Jacob my servant’s sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me. I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me . . . I form the light, and create darkness: I make

peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.” (Isaiah 45:1-7) Scripture teaches us that: “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.” (Prov. 21:1) Confessing this truth brings us before that ancient problem of man’s responsibility. There can be no doubt about the fact that the Bible teaches that every man is answerable to God for his deeds whether good or bad. God in His strict justice punishes the ungodly in hell because of all their sin. They justly deserve His holy wrath. Yet God controls all of his actions. Whatever may be said concerning this, certainly one thing is true. God never violates man’s will. No man sins because God forces him to sin. Man sins willingly. Whatever a man does, he does because he wants to do it.

A third element of providence is government. By this we mean, God rules all things. But He does not rule all things arbitrarily. He rules His entire creation in such a way that He infallibly guides it to its eternal purpose. God’s eternal purpose is the perfect manifestation of His glory in Christ and His Body, the Church. To that goal, toward that grand purpose God directs every creature. All things, therefore, must serve that purpose willingly or in spite of themselves. Again the Scriptures speak clearly to this point. Joseph was sold into Egypt, and, while his brothers meant it for evil, God meant it for good to save much people. (cf. Genesis 45:1-7) Judas must betray Christ, and he perishes; but through the cross Christ made atonement for the sin of the elect. So it is that all things great and small, good and evil are directed by God to reach His eternal purpose.

In this connection the article presents an emphatic warning against “curiously inquiring into what he (God) doth surpassing human understanding.” This warning is especially directed against curiously inquiring into the matter of man’s responsibility and God’s sovereignty. In this connection Article XIII teaches two things very plainly. The Article instructs us that “nothing happens without his (God’s) appointment.” This includes even sin. Sin is not some force alongside of God, but it too falls within the scope of His providence. But at the same time: “God neither is the author of, nor can be charged with, the sins which are committed.” This is the teaching of Scripture. The Bible teaches that God raised up Pharaoh to show His power and declare His Name throughout the earth. The history reveals that very plainly. Long before Pharaoh, in the hardness of his heart, pursued Israel to his watery grave in the Red Sea, God had told Moses: “I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no not by a mighty hand. And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go.” (Exodus 3:19, 20)

One can only conclude: "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and who he will he hardeneth." If you object to this and ask: "Why doth he yet find fault?" Why does God hold a Pharaoh accountable for his evil deeds? the Scripture answers firmly: "Nay but O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" (Cf. Romans 9:15-23) Man may not reply against God. This does not mean that we ought speak here of a paradox, an apparent contradiction. Many do. But they use the paradox as support for their inconsistencies and denials of the truth and especially their denial of the truth of God's absolute sovereignty. There are no inconsistencies or contradictions either in God or in His revelation to us. We may not understand or comprehend these things, but that does not mean they are contradictions.

This is the Biblical stance of our Confession. We must understand that God's "power and goodness are so great and incomprehensible, that he orders and executes his work in the most excellent manner, even then, when devils and wicked men act unjustly."

We may note in this connection that the doctrine of providence teaches us to consider all of God's works as miracles or wonders. A miracle is not something out of the ordinary; nor is it something contrary to natural law. A miracle is that act of God whereby He breaks through this creation to reveal His grace. The central miracle is the Wonder of Jesus Christ. All miracles speak of this. And all God's works are wonders. Is it any greater that Jericho's walls fell

down than that the mighty oak should grow from the little acorn? Is the conception and birth of a child any easier for us to understand than the healing of a leper or even the raising of someone from the dead? All God's works are wonders and all those focus on THE wonder, Jesus Christ and the salvation of the elect in Him. Thus it is that all things in this creation under the providence of God are preserved and governed to serve the full manifestation of His glory in the resurrected Church in Christ in the New Creation.

How true it is then that: "This doctrine affords us unspeakable consolation." Nothing happens to us by chance. All things occur under the direction of our heavenly Father "Who watches us with a paternal care." He sends health, but also sickness. He gives life, but also death comes at His command. Prosperity, poverty, affliction, pain, sorrow, joy — all these are sent us out of His gracious love for us in the Lord Jesus Christ. By means of them all we are brought into His fellowship in Christ. In the knowledge and confidence of that blessed truth we can sing triumphantly: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Nay in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." (Romans 8:28-37) This is true: "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen." (Romans 11:36)

ALL AROUND US

The Reformed Witness Hour Cancelled in New Jersey

Rev. H. Veldman

Our Reformed Witness Hour committee received the following communications from WAWZ-FM in Zarephath, New Jersey. They speak for themselves, and we quote:

April 1, 1975

Dear Mr. Prince:

I am writing to acquaint you with certain guidelines for religious programs that have been set up by both the National Association of Broadcasters and National Religious Broadcasters. The code of the former reads in part:

Radio broadcasting, which reaches men of all creeds, simultaneously, shall avoid attacks upon religious faith . . . Religious programs shall be presented respectfully and without prejudice or ridicule . . . Religious programs shall place emphasis on religious doctrines of faith and worship.

The speaker on the REFORMED WITNESS HOUR last Sunday evening was clearly in violation of these guidelines, as well as the guidelines of the station. He mentioned by name the Roman Catholic Church and spoke about what he considered to be their wrong doctrines.

I am not disagreeing theologically with his statements in the least, but to air them on a radio program we cannot permit. Unless I can have written assurance from you that this will not happen again, we will have to terminate the REFORMED WITNESS HOUR at once.

