

The STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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THE STANDARD BEARER

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MEDITATION

The Virgin Birth - A Sign

Rev. M. Schipper

"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

Isaiah 7:14.

"Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." Matthew 1:22, 23.

Normally, at this time of the year, the church of Christ desires and looks forward to hearing and meditating on the Christmas story. Old as that story may be, and so oft repeated as the story is, the believing church and her believing children want to reflect on the central mystery of the incarnation, the coming of the Son of God in the flesh.

Whether that reflection be on the annunciation to the virgin, the message of angels to the shepherds as they watched their flocks by night on the hills of Judea, or the visit of the Magi to the Christ-child; or even the sign of a pregnant virgin given to an apparently pious, but very wicked king Ahaz — it makes no difference. Believers look to the church to tell the story.

And this is entirely proper. Our sympathies are not with those who would spoil the custom because there is some discrepancy regarding the time when the story should be told; or who would rob us of the celebration of Christ's birth, simply because such a celebration is not mandated in the Holy Scriptures; or because the world with its vulgar commercialism has distorted the story. There can be nothing wrong with telling the story, provided that it is told according to the Scriptures. When this is so done, it is as it should be.

Nor is it abnormal at such a time as this to call attention to the wonder of this historical event. To tell the story, without anything more, is only half the story. To relate only the history, and not the purpose of God, Who realizes history, would be a failure to relate the whole counsel of God. It must also be seen that back of all history, also that pertaining to the Advent, is the eternal, covenant God, realizing His eternal purpose. And the heart of that eternal purpose is His covenant. We should see that in the birth of Christ is the central realization of God's eternal covenant which He establishes first with Himself, and then with the believer and his believing seed.

It is this truth which lies basic in the Word of God upon which we now focus our attention.

That Word of God speaks of the virgin birth as a sign.

We should see, first of all, that it is a divine sign!

And signs are for the believers!

This cannot mean that signs have no significance for the unbelievers. Jesus once said: "A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas." (Matt. 12:39; 16:4) Paul also wrote: "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom." (I. Cor. 1:22) From this it is plain that the wicked not only desire signs, but that signs are given unto them. Even wicked king Ahaz, who, according to the context, appears so pious that he will not tempt the Lord by asking for a sign, nevertheless has a sign given unto him, namely, the sign of a pregnant virgin.

However, the ungodly cannot discern the signs concerning the kingdom of heaven. Jesus intimated that when He said, "O, ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky: but can ye discern the signs of the times?" (Matt. 16:3) As with the preaching of the gospel, so with the multiplication of signs, the unbelievers reject them to their own condemnation.

Indeed, signs are only for the believers. To them the signs confirm the Word of God which accompanies them. Signs are divinely intended to strengthen their faith. Very evident this is in the signs

of the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. And this is true also with all other signs God has given; e.g., the sign of the rainbow to Noah, the sign of the dew on the fleece to Gideon, the signs of Pentecost to the church in the upper room. And so is the intention of the sign, given first to Ahaz; and later to Joseph, espoused to the pregnant virgin, whose name was Mary.

The Lord Himself shall give you a sign.

Ahaz, king of Judah, was threatened by a powerful union of Pekah, king of Israel, and Rezin, king of Syria. These had united to lay siege against Jerusalem. They had connived to slay Ahaz, and to set a man of their choice on the throne in his stead. Ahaz was sorely afraid for his life and for the future of his kingdom. His troubled thoughts, however, did not bring him to seek the Lord as His help. Rather, he planned to find help in an arm of flesh, and he called to the king of Assyria for help.

In this situation the Lord sent the prophet Isaiah to him to inform him that the threat of Israel and Syria would not succeed, and therefore he need not seek the help of Assyria. It was then the Lord through the prophet demanded that he ask a sign of the Lord. But Ahaz refused, on the pretense that he would not tempt the Lord. But the Lord would make His sign to be given anyway.

"Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

Jehovah God remembers His covenant with the house of David. He will preserve the seed of David forever. He will not fail to keep that which He had sworn to David. Nothing is too hard for Him when it comes to keeping His Word. He will even do the impossible!

Imagine, a virgin, not a married woman who has co-habited with man, shall conceive and bear a Son. And this Son shall be called Immanuel — God with us!

It is the fulfillment of this prophetic Word that is revealed to Joseph who was espoused to Mary, a virgin, of the house and lineage of David.

A divine Son!

Mary's first-born!

But God's Only Begotten!

Indeed, she was espoused to Joseph, but before they came together she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. (Matt. 1:18)

Joseph was troubled, for he imagined that his virgin was no longer a virgin, but that she had had illicit relations with another man. According to the law he must expose her. But while he thought on these things, and even in his thoughts was planning to

hide her for shame, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, commanding him not to fear to take to himself Mary for his wife, for that which was conceived in her was of the Holy Ghost.

Born, He would be, of a woman, a virgin; not by the will of man, but by the will of God!

Not of any virgin would He be born, so that it did not make any difference in which nation the virgin would reside; but a particular virgin, who represented the very last of the long line of David. That line ended in a virgin. She was all that was left of the royal and elect line of David. It was this truth that also brought consternation to Mary herself; for when the angel appeared to her with the announcement that she was to have a Son, she asked: "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" (Luke 1:34) She understood that there was no man that could fulfill God's promise to David. God in His providence had made it impossible for man to fulfill His promise. He alone would fulfill it by performing the impossible. So, too, Mary's first-born Son would at the same time be God's only begotten.

They shall call His name Emmanuel — God with us!

Surely, Mary's first-born was not her only begotten. When the Lord opened her womb to conceive and bring forth her first-born, He opened it to conceive and bring forth others, though this must be understood as being possible by the will of man. That Mary had other children who are even called by name, is evident from all the gospels. (Matt. 12:46, 47; 13:55, 56; Mark 3:31, 32; 6:3; Luke 8:19, 20; John 7:3-5, 10) We must have nothing of the doctrine that would make Mary's first-born her only begotten. Joseph would indeed be the father of her other children. But Mary's first-born would be God's only begotten.

Emmanuel! God with us!

God uniting the human and the divine natures in the Person of His only begotten Son! "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son . . ." (John 3:16) "When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman . . ." (Gal. 4:4) "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." (I John 4:9)

The person of the Son of God, in Whom resides all the divine nature and all the perfections of the Godhead, is united to the human nature, so perfectly that He is like unto us in all things, sin excepted. As the fathers of Chalcedon expressed it (an expression which has been denied, but never changed): "In the incarnation the unity of Person in two natures

existed, which is unmixed, unchanged, undivided, and inseparable." Such is the miracle of the incarnation, the coming of the Son of God into the flesh!

Of this truth the pregnant virgin was the sign!

The sign was given by the prophet to wicked king Ahaz, and rejected by him. Now the sign is revealed by the holy angel to Joseph, who by faith is enabled to appropriate it. And it is revealed to and accepted by faith by the believers and their believing seed, as the rock upon which all of their salvation rests.

Central is this truth in the fulfillment of God's covenant promise. Possibly this statement may be disputed, in favor of other wonders which may be considered central, such as: the resurrection of Christ from the dead, or the miracle of Pentecost, when the work of salvation is applied to the hearts of the believing church. But it should become abundantly clear that none of these wonders could ever be possible without the wonder of the incarnation. Without the virgin birth, there is no cross or resurrection thinkable. Without the mystery of Bethlehem, there can be no other wonders. And the converse is also true — all other wonders find their center and significance only in the mystery of God coming into the flesh.

A covenant promise, a promise that was reiterated and symbolized in sacrifices and ceremonies, was given at the very dawn of history in the so-called Mother promise. (Gen. 3:15) It was the central message of all the prophets, informing the believers not only with general references, but even in detail the facts concerning its fulfillment, when they spoke of the manner (Isa. 7:14; 9:6,7) but also the place (Micah 5:2) where the promise would be fulfilled.

Our text from Matthew's gospel makes it very clear that with the birth of Jesus from the virgin we have the beginning of the fulfillment of the covenant promise. This is certainly implied in the very name of the virgin's Son — Emmanuel, that is, God dwelling with His people.

God purposed eternally to dwell with a people whom He had chosen and would form, who would forever show forth His praise, a people who historically had fallen into the depths of sin and death, but whom He purposed to redeem through His saving grace. With that people He came to unite Himself when He appeared in the form of a man-child, conceived and born by the Holy Ghost from the Virgin Mary, whom the fathers called the Mother of God. And having united Himself to that people, He saves them, lifts them up into heavenly heights, where He will dwell with them in the house of His covenant forever.

Of all this, the sign of the pregnant virgin is the beginning of fulfillment.

This is the story that must be told in this Christmas season.

The believing church ought to eschew as a satanic evil the mythical fantasy of a jolly old Saint Nick. Nor should she prefer to read to her children Dickens' ghost story of Christmas, intriguing as the story may be. All the tinsel and the sound of jingling bells can

only serve to blot out of sense and reason the true story of Christmas.

With believing hearts the church and her children will want to hear only the good news of the gospel — God manifested in the flesh, as the God of our salvation, revealed in the sign of the pregnant virgin.

EDITORIAL

Our Australasian Tour (4)

Prof. H.C. Hoeksema

We interrupted our tour in mid-air, so to speak, on the way from Auckland to Napier-Hastings, in order to give our attention in the November 15 issue to some of the events in Wellington. We now resume our account in chronological order.