Yours cordially,
WAWZ-FM
w.s. James M. Pearsall
Program Director.

The second communication reads as follows. This letter was dated September 9, 1975. We now quote it:

September 9, 1975

Dear Mr. Prince:

I regret to have to inform you that we must cancel the REFORMED WITNESS HOUR effective immediately.

As you will remember, I wrote to you under date of April 1, 1975 to apprise you of certain statements I heard over one of your broadcasts that were in violation of the N.R.B. and N.A.B. Code of Ethics. The statements at that time, I believe, were in reference to the Church of Rome and its doctrines.

This past Sunday evening (9/7) the speaker on the REFORMED WITNESS HOUR made mention of "Arminianism" in a negative manner and was heard to say that it was, in his opinion, a wrong and un-Biblical doctrine, or words to that effect.

I am sorry, but we cannot permit this to continue over this station. You understand our position, of course.

Yours most cordially,
WAWZ-FM
w.s. James M. Pearsall
Program Director.

In the first place, the latter letter states that mention was made of "Arminianism" in a negative manner, that the speaker was heard to say that it was

a wrong and un-Biblical doctrine, or words to that effect. The undersigned, the speaker of these radio sermons, delivered last March and last September, is sure that he was heard correctly. Of this I have no doubt.

Secondly, the undersigned was not aware of this letter of April 1 last when he delivered the four radio sermons during the month of September. However, this does not matter. I had heard years ago of some such code of ethics. But I know that our radio speakers have again and again condemned the teaching of Arminianism, including the undersigned.

Thirdly, I am not criticizing the position taken by this radio station in Zarephath, New Jersey. It is the conviction of the undersigned that all preaching, also over the radio, must not only be positive but also distinctive. This injunction has surely been laid upon the Church by the Head of the Church, our Lord Jesus Christ. He warns His Church repeatedly to beware of the false prophets who appear as wolves in the midst of sheep, wearing sheep's clothing, Matt. 7:15. And the apostle warns the church at Ephesus, Eph. 4:14, 15: "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ." To preach the gospel certainly means that it be preached in all its purity and that it be defended against all error.

Finally, this surely should show us how easy it will be to stifle the voice of the church as it would proclaim the pure gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. And this day is coming. Let us arm ourselves, and also our children, with respect to this eventuality, that we may be able to stand in that day. Incidentally, the radio committee deemed it advisable that I comment on this in our rubric of ALL AROUND US.

Reformation Sunday Will Mark Pulpit Exchange With RCA

In the *Banner* of Sept. 26, 1975 the following appears on page 22, and I quote this article in part which has the above for its heading:

A wall is not a fence, and a fence is not a wall — at least not as I picture them. It seems to me that a wall is clearly a more negative thing. It is wider and keeps people father apart. Some walls even hide us from each other. Then we are left to guess what those on the other side are like. We form mental images that

are hardly realistic, or just, or fair. Sounds and voices can sift through such a wall, but they are often muffled or garbled and hardly refine the images.

We trust that Reformation Sunday (Unity Sunday), 1975, will find all our churches engaged in this exhilarating transformation of wall into fence.

Rev. Nelson Vander Zee
Denominational Interchurch
Relations Committee

And I fear that in due time also the fence will disappear. This Reformation Sunday is supposed to be Unity Sunday. This means, to me, that this is but another step toward bringing the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church of America together. But what about the differences between them? What about the secession of the Christian Reformed Church from the Reformed Church in 1857? Was this secession just and legitimate, as before

the face of God? Did the Christian Reformed Church have just reasons for acting as it did then? And now, on Reformation Sunday, Unity Sunday, there will be a pulpit exchange between these churches? But it is surely very serious to preach in one another's pulpits! It means that a Christian Reformed minister places himself under a Reformed Church's consistory. Will this not lead to an ignoring of all differences?

Prayers For All Men

Rev. Henry Vander Kam is writing a series of articles on I Timothy in THE OUTLOOK. In the issue of October, 1975 he writes on I Timothy 2:1-7, page 12. We need not quote the entire article. The following may suffice.

Prayers for all men — The Apostle tells Timothy that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings are to be made for all men. The church is to remember her function in this world. She is to preach the gospel to all men but must also remember all men in her prayers.

It is not sufficient to pray only for the membership of the church but congregational prayer must be far broader. The church must remember that she is the intercessor for the world. The world cannot pray. The church is to bring the needs of the world before the throne of God. Herein too she is the salt of the earth. That world will not last long if the salt has lost its savor. When the church is gathered for worship she is to bring the world's needs to God's mercy seat. The world doesn't realize how important the worship services of the true church are for its very existence. What a responsibility for those who lead in congregational prayers!

An illustration is now used to show something of the content of such prayers. Prayers are to be offered for kings and all those who are in high places. This could not only be forgotten very easily in the early church, but there might even be strong feelings against doing this. These rulers, almost without exception, were not friendly to the church. That makes no difference. Government is God-ordained (Romans 13) and must so be honored. Paul exhorts the church to pray for the government which will put him to death! This is the calling of the church. He does not tell us what the content of this particular prayer should be because that will change with the times. However, he tells us that prayers offered for authorities will have the effect of giving us a tranquil and quiet life. In other words, we are to pray that persecutions by governments will not hinder us in our lives. Then we will be able to live in godliness and gravity — and so we must! We are to live in such a way that we do not *invite* persecution.