If you turn back to the map which appeared in the October 1 issue, you will find that Napier (and its neighboring city Hastings) are located on the shores of Hawke Bay, on the east (Pacific) coast of New Zealand. This is beautiful country, and normally the climate is very mild. It is the fruit-belt of New Zealand. The only trouble was that we experienced some of the coldest, rainiest weather of our tour there. The cold was the more severe because the electrical voltage was cut down, which made the heaters well-nigh useless. However, the hospitality of our hosts, Mr. and Mrs. J. Braam, was warm. At Napier Mrs. Hoeksema had the opportunity to talk to a group of women in the afternoon about Christian education; and during the meeting, I had the opportunity to become acquainted with the Rev. L. Reurich, pastor of the local Reformed Church. Our evening meeting was in that church; but the attendance was greatly hampered by a driving rainstorm and the extremely cold weather. In fact, my lecture on "The Reformed Faith in Crisis" had to be cut short because the extreme cold in the little church auditorium was literally numbing for both audience and speaker. This was one of our smallest meetings, the audience numbering only eight. After the meeting we enjoyed fellowship and a warming cup of coffee with Pastor and Mrs. Reurich and with Rev. and Mrs. Graham Adams of the local Orthodox Presbyterian group.

Bright and early on the morning of June 25 we took the bus across the island and to the southwest toward the city of Palmerston North. The trip across the mountains of the North Island ended in a winding drive — along a road which was actually too narrow

for a large bus — on the very rim of a scenic gorge. The day was rainy and dark at first, and the heater of the bus was not working. So while we travelled with an overcoat wrapped around our legs for warmth and shivered most of the way, we were truly happy when sunshine greeted us just as we arrived in Palmerston North. At Palmerston we were greeted by a Mr. A. van Echten, our congenial host for a day-and-a-half, and by Rev. R. McKenzie, the conservative pastor of the local Congregational Church. As you may gather, this was one of the strange situations encountered on our trip. There is a group of people here who formerly belonged to a Bible Presbyterian Church — a group which originally separated prematurely from the Reformed Church in the Runia friction. However, the Bible Presbyterian group was smitten with dissension; and now this group of people is without an actual church home, although they fellowship and worship with the Emmanuel Congregational Church. The latter group is rather conservative and find themselves at odds with their denomination on several counts. The former group has some serious problems, not the least of which is some neo-Pentecostal leanings. However that may be, all of these circumstances afforded me an opportunity to speak to an attentive audience of about 25 on "Our Calling and the Faith of the Reformation." The message was rather well received and favorably commented on by Pastor McKenzie and more than one member of his congregation.

I should also note at this point that while we were at Palmerston, Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Young, of the Christchurch Orthodox Presbyterian Church, flew up to meet us and to accompany us on the rest of our journey. They brought along a supply of our literature, much of which was disposed of at this meeting and various other meetings along the way. Mr. Young is one of the elders at Christchurch, a capable and knowledgeable leader there; and during our travels

together we soon became well acquainted, so that "Mr. and Mrs. Young" became "Andy and Nola" to us. We truly appreciated their company.

After an early breakfast on Friday, June 27, the Youngs and the Hoeksemas met Mr. Bob van Herk at Pastor McKenzie's house. Brother van Herk is a long-time friend-by-correspondence from Wellington. And he had driven up from Wellington early in the morning to pick us up for the 2½ hour drive down to Wellington — the capital city of New Zealand, situated at the southern tip of the North Island. The drive to Wellington seemed very short — partly because of the beautiful scenery (every now and then we caught sight of the Tasman Sea), and partly because our time was occupied with busy conversation concerning the things of the truth and of God's church.

Meanwhile, Rev. C. Hanko had arrived in Auckland on June 26; and on the morning of the 27th he flew down to Wellington. Needless to say, we had a happy reunion when we met in downtown Wellington. I cannot stress too much the importance of having a co-laborer on a tour of this kind. It was not only a relief to have help with leading meetings and fielding questions. But I personally found it to be of great help and support to have someone with whom to share problems and to help make evaluations of the many new situations and experiences which confronted us. I think it is no secret that I have long been personally involved in contacts "down under"; and my sympathies obviously lie with our friends there. In such a situation there is always a danger that one's sympathies color his judgments and evaluations. In fact, I frankly asked myself more than once in the early part of the tour, "Can this be real? Am I seeing things too rosily? Am I overly excited and enthusiastic?" It was a very good thing, therefore, to share things with Rev. Hanko, a veteran and experienced laborer in our churches, and to be able to weigh and evaluate our experiences *together*, so that upon our return we might make a sober and well-reasoned report to our Committee and to our churches. In a very real sense, therefore, what we are reporting to our churches is established by two witnesses; and our report and advice are the fruit of very careful and sober evaluation, not the reflection of run-away enthusiasm. This makes all the more serious the concrete questions which our denomination will eventually have to face as a result of the obvious fact that the Lord has opened doors to us in Australasia.

What work was accomplished in Wellington?

During the afternoon of the 27th of June we met with the three Reformed ministers of the Wellington area at the home of Rev. Kroon. Since my "open letter" to Rev. G.I. Williamson in the November 15

issue recounts most of that conference, I shall not repeat that information here.

Late in the afternoon of that day Mr. van Herk picked us up at the home of Rev. Kroon and took us through the hills of Wellington to his home in the pleasant suburb of Wainuiomata. Mr. and Mrs. van Herk were our gracious hosts during our stay in the Wellington area. Mind you, they themselves slept in a "caravan" (house trailer), in order that we might have their comfortable bedrooms. After "tea" (evening dinner) with the van Herks, we all returned to downtown Wellington for the advertised lecture in the YWCA building at 7:30 p.m. To an attentive audience of 30-35 people I spoke on "Our Calling and the Reformed Faith." There was a rather long question period after the lecture. Several of the questions centered on predestination and on the Reformed position over against the Arminian error. After the formal meeting ended, many of the people remained for a while, so that we had the opportunity to meet them and converse with them. The majority of those who were present expressed agreement with the lecture and said that they enjoyed the evening.

On Saturday morning, June 28, we had a "cottage meeting" at the van Herk residence. Present were Mr. and Mrs. van Herk, Mr. and Mrs. J. Koppe, and Mr. Anton Vooys. Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Young were also present. The Wellington people are acquainted with Mr. and Mrs. Young through the fact that at the last couple of Council meetings of the OPC the Wellington brethren had participated. This little group in Wellington have been separated from the Reformed Churches ever since the Runia crisis. Since that time much of their spiritual nourishment has come by way of literature and taped sermons from our churches. For a long time Mr. Jacob Kuiper, Sr., of our Hope Church, has faithfully sent them cassette-tapes of the Hope services. The express purpose of our meeting on that Saturday morning was to discuss the future of this little group of three families. At this meeting each of the heads of families expressed his appreciation for the fact that we had come to Wellington and strengthened them. They expressed themselves very warmly and sincerely with respect to their desire to maintain the Reformed faith and to have Reformed preaching and instruction for themselves and their families. They expressed deep appreciation for their contact with our churches and especially for the taped sermons and the literature which they had received. As a small group without a church home, they feel very weak and dependent. They felt keenly that God in His providence had sent us to them and, though they hardly dared suggest it, they expressed the desire that somehow a minister from our churches might come to New Zealand to help them. Needless to say, we were deeply impressed by the spontaneous

testimony of these brethren and by their altogether unsolicited cry for help. As representatives of our churches we were not in a position to make any promises, nor to commit our churches to anything. We did assure them that we would report faithfully to our Committee for Contact and to our Synod what we heard from them. We also discussed with them the possibility and the practical implications of possibly having a man from our churches who would work both in Wellington and in Christchurch. And we encouraged the brethren to remain faithful to the Reformed faith, to keep in contact with us (as we would with them), and to continue in close contact with the Council of the Orthodox Presbyterian Churches. It must be remembered that there is as yet no organized group in Wellington. The present group is very small; but the brethren assured us that they were interested in trying to work in this area with a view to the possibility of gathering a congregation, which could then become a congregation of the OPC. Only time would tell whether there is the possibility of establishing a viable congregation there, of course; but there are indications of considerable interest. I can assure you that our meeting that Saturday morning was a heart-warming one; and when we listened to these brethren, we could have been among our own people.

Rev. Hanco remained in Wellington over Sunday, June 29, and stayed with the van Herk family. In our official report to the Committee of Contact, Rev. Hanco reported as follows: "We had services in the morning in the YMCA. There were 10 individuals present. Since the room had no heat whatsoever and the cold penetrated into the building, the men kept their overcoats on, the ladies spread blankets over their legs, and all agreed that it was worth suffering a bit of cold to hear once more the sound of the Word. In the afternoon a meeting was held in the home of Vooy's, where we also had afternoon tea. In the evening a service was held in the home of the van Herks. The same group was present on each occasion. They listened attentively to the Word, one woman even breaking into a sermon to ask a question which she was afraid that she might forget. A very interesting discussion followed."

For Mrs. Hoeksema and myself, along with Mr. and Mrs. Young, our stay on the North Island ended on Saturday afternoon, when we flew some 200 miles farther toward the South Pole, arriving in the large city of Christchurch at 5:45 o'clock. Mr. and Mrs. van Rij were at the airport to meet us and brought us to their very comfortable home, which was our headquarters while in Christchurch. Awaiting us was some welcome mail from home, and also a surprise in the form of a recording of a Dutch Psalm-sing in Grand Rapids — sent by none other than our Business

Manager, Mr. Vander Wal. That tape was played a good many times during our stay at Christchurch! For us personally, the stay at Christchurch was one of the highlights of the tour. Over the years a bond of friendship had developed between us and Mr. and Mrs. van Rij, and it was a real pleasure and a blessing to spend a few days in their home, even as they had been in our home several years ago.