In the first place, the writer of these words declares that the apostle does not tell us what the content of this particular prayer should be because that will change with the times. Is this true? Is it not clear from this entire passage that the apostle tells us that the Lord would have all men be saved? This does not refer to all men individually (the writer himself writes this when he immediately afterwards asks the question whether the apostle is speaking of a universal salvation). But this surely indicates that the content of this prayer which the apostle enjoins upon the church is exactly that we must pray for kings, etc., in the sense that we pray for their salvation. In our prayer that the Lord may save all His people we must not omit them who are in authority.

Secondly, we are to live in such a way that we do not *invite* persecution. With this we agree. We must surely never *invite* persecution. But this also means that we must pray that we may never be persecuted? With this we do not agree. This can never be harmonized with the second petition of the Lord's Prayer.

Thirdly, the church must pray for all men, for the world? This is surely what the writer of these words is saying. (Of course, I stand to be corrected.) But, this is surely impossible. The church must pray for the world? How does this author harmonize this with the Lord's Prayer? That prayer is a model prayer, teaches us how to pray. But this prayer of the Saviour is surely completely particular. Where do we read in this prayer that we must pray for the world? And how does this author harmonize it with what we read in John 17:9: "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine." Jesus does not pray for the world. And we must pray for the world? Indeed, this "tranquil and quiet life" does not refer to a quiet and tranquil life in the midst of the world but to such a life in the consciousness of the child and church of God. We must have peace and tranquility within our own hearts and souls.

FROM HOLY WRIT

Exposition of Hebrews 13:10

Rev. G. Lubbers

THOSE WHO ARE COME TO MOUNT ZION HAVE AN ALTAR (Hebrews 13:10a)

It is a rather arresting and instructive verity concerning which we are here instructed by the writer; it is the truth of the Gospel of Christ. We *have* an altar, says the writer; the people of the New Testament dispensation have an altar, now in the dispensation of the fulness of times. (Eph. 1:10). We, the new men in Christ, where there is neither Jew nor Greek, those near and far, have all been brought nigh by the blood of Christ; He hath made both one, having broken down the middle-wall of partition between us. And now this new man, the saints in Christ, have an altar. However, it is set outside of the Old Testament "camp" and "tabernacle" with its types and ceremonies; and the worshippers do not keep the lunar calendar of the Old Testament feast days, sabbaths, new moons. Nor do we go to worship with those who continue to attend at the "altars" of the Old Testament "tabernacle". Doing so we would be trampling under foot the Son of God, accounting His blood common blood, and doing despite unto the Spirit of grace. (Hebrews 10:29) They who continue at the Old Testament altar will receive sorer judgment than did those who died under Moses' law under two or three witnesses! (Hebrews 10:27b)

The implication of our "having" an altar from which unbelieving Judaizers "have no right to eat" is that we may eat from our altar. Our altar is such that on it the Lamb of God was slain, who is the propitiation for all of our sins. But that altar is not within the "camp" of the Old Testament theocratic institution of the earthly city of Jerusalem. The "truth and substance" which was typified in those sacrifices and which pointed to Christ we have in our Altar. However, that "truth and substance" is denied by those who still remain ministering in the Old Testament temple, where God Himself rent the veil when Christ died on the Cross. Our Reformed fathers caught this vision and carefully formulated it in the Belgic Confession, Art. XXV, where we read,

"We believe, that the ceremonies and figures of the law ceased at the coming of Christ, and that all the shadows are accomplished; *so that the use of them*

must be abolished amongst christians (italics, G.L.) yet the truth and substance of them remain with us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have their accomplishment. In the meantime, we still use the testimonies taken out of the law and the prophets, to confirm us in the doctrine of the gospel, and to regulate our life in all honesty, to the glory of God, according to his will". Scriptural proof: Rom. 10:4; Gal. 5:2-4; Gal. 3:1; Gal. 4:10,11; Col. 2:16, 17.

Our New Testament "altar" has no place in the Old Testament types any more now that Christ has died and risen again. It does not *stand* in the Old Testament "tabernacle" which was built after the *pattern* which was shown to Moses on the mount at Sinai. (Ex. 25:40; Heb. 8:6) We have come to that tabernacle which God had in His counsel of redemption and of which He shewed a pattern to Moses and which the latter was enjoined strictly to copy. And all this was governed by the *law* of ceremonies. This law of ceremonies also included the "feast days," as part of the "figures" of the law. In as far as these "days" were a part of the Old Testament apparatus, these days are abolished and have been nailed to the Cross as a hand-writing against us. They belonged to the "beggarly principles" of touch not, taste not and handle not. (Col. 2:16) We should notice that Paul writes in this connection, "Let no man, therefore, judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days; which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." Jesus himself tells his disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees. (Matt. 16:6; Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1) Our altar is the "body" of the shadows and types, also of the shadows and figures of the feast-days, new moons and sabbaths. Our New Testament Sabbath may never in any way be equated with a "day" of the Old Testament calendar as prescribed by Moses, but must ever most carefully be taught as being the reality and substance of these days. Our New Testament Sabbath is ours as we have "come to mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to the blood of sprinkling, which speaks better things than Abel." (For "blood of sprinkling" must ever be carefully distinguished from the blood of those sacrifices which was poured at the foot of the altar. The former was the blood of

the sin-offering, bringing propitiation, while the latter was the blood of the peace-offering and the burnt-offering, or the free-will, the thank-offering. For the former see: Lev. 1:5, 11; 7:2, 8, 13; 7:2, 14 etc.; and for the latter see: Lev. 8:15; 9:9.)