But also as far as the purposes of our tour were concerned, our stay in Christchurch was one of the highlights. There is a small, but lively congregation there. Several university students are among the membership. Mr. van Rij is somewhat of a spiritual father to this young group, being much older in age than they, but also much older in the faith. Mr. Andrew Young, who along with Mr. van Rij is an elder, gives capable leadership. He himself is a young man, but very knowledgeable; and he capably leads the services in this little congregation which is without its own pastor. Besides, through his position as a lecturer in soil science at Lincoln College, Mr. Young has opportunity for contact with many young people, and thus opportunity to give them spiritual guidance and instruction. We learned of two instances of young foreign students here who have been converted from heathendom and have come to the Reformed faith. One of these is still in Christchurch, but will have to go back soon to a very difficult battle in her homeland when she has finished her education. The other has already returned to his homeland of Singapore, where he is under bond to his government for several years in order to repay the government for his education. We met him when we reached Singapore a few weeks later.

The little flock in Christchurch does not have much from an outward point of view. They are small. They own no place of worship. They are young in the faith. But we found them vitally interested in the truth, and that, too, not as a matter of mere theory, but as a matter of their life and walk. For we discovered that many of the questions in our cottage meetings with them arose out of practical problems and concerns in their lives. It was truly encouraging to have fellowship with them for a few days, and it was a spiritual delight to be able to preach to them and to instruct them.

Sunday, June 29, was a busy day. In the morning at 10:30 we had our first service in the Red Cross Hall, their meeting place. Yes, it was cold: when we sang, we could see our breath! But our hearts were warm. Mr. Young led the service. A congregation of 22 was present. And I preached for some 50 minutes to an attentive audience on Isaiah 45:22-25. We lingered for a good while after the service, getting acquainted. After a quick lunch at the van Rij home, we returned to the hall for the afternoon lecture at

2:30. Upon request, I spoke again on the subject, "The Reformation Faith in Crisis." There were 34 in the audience, including several who had not previously participated in any of the meetings of this congregation. There was a fairly lengthy question period after the lecture, and there were some very pertinent and intelligent questions asked. Especially were there questions about the key truth of God's sovereignty in the matter of salvation. After our evening meal we went back to the hall once more for

the evening service, at which I preached on John 14:6. The audience totalled 27 souls, and we remained at church for a long time after the service – talking on an informal basis.

There was more to come in Christchurch when Rev. Hanko joined us again on Monday, June 30. But the rest of the story and the conclusion of the New Zealand section of our tour must wait for the next issue.

FEATURE

Report on the Conference Between the PRC and the RCUS

Rev. Rodney Miersma

On October 7 and 8, 1975 at the Richmond Lake Youth Camp, located on the shores of Richmond Lake, a few miles northwest of Aberdeen, South Dakota, an unofficial conference was held between interested ministers and elders of the Reformed Church in the United States (Eureka Classis) and of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America. The conference was well attended, in that there were twenty-two men present (11 from each denomination) for the duration of the two-day meeting. Represented were men from points as far west as Shafter, Calif., as far east as Grand Rapids, Michigan, as far south as Kansas City, Missouri, and as far north as Upham, North Dakota, which is near the Canadian border. The fellowship which was experienced during the discussions, leisure time, and meals, was warm and enjoyed by all. A special word of commendation is in order for the ladies of our Forbes church for the delicious meals which they served during the two-day stay.

BACKGROUND

The Protestant Reformed Churches first came into contact with the RCUS (Eureka Classis) in 1944. An unbiblical union had taken place between their denomination and another with which the RCUS (Eureka Classis) could not be part of, in good conscience. This led to the separate existence of Eureka Classis. A conference in Menno, South Dakota in 1944 considered our respective doctrinal positions. As an indirect result of this conference Herman Mensch and Marvin Koerner came to our seminary for instruction.

The second contact came in the 1950's. Two churches, one in Forbes, North Dakota, and the other

in Isabel, South Dakota, both members of the RCUS (Eureka Classis), contacted Rev. G. Lubbers, who at that time was laboring in Loveland, Colorado. They were dissatisfied with the amount and the quality of the preaching which they were receiving from their own denomination. Hence, through the aid of the then Rev. Herman Mensch, a call of help was extended to Rev. Lubbers. As a result of his labors, the Ebenezer Protestant Reformed Church, Forbes, North Dakota, and the Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Isabel, South Dakota, were organized in the year of our Lord 1960.



The third contact was in the spring of 1974 when Rev. Mark Hoeksema and the undersigned, both pastors in the two above-mentioned Dakota churches, were invited to join a group called The Reformed Ministerial Conference. This was a group consisting of ministers from the Reformed Church in the U.S. (Eureka Classis), the Reformed Church of America, the Christian Reformed Church, Orthodox Presbyterian, Evangelical and Reformed, and now the Protestant Reformed Churches. Its membership for the

most part consisted of ministers from the RCUS (Eureka Classis) with the rest of the membership consisting of the conservative element in their respective churches. At these meetings Scripture was exegeted and pertinent doctrinal subjects were discussed, to the benefit of all in attendance.