Hence, our Sabbath is the direct fruit of Christ's having been delivered for our offenses, and having been raised for our justification. (*dia teen dikaioosin eemoon*) (Rom. 4:25) Christ came forth from the grave on the resurrection morning to demonstrate powerfully that He was the Son of God in our flesh, and that He is the mighty conqueror who has procured for us the righteousness of God, so that we are now righteous before God and heirs of everlasting life. Thus we eat from our altar. We have but one sacrifice left now: it is the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to God. *We* pour the blood at the foot of the Altar!! The blood of sprinkling has been brought!!! Such is our altar in the New Testament dispensation. We have an altar, the cross of Christ and all the benefits which flow to us from Christ's riven side. And here the injunction comes to us: keep the New Testament Sabbath, the day of the Lord; maintain the schools and the ministry of the word. Enter into the Lord's rest (His completed work in his death, resurrection, and ascension), faithfully coming to the congregation of God to learn the Word of the Gospel, use the sacraments, publicly call upon the name of the Lord and give alms to the poor, and let this coming be part and parcel of the life of Christian conversion: the mortification of the old man and the quickening of the new man. Thus I will "rest" from my evil works (*dass ich alle Tage meines Lebens von meinen bosen Werken feire*) all the days of my life, and yield myself to the Lord, to work by His Holy Spirit in me. Thus I begin in this life the eternal Sabbath. Such is our Altar from which we eat. Such a Christian comes "diligently" to the congregation of God each Sunday when the congregation meets. He is spiritually sensitive not to a lot of "don'ts and do's" but because he has been "renewed by God's Holy Spirit after God's own image" and by the whole of his conduct he would show his gratitude to God for his blessings. The man who does not come to church, who would deliberately find a job so that he *will* not come to the congregation, does not have a problem of the formal keeping of a "day". His is a deeper problem. He does not really love the LORD OF THE SABBATH! He has never heard the prelude of the Decalogue in Exodus: "I am the Lord thy God which hath delivered you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Such a man does not know the *three things* which we must know to enjoy the only comfort in life and in death. He has never seen in the "ten words" ten precepts of the *Gospel*. He has never noticed that all the commandments have been put in

the form of the rule for a life of conversion and thankfulness. Such a man does not merely transgress the fourth Commandment, but he transgresses the very Covenant of God Himself: I am your God, and ye are my people! (Exodus 31:14)

Yes, we have an altar. It does not stand in the courts of those who now still continue to minister in the "tabernacle." We are called to come to this altar. We do not need any dissertations concerning when and how and why we may be absent when those who are gathered at the altar are present, and present themselves before the Lord of the Sabbath on the Lord's Day. We hear the call to prayer! We sing that we do this with joy and gladness in our soul! That is the secret of true church-attendance and also of worship "in spirit and in truth! Then we censure those who neglect the means of grace, or, what is worse, despise the means of grace! We stone the man that gathers sticks on the Sabbath, defying the Lord of the Sabbath. Such is a *covenant-breaker* and not a *day-transgressor*. Such is the *truth* and *substance* of the ceremonies and figures of the law. But when we stone a man for breaking the Sabbath in the New Testament sense and we have cut him off as a rotten member, do not forget to humble ourselves before the Lord of the Sabbath and confess "O! Righteous God and merciful Father, we bewail our sins before thy high majesty and acknowledge that we have deserved the grief and sorrow caused unto us by the cutting off of this our late fellow-member; yea, we all deserve, shouldst Thou enter into judgment with us, by reason of our great transgressions, to be cut off and banished from Thy presence." (See *Form of Excommunication*)

THOSE MINISTERING IN THE TABERNACLE AND OUR ALTAR (Hebrews 13:10b)

It requires a certain "right" (*exousia*) to eat from the altar whereon Christ was sacrificed, the cross. Not all have this right. When Christ came on earth, as the Word made flesh, to suffer and die, He was rejected of His own. He came to His own things, His own tabernacle, which had been made a house of merchandise. (John 2:16) When Jesus cleansed the temple the second time, He told the desecrators of the temple and the Sabbath-breakers of his day, that they had made of the temple a den of thieves and robbers, quoting Jer. 7:11, and alluding to Isaiah 56:7. He will make the temple a "house of prayer for all nations." He will rebuild the temple in three days through His death and resurrection. And in that temple will be only the true worshippers from all nations. These have a right to be there. Those who have this right are not born of blood(s) nor out of the will of the flesh, nor out of the will of man, but are born out of God. These were given (to them became)

the right to be children of God and to eat at the altar of God.

Now the writer to the Hebrews says that the right to eat from our Altar in the New Testament dispensation is not for those who cling to the Old Testament "tabernacle" of Moses, which was made as a type of the heavenly and the true tabernacle. (Hebrews 8:1-5) That tabernacle of Moses was not

the tabernacle which the Lord pitched, the true tabernacle of God with man. He who still clings to that earthly tabernacle and explicitly and implicitly denies that these things were set till the time of reformation has lost all right ever to eat, to share in the merits of the crucified Christ of God. Such are the unbelievers upon whom the wrath of God abides as long as the veil remains upon their hearts. (Hebrews 6:6; II Cor. 3:15, 16)

MY SHEEP HEAR MY VOICE

Letter to Timothy

December, 1975

Dear Timothy,

In my last letter I began a discussion with you concerning the so-called "New Hermeneutics" and its relationship to preaching. We really only began to discuss this matter, and so I want to carry on this discussion now.