Through these discussions the two pastors from the PRC learned to appreciate the Reformed stand and sincerity of the ministers from the RCUS (Eureka Classis). It was their desire that more of our ministers and people meet them and enjoy the same fellowship. Thus, an unofficial *ad hoc* committee was formed with membership consisting of Revs. Hoeksema and Miersema from the PRC, and Revs. Hart and Riffert from the RCUS (Eureka Classis). The purpose of the committee was to arrange details for further unofficial contact, which resulted in the conference at Richmond Lake.

THE CONFERENCE

The conferees began arriving on Monday evening and soon became acquainted around the chess board, ping pong table, volley ball net, and later in the bunk house where all the men slept.

On Tuesday, after breakfast and introductory remarks, a paper was presented by Rev. Howard Hart, Eureka, South Dakota, entitled *The Basis of Christian Unity*. Emphasized in the paper was the truth that unity of the church is ultimately based on the unity of the Trinity (Tri-Unity) and on the fact that the members of the true church belong to and constitute the one body of Christ. Thus, there can be unity only for those in Christ, a unity in the truth which is manifested in the church by the three marks. Rev. Hart said that "we must not allow our zeal for external unity to betray us into the error of giving it a place above the other essentials of the truth. Unity is one of the essentials of the church — but not at the price of truth."

Following the presentation of this paper there was lively discussion on such questions as the following: 1) the covenant as "essentially a relation of friendship," 2) infra- and supralapsarianism, 3) common grace, 4) "ultra-predestinarianism," 5) the relationship between the higher and lower assemblies, and 6) the apologetics of C. Van Til.

On Tuesday evening a public lecture was given at the conference grounds by Prof. H.C. Hoeksema on *The Reformed View of The Church*. And if my memory serves me correctly, the three divisions were 1) Its Idea, 2) Its Election, 3) Its Gathering. This lecture was very stimulating and informative, for it tied together many loose ends of the discussion during the day, as it presented a thoroughly Scrip-

tural view of the church of Jesus Christ. Dealt with were the unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity of the church. Also the question of God's counsel with relation to the election and salvation of the church was presented from the supralapsarian point of view.

Wednesday morning began, as did Tuesday morning, with a paper. Prof. H. Hanko presented a paper on *Possibilities and Areas of Further Contact*. In this connection Article 85 of the Church Order was discussed: "Churches whose usages differ from ours merely in non-essentials shall not be rejected." Prof. Hanko continued by explaining that the unity of the church is a unity of essence, which must take on institutional form and which expresses further unity by forming broader federations of churches. These are formed in different countries and in different cultures and nations, this being the reason why there are found even today differences between the Reformed and the Presbyterian. A unity that tries to erase these differences must be shunned, for "God wills that the church of Christ, agreeing in essentials, differing in non-essentials, develops in different ways according to its different nationality, culture, and race. It is within this context that we must discuss our contacts with each other."

After a discussion on these matters the conference came to a close with the following consensus: 1) that further contact between the two churches should remain unofficial, 2) that if another conference were held that the subject of debate be limited to one topic with position papers being presented by members of each church, 3) that a committee of two, one from each denomination, be appointed to study the feasibility of another conference and to make arrangements for the same if plans materialize.

In the eyes of the undersigned, and I am sure that I can speak for most of those present, the conference was well worth the time spent. The objective was met, i.e., ministers and others of both denominations had the opportunity to meet one another and express their views. We enjoyed one another's fellowship and appreciated the Reformed stand on many key points of doctrine. But, understandably, there were many differences (essential and non-essential) which make any official contact at this time not feasible. However, we would like to discuss these differences at a future conference to see whether there are areas to which God will lead us, in which we can work together, and be of assistance to one another. For, as Prof. Hanko wrote in his paper, "we live in the end of the ages. The pressures of circumstances may push us together in ways wholly unanticipated. For the people of God shall have to stand together in the evil day that will soon enough be upon us."

“MY SHEEP HEAR MY VOICE”

Letter To Timothy

November, 1975

I made mention in a previous article of the fact that this rubric ought to be as practical as possible so that it can be of benefit to all our readers. A theoretical discussion of the various branches of Practical Theology would not be of as much interest to all our readers as a more practical discussion of the matters related to this subject might be.

In casting about for a format for these articles which would emphasize the practical aspect of the subject, it came to me that the best vehicle for attaining this goal would be a series of letters written to an imaginary minister of an imaginary congregation; or letters written to the congregation itself; or letters written to some imaginary member or office bearer in the congregation. This idea is certainly not original. Charles Spurgeon already used this type of format, although in a slightly different form. And others have done the same.