I do not want to prolong this letter or series of letters indefinitely; nor do I want to enter into a detailed discussion of this whole matter in our correspondence. This is a very complicated and involved subject, and, if one would examine the question thoroughly, it is also a highly technical subject besides.

As you know, the main idea of the New Hermeneutics is the defense of a new and different method of interpretation of Scripture than that method which was set forth by the Reformers of the 16th century, and which was held to be the proper method by the Church of Christ since that time to the present.

It seems quite natural to ask the question: *Why* is a new method of interpretation being set forth and defended? *Why* do some believe that the principles of the interpretation of Scripture set forth by the Reformers are no longer valid in our day? *Why* must we make alterations and modifications in Hermeneutics if the principles which the Church has maintained for a long time have always worked so well?

This is not such an easy question to answer. The difficulty of answering it is mainly because there are so many different answers which can be given. And there can be so many different answers given because there are so many different approaches made by the proponents of the New Hermeneutics. Because those

who defend this new approach to the interpretation of Scripture differ so greatly from each other, their reasons for adopting a new approach differ also. But I do think it is important for you to know some of these reasons anyway.

One reason for this new approach is the influence of modern rationalistic philosophy. I think I mentioned this to you already in my last letter. But the destructive and unbelieving higher criticism of the 18th and 19th centuries was directly the result of rationalistic philosophy of modern times. I do not want to trace this all here, for this will carry us too far away from our main concern. I only want to point out that the New Hermeneutics is also under the same influence. If you are interested further in this subject, I suggest you read C. Van Til's new book, "The New Hermeneutics", a book published recently by Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing. He shows unmistakably the relationship between the two. The point, however, which is worth noticing is that the New Hermeneutics is fundamentally *rationalistic*. In this respect it differs radically and basically from the historic Reformation approach which is the approach of *faith*.

Another reason why some think a new Hermeneutics is necessary is because of recent developments in the fields of the natural sciences. The assumption is, of course, that studies in the natural sciences have proved conclusively that the universe is very old and that, in some form or another, it came into being by processes of evolution. I do not think it is important to go into this matter in detail either. This has been repeatedly discussed and is still being discussed in the ecclesiastical press. Again, if you are interested in pursuing this matter further, I highly recommend the material which is being published by the Creation

Research Society. While I do not go along with their approach in every respect, they have done an immense amount of excellent work in showing that the natural sciences do *not* support evolutionism at all. They have also done a lot of work in showing that all the discoveries of the natural sciences are easily (and even better) explained from the viewpoint of creation and a universal flood as Scripture describes them. What is interesting though, is the fact that those who defend the New Hermeneutics are *motivated*, whether they will admit it or not, by a desire to make the Scriptures harmonize with the findings of science. But if you want to do this, you cannot take many passages in Scripture (especially Genesis 1-7) literally. It is exactly this which will force you to adopt a new method of interpretation, for one of the principles of the Hermeneutics of the Reformation is exactly that the literal sense of Scripture is the correct one unless the passage itself indicates that another sense is intended (as, e.g., in the visions of John recorded in the book of Revelation).

Another reason why the New Hermeneutics has been proposed is what I would like to call a certain embarrassment with simple faith. This should have, I think, a little more explanation. You see, what has happened over the years is that destructive higher criticism has made fierce attacks against the Scriptures in an open attempt to destroy them. The people of God have never failed to answer these attacks, but they have always based their answers solidly upon the Scriptures themselves. They have insisted that they stand by faith upon the Word of God as God's Word. But wicked and unbelieving higher criticism has never been satisfied with this answer. Higher critics have come up with all sorts of "problems" which are supposedly to be found in Scripture, and all sorts of "problems" about the relation between the teachings of Scripture and the findings of the natural sciences, and have demanded answers to these problems. Now this demand for answers is not, in itself, bad. But, though the believer has put forth every effort to answer them, he has always insisted that the answers must be found within the framework of a deep and unwavering faith in the Scriptures as the Word of God. This, the believer has insisted, is my starting point, my unswerving loyalty, my basic presupposition, my firm conviction — whether the problems can be solved or not. But the higher critic has scoffed at this. And in his mockery, he has charged the defender of the Scriptures with being "unscholarly". It seems as if there is no single charge which hurts some people more than the charge of being unscholarly. This really stings. And the higher critics know this. But the point is that those who were deeply hurt by this sort of criticism determined to show that they are, after all, scholarly. And, in their eagerness to show how scholarly they

really are, they engage in discussions with the higher critics *on their own ground*. These men, attempting to defend the Scriptures, but wanting so desperately to be scholarly, adopt the fundamental principles of the higher critics in their defense of the truth. I mean by this, fundamentally, that these men who are attempting to defend the Scriptures on the grounds of the higher critics, themselves adopt what is nothing else but a *rationalistic* approach to Scripture. The higher critics attack Scripture on rational grounds; the defenders of the truth of Scripture are going to defend Scripture on rational grounds. But to do this, they abandon the approach of faith — unless also faith can be rationally demonstrated. If you ever do this, you cannot long endure. You have really lost the battle. If you let the enemy choose the battleground and let the enemy make the choice of weapons, you can never hope to prevail.

So, you see, this is another reason why there is today something like the New Hermeneutics. For the New Hermeneutics is a rational approach to the Word of God.

I might mention, somewhat parenthetically, that there are many examples of books by "conservative" scholars which do this. I am at the moment reading a book by the great scholar F.F. Bruce which is entitled, "The New Testament Documents; Are They Reliable?" In this book Bruce finally answers the question in his title, "Yes, they are reliable." But the thrust of his whole book is that they can be proved to be reliable by rational argument and by a careful examination of the evidence. While I do not know whether Bruce is a proponent of the New Hermeneutics, I do know that it is exactly this approach which will lead to the New Hermeneutics inevitably. And this is true because the basic starting point of all these views is the starting point of *reason*. If you do not differ from the unbelieving higher critic in your basic starting point, how do you expect to maintain a correct Scriptural position overagainst those who are seeking to destroy Scripture? If you do have such expectations, they are bound to be disappointed. A rationalistic approach leads to the New Hermeneutics; of that there can be no question.

And so we come to the real issue here. How does one come to Scripture? That is the question. Does one come to Scripture believing by faith that it is the Word of God? Or does one come to Scripture to investigate whether there is sufficient evidence that we may pass judgment on Scripture that it is, in the light of all the evidence gathered, indeed reliable?

Let's try to put the question a bit more clearly. How do we know that the Scripture is the infallibly inspired record of the Word of God? What reason do we have to say this? The Reformers said: We *believe* this. The New Hermeneutics says: We must keep an

open mind on the question. We shall examine the evidence — literary and historical. We shall gather all the evidence for and against and weigh the evidence as one would in a court of law. And we shall see which way the evidence points. Maybe we shall conclude that Scripture is infallibly inspired. Maybe we shall conclude, on the basis of evidence, that Scripture is authoritative. But it is just possible that the evidence will point us to a partial inspiration of Scripture; maybe we will be shown that Scripture is authoritative only in certain areas, but not when it discusses scientific and historical data; maybe the evidence will show us that Scripture's inspiration must be re-defined. But whatever the outcome, let us, by all means, keep an open mind until we can submit all the evidence to careful analysis and detailed scrutiny. We must by all means be scholarly.

Now, (and this shall have to be by way of conclusion in this letter), if this is really the issue — if the issue is really between the rationalistic approach to Scripture and the approach of faith, then it is also clear that the issue is really a spiritual issue. It is not only an intellectual problem. It is not an issue which can only be described in theological terms. It is, very profoundly, a *spiritual* issue. Finally, it is an issue between faith and unbelief. (I do not want you to interpret this remark as meaning that every proponent of the New Hermeneutics is an unbeliever. That is not my conviction, nor is that any business of ours to discuss.) But the fact of the matter is, never-

theless, that the issue is spiritual and ethical. It involves the approach of the believer which is the approach of faith vs. the approach of reason which is the approach of unbelief. And the approach of reason is the approach of unbelief simply because man's reason, divorced from faith, unenlightened by faith, is reason which is wholly darkened by sin and which is wholly given over to the lie. If you set reason over-against faith, you give to reason an autonomous role. But autonomous reason is unbelieving reason. And its product will be the lie.

Well, I shall have to stop here. I hope that you will let me know your reactions to these things. We shall, the Lord willing, pick up the discussion in a later letter.

Fraternally in Christ,
H. Hanko

P.S. There is one point which shall have to be added, although we will hopefully get at this matter later. The point I have in mind is that this whole question is extremely practical as far as the life of the child of God is concerned. Whether you like to or not, you shall have to acquaint your sheep with these issues. And you shall have to get them to understand the tremendous importance of these things. They are matters of life and death to the sheep. Be sure therefore, that you address yourself to these problems in your contacts with the congregation.

IN HIS FEAR

Thanksgiving in The Whole of Our Walk

Rev. M. Joostens

(Note: The following is the substance of a speech delivered to the young people at Hope Protestant Reformed Church at their Thanksgiving Mass Meeting held on Nov. 23, 1975.)

I was asked to speak to you on the occasion of your thanksgiving mass meeting. This means, of course, that my topic is pretty well decided for me. Yet at the same time I did not refrain from asking for several suggestions. In response to my request I received these: "Giving Thanks Only on the 27th",

"Giving Thanks in Song and Prayer", and "Thanksgiving in a Young Person's Walk in Life." I was immediately attracted to the last of these various topics. But I revamped it a little bit so that it would also include the other suggestions which I received. Therefore, I chose to address you under the theme "Thanksgiving in the Whole of Our Walk." Song and prayer must of necessity fall under this topic. It also goes without saying that the idea of giving thanks just on Thanksgiving Day will receive comment. In all of these considerations I want to speak to you as Christian young people.

The occasion of Thanksgiving is a very fine one. And this remains true, even though it is being subjected to much abuse in our society. Thanksgiving Day has become a secular holiday. The real meaning of this day has disappeared and been obscured. And even though many prayers are uttered on this day, there are but few that ever rise above the ceiling. Men indulge themselves in all the numerous bounties of the earth without as much as a thought of God! For many this is the only day of the entire year on which they will render thanks, at least in form.