Nevertheless, the format commends itself for different reasons. In the first place, it tends to keep the discussion on a more informal level; and, in this way, it tends to preserve the practical emphasis which is so important in the treatment of this subject. In the second place, it will, hopefully, assist in bringing the discussion as close as possible to the problems of pastoral and congregational life within the church of Christ. And this was the original purpose of such a rubric when the idea was proposed at last summer's staff meeting. In the third place, it will give me more freedom to wander about in the whole field without limiting myself to any one given subject. Matters can be treated as they arise. One need not be too concerned about a systematic, logical and continuing treatment of individual subjects. One can roam rather freely and discuss matters of importance as these matters appear. Finally, this format will introduce into the rubric a personal element which will hopefully inspire more reader response so that the column is shared with you all.

Let us then call our imaginary pastor, "Timothy" and include in these columns, "Letters to Timothy." If the time comes to write to an imaginary congregation, or to imaginary members of a congregation, we shall find other names and other titles.

* * * * *

Dear Timothy,

It was good to hear that you successfully completed your classical exams and are now an ordained minister of the Word and Sacraments. Now begins the work towards which you have aimed your life and bent your efforts for many years. No doubt, there is also in your heart a deep sense of gratitude to God for bringing you on this long journey to become a shepherd of a flock in Christ's sheepfold. There were many barriers along the way, obstacles to overcome, difficulties to face. There were, I know, many times of discouragement, and you would be an exception to the rule if there not many moments when you really doubted whether God had called you to the work of the ministry. But the Lord opened the way each step of the path you walked, and brought you to your goal. No doubt, you yourself are amazed, now that you can look back, how the Lord, in many wonderful ways, made it possible for you to continue your work, and how He led you step by step to your destination.

I suppose that you have begun your work with mixed feelings. On the one hand, there is undoubtedly a sense of elation. How could it really be any different? You have struggled to attain this goal; you have prayed often that the Lord would bring you to the point where you can actually begin the work of the ministry. You have held this goal before your mind and heart for more years than you yourself know. And now your prayers are answered and your life's work lies before you. The years of preparation are over, and the actual task to which you have been called now begins. But, on the other hand, there is also, I am sure, a certain sense of wonderment and awe, of trepidation not unmixed with fear. It is only when you are at last in the parsonage and begin to perform the work of shepherd that some of the heaviness of your responsibilities comes upon you. The fact that you are a mouthpiece of Christ, an ambassador of the gospel of our King, one to whom is entrusted the feeding of the souls of the precious elect of God, suddenly fills you with a measure of fear as you stand before the task to which you are called.

Do not mistrust this feeling. I hope that it remains with you all your life. It is only this sense of wonder and fear at the awesome-ness of the task which will lead you to seek your strength and help only from Him Who has appointed you to this position in His Church.

While perhaps we can discuss some of these things in another letter, for there are many things to write in this connection, nevertheless, you have asked for some guidance in the matter of preaching. And it might be well to shelve our present discussion for a little while to turn to this matter.

The fact that you inquire concerning the whole subject of preaching is interesting. You have had your Homiletics course in seminary, and you have mastered, in so far as that is possible in school, the mechanics of exegesis and sermon making. It is not concerning these things which you inquire. Your question, I take it, arises out of another situation. You have learned rather quickly that mastering theory in school is one thing — of no little importance, of course. But the matter of putting theory into practice is quite another. You will find that this is true in all aspects of your work. I suppose, in a way, I am interpreting your request. But I take you to mean that you are anxious to know something about the more practical aspects of preaching. And this is indeed something worth talking about.

Although it may seem that I am starting rather far distant from the subject of preaching, I think nevertheless, that this is important if we are to put preaching, from a practical point of view, in its proper perspective. I want to talk for a bit about the relation between preaching and what is called in our day, the New Hermeneutics.

There will not be sufficient room in this letter to complete our discussion of the subject; so please wait for a further letter or two to finish the matter. In the meantime you can write with any questions you may have and perhaps steer the discussion in different channels.

Admittedly, I have a personal reason for discussing this matter first. I was asked to give a Reformation Day lecture on the subject of the New Hermeneutics. And, while I could not discuss in that lecture the relationship between the New Hermeneutics in preaching, I felt all along in the lecture that this was a subject worth some discussion.

There is no doubt about it that the New Hermeneutics has all kinds of implications for preaching. You recall from your school days that when we worked together in Hermeneutics class we discussed at length the principles of the interpretation of Scripture — and this is really what Hermeneutics is all about. You will recall that we talked about the fact

that your study of the principles of Biblical interpretation was directly related to your calling to preach the gospel. It stands to reason therefore, that the two are closely connected to each other. This is not only true from a theoretical point of view, but from a very practical point of view as well.

When mention is made of the New Hermeneutics, (and there is a lot of talk about this in the air nowadays), it is not always so very clear exactly what people mean by this. This confusion is due to the fact that there is such a great variety of opinion among those who promote this so-called New Hermeneutics. There are almost as many differences of methods of interpretation as there are interpreters. Each one who takes upon himself the task of constructing a different Hermeneutics has his own idea as to how this ought to be done. This, in itself, is worthy of special notice. There is something instructive in this, for it gives evidence of the fact that once one has abandoned the tried and true paths, it is sort of like "every man for himself." And this already puts a big question mark behind all these attempts.