We must be careful to guard against this sort of tendency. It is for that reason that I do not elect to remain within my speech with turkeys and other traditional goodies. Because certainly, our Thanksgiving Day meal as well as our every meal, is God's abundance unto His people, it behooves God's children to give proper thanks in regard to these things. But I want to talk about us! Oh, I do not want to limit myself to one certain aspect, whether it be prayer, singing or yet another. I desire to speak about our thanksgiving in an all-comprehensive way, as, for example, Lord's Day thirty-two speaks of it. "Why must we still do good works?" That is to say, why are we obligated to live a sanctified life out of faith? To this question the Heidelberg Catechism answers, "... that so we may testify by the whole of our conduct, our gratitude to God for his blessings, and that he may be praised by us; . . ."

This viewpoint brings to mind the words of the apostle Paul to the church at Rome. Verse one of chapter twelve is a very rich passage as touching our topic. It is there that Paul speaks of presenting our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God. To heed that admonition is to give thanks in the whole of our life and walk. We do well to consider together this afternoon those words of Paul.

Let us see, if we can clarify somewhat the connection between sacrifice, the word which Paul uses, and thanksgiving. It is certain that such a connection must be made. The question comes to the fore: "Why do you want to speak of sacrificing on this occasion of thanksgiving? Let's leave the sacrifice in the old dispensation." Paul does not do this and we must not. Actually, the connection of which we spoke before is not so difficult to establish. It can be done quite easily if we properly understand the idea of a sacrifice. A sacrifice is much more than merely a dead animal upon an altar. The animal of sacrifice was a dedication unto God in its life and blood. A sacrifice was something which was wholly consecrated unto the Almighty. For this reason Paul speaks of a sacrifice being "holy and acceptable unto God." The idea of a sacrifice is to be found in its consecration unto God. That this is so is shown with all clarity in the Lamb *par excellence*. Christ consecrated Himself

to God perfectly. It was prophetically spoken of Him, "Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God." He sacrificed Himself in perfect consecration on behalf of His own.

Such consecration is rooted in faith. To understand this, call to mind with me the sacrifice of Cain and Abel. The former's was not pleasing to God because it was not rooted in the heart. Cain's sacrifice was not acceptable before God, nor was it holy. Abel's sacrifice was much different. He understood that blood had to be shed. That is to say, in his sacrifice he looked toward Christ, the Messiah which was to come. Through faith in hope he looked for the promised salvation in Jesus. And because he was able to see this by faith, his heart was full of thanksgiving. That brings me once more to Lord's Day thirty-two. "What are good works?" They are those works which proceed from a true faith. They are works of thankfulness. And such works we perform, "that . . . we may testify, by the whole of our conduct, our gratitude to God."

Thanksgiving is nothing less than being a living sacrifice unto God. We must never forget that there is such a thing as a dead thanksgiving. That kind of a sacrifice of thanks is a very terrible thing. You see, that is like the offering of Cain. O, that offering was not dead because it was not an offering from a formal point of view, but because it was devoid of faith. It was empty! In the same manner it is possible to go through all the proper motions of thanksgiving and never really give thanks. This will happen around many tables on Thanksgiving Day. But I said that I didn't want to stay with the twenty-seventh. Nor, do I want to point the finger at others. We may not just go through the motions of a Christian life. You know what I mean: other acts of piety. Our Christian life may not be hollow or empty. It may not be devoid of faith. Sacrifices of thanks must be wrought by faith. And that is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God. God has purposed to work His glory. It is the new man in Christ that is the motivating principle behind thanksgiving.

But you are ready to ask me: "What precisely must we sacrifice unto God?" The answer is, nothing less than our bodies. That is what Paul tells us in Romans twelve. You, as young people, must give your bodies as an offering of thanksgiving unto God. O, let's not misunderstand this. We must not think that our flesh must be sacrificed unto God, as if the blood of bulls and goats can ever accomplish anything. A pound of flesh does not constitute a good work before God. This can not be the meaning of sacrificing our bodies. Rather, we must consecrate the members of our bodies unto God. The functionaries of our bodies: the eye, ear, tongue, etc., must be dedicated unto

God. Yes, that includes every part of our body that can perform any kind of activity, whether it be the brain cells, the organs of reproduction, or other members of the body. These various members of the body must be a living sacrifice before God. That is to say, they must be motivated into activity by faith. And what is faith? It is the connection which links us to Christ, whereby we have His indwelling Spirit in our hearts. That brings me to the wisdom of Solomon. His wisdom relates the fact that out of the heart are all the issues of life. The point is that the regenerated heart must dominate the body. The whole of our bodily functions must be subject to the new man in Jesus Christ. Paul says to the Corinthians, who had difficulty with their Christian freedom, that he will not be brought under the power of anything. Because we are free in Christ, we may not become slaves to any thing. Least of all, may we be slaves to our own flesh.

I am sure that you can put it all together by now. But let's speak concretely for a moment. You, young people, are well aware of the members of your bodies. You know what they are capable of doing. You also know that they can do both good and evil. Make sure that the members of your body are sacrificed unto God! That means, that the eye looks at proper things. We live in a world full of lust. And when the old man directs the eye, it looks at the filth found in the magazines of our day and it hastily devours page after page of a sensuous novel which depicts the activities of sin in all its vividness. Need I continue? This is not to God's gratitude. And there is the ear. The Devil likes to shout into it cursing, swearing and all sorts of sensuous sounds. Let not your ears itch for all these things, but for the truth alone! And then there are the hands, fingers, feet and many more do the same. O yes, lest we forget, there is also that little bundle of fire, the tongue. You are aware of what James says about it. It is kindled with the fire of hell.

The tongue is likened to the small rudder of a large vessel. That little member can direct the whole body. Learn to control it by the new man in Christ!

That is thanksgiving in the whole of your life and walk. Is there anything we do apart from our bodies and its members? It is through the body that we perform all things and there is no exception to that. With the cells of the brain we think. Our feet transport us to a desired location. With our hands we perform cunning works. With our mouth we eat, communicate, sing and pray. The eye is the guiding light of the body. Consecrate your every member unto God! "What," says Paul, "know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ?" To whom we yield our members as servants to obey, to them we are enslaved. Shall we give our members to the Devil or to the old man of sin? God forbid! But in thanksgiving consecrate your bodies a living sacrifice unto God!

That is proper thanksgiving for covenant young people. After all, as godly young people we are the friend-servants of our God. This is a friendship which we have in Christ. Such friendship is essentially a matter of a renewed heart. But it doesn't stop there. Our regenerated heart must dominate the whole of our bodies pressing all its members into the service of God.

Then God is glorified and honored. And that is thanksgiving! It is not just a rendering of thanks on the twenty-seventh. Nor is it a consecrating of only a part of our body to God. But proper thanksgiving ought to be reflected in the whole of our life and walk. That is your chief calling. No, that is your only calling.

"The offering on the altar burned, gives no delight to thee." God does not delight in a vain and empty sacrifice devoid of faith, but, "the hearing ear, the willing heart, Thou givest unto me." Young people, walk in accord with that gift of God!

NOTICE

Classis East of The Protestant Reformed Churches will meet, the Lord willing, in regular session January 7, 1976, at SouthEast Protestant Reformed Church. All materials that must be treated at this session must be in the hands of the Assistant Stated Clerk 10 days prior to the convening of this session.

Rev. M. Joostens,
Assistant Stated Clerk.

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News From Our Churches

October 31 is the anniversary of the Reformation of the Church — Reformation Day. On the 31st of October, 1517, in Wittenberg, Germany, the monk and university professor, Martin Luther, nailed to the door of the great church a list of 95 propositions or theses. That act and those theses became the source of that mighty movement within the Church which we know as the 'Reformation of the Church.' We do well to commemorate this event of the 16th century, for it had the most tremendous significance for the true church of Jesus Christ. It was the most important act of God upon the Church for good from the time of the apostles to the present time.

Reformation Day is not forgotten within our churches. In addition to the Reformation Day programs mentioned in an earlier issue, several more public programs have come to our attention. Rev. Lanting spoke on "The Place of Reformation in the Church Today" in our Loveland, Colorado, church on November 7. The first paragraph of this column is taken from Loveland's Reformation Day program.

Rev. Lanting spoke on the same topic in Rock Valley, Iowa, on October 29. This lecture was sponsored by the Reformed Witness Committee. In addition to the speech, the program included some special music, a question and answer period, and coffee afterward.

Rev. Engelsma of our South Holland, Illinois, church gave a Reformation Day lecture for our Prospect Park, New Jersey, congregation on October 30. The Prospect Park consistory also requested Rev. Engelsma to preach for them on the following Sunday as well, offering to provide pulpit supply for South Holland. That certainly is an example of long distance co-operation.

Rev. J. Kortering from Hull, Iowa, gave a Reformation Day address in Pella, Iowa, on October 28. His speech was titled, "Reformation NOW." Rev. R. Moore accompanied Rev. Kortering on the visit to Pella to conduct the annual classical church visitation.

The congregations in Isabel, South Dakota, and Forbes, North Dakota, were invited to a Reformation Day observance in Isabel on Reformation Day. Rev. Mark Hoeksema lectured on the topic "Scripture Alone", divided as follows: I. Denied by Rome, II. Set Forth in the Reformation, III. Affirmed by the Church Today. In addition to the speech, a mini-singspiration was held. This must have been an interesting evening for all who attended, especially in view of the fact that Forbes and Isabel are separated by something like 185 miles.

The Hull, Iowa young people invited the congregation to a Reformation Singspiration on Sunday evening, November 2. "Rev. Slopesma (Edgerton, Minn.) will give a short speech, there will be spirited singing, and an offering taken for the *Beacon Lights*."

On November 13, Prof. H.C. Hoeksema and Rev. C. Hanko gave an illustrated lecture (slides) on their Australasian tour of last summer. First Church was almost full that nite (950 people?). Prof. Hoeksema lectured from the pulpit wired for sound (with a lavalier mike), and armed with a stout stick (to point out faces and sights on the huge screen.) After reading about the tour in the *Standard Bearer*, it was very interesting to see something of the people, churches, and country our representatives visited. The lecture and slides were also given in South Holland on November 21.

Because of the delays inherent in news gathering, editing, and publishing, the news reported in this issue goes back to October and early November, was written up the day after Thanksgiving (USA), and will probably be read just before Christmas. Speaking of Thanksgiving, did you realize that our brethren in Edmonton, Canada, celebrated Thanksgiving Day on October 13? Some things are different up there you see!

Rev. B. Woudenberg declined the call from Edmonton.

Another quiet thought from the Southeast bulletin: "When your faith is properly fed, your doubts will be starved to death."

K.G.V.