Nevertheless, the term New Hermeneutics is, from one point of view, a fitting description of what is going on in the field of Biblical interpretation; and, from another point of view, it is a misnomer. It is a misnomer first of all, because what is meant by the name New Hermeneutics is really not *new* at all. The New Hermeneutics has striking resemblances to what has been going on in the field of higher and destructive criticism for a couple of centuries already. These resemblances have to do not only with the views which are held by the proponents of these New Hermeneutics — the views are the same in some respects of those of the higher critics from way back in the 18th century; but the resemblances are especially striking in the way both the higher critics and the proponents of the New Hermeneutics approach Scripture. That is, both approach Scripture from a *rationalistic* viewpoint. And I mean this to be in distinction from the approach of *faith*. But I shall try to say a little bit more about this later on. So the New Hermeneutics is not really *new*, but very, very old.

Nevertheless, from another viewpoint it is new. And it's new because it is only within the last twenty or thirty years that this Hermeneutics has been found within the Reformed Churches. At the time of the Reformation, certain basic and fundamental principles of Scriptural interpretation were set down which the Reformers maintained over against Rome. And while there have been, over the years, some development and systematization of these views, nevertheless, the Reformed Churches have been faithful to these principles. Higher Criticism arose out of rationalistic philosophy which had its roots not in the Reformation, but in the Renaissance. It is true that

this rationalism and Higher Criticism infected the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in the 17th and 18th centuries. But when our fathers led many people of God out of the old State Church in 1834, the Church returned to the principles of the Reformation also in this matter of Biblical interpretation. And the church has, on the whole, remained faithful to these principles. Even when there were many doctrinal controversies of many different kinds, the opposing parties were, on the whole, not divided on questions of Hermeneutics. And if there were men who departed from these principles of the Reformers, (such as Geelkerken in the Netherlands, and Jansen in America) they were deposed from office.

But now things are different. Within the Reformed Churches there is a new approach; not new in the sense of being something different from Higher Criticism, but new in the sense that the principles of Higher Criticism are rapidly creeping into Reformed circles and winning the day. This is new.

But I see I must end this letter. We shall have to continue our discussion next time. In the meantime, I suggest you read H. Boer's articles in the *Reformed Journal* on this subject. He has just started a series on the matter. He is going to defend, he says, a genuine and Scriptural "Biblical criticism." We shall see.

With Christian greetings,
H. Hanko

Taking Heed To Doctrine:

Hyper Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel (14)

Rev. David Engelsma

John Calvin takes up the doctrine of the call of the gospel in Book III of the *Institutes*, in connection with the doctrine of God's eternal election. In chapter XXII, section 10, after he has taught that God elects some to Salvation and reprobates others to perdition, he notes that "some object that God would be inconsistent with himself, in inviting all without distinction while he elects only a few. Thus, according to them, the universality of the promise destroys the distinction of special grace." He faces the question, "How can election be harmonized with the call of the gospel to others beside those who are saved?" This question is really an objection to election. Those who raise it argue that since God calls everyone to repent and believe, there is no election.

Calvin's answer is that there is harmony between "the two things — viz. that by external preaching all are called to faith and repentance, and that yet the Spirit of faith and repentance is not given to all." Addressing himself to the assumption that the external call to everyone implies a universal grace of God to all and a universal promise to all, Calvin reminds such objectors to election that God is not "under a fixed obligation to call all equally." "He (God) destines the promises of salvation specially to

the elect (Is. 8:16)." "Whence it is evident that the doctrine of salvation, which is said to be set apart for the sons of the Church only, is abused when it is represented as effectually available to all . . . though the word of the gospel is addressed generally to all, yet the gift of faith is rare. Isaiah assigns the cause when he says, that the arm of the Lord is not revealed to all (Isa. 53:1)."

The harmony between election and the call of the gospel to all who hear the preaching Calvin gives in chapter XXIV of Book III. He begins by stating that he will now treat "both of the calling of the elect, and of the blinding and hardening of the ungodly" (section 1). For Calvin, "the preaching of the gospel springs from the fountain of election" (1), i.e., the preaching of the gospel is due to the eternal love of God's heart for the elect, is God's gift to the elect, and is intended to save the elect — and the elect only. Accordingly, the call of the gospel, "which consists not merely of the preaching of the word, but also of the illumination of the Spirit" (2), is exclusively for the elect. God withholds the call from the reprobate.

Immediately, Calvin brings up Jesus' words in Matthew 22:14: "Many are called but few are chosen." Does this not contradict Calvin's teaching

that God calls only the elect, and does this not indicate that God desires many more to be saved than only the elect? Not at all, says Calvin, for "there are two species of calling — there is a universal call, by which God, through the external preaching of the word, invites all men alike, even those for whom he designs the call to be a savour of death, and the ground of a severer condemnation. Besides this there is a special call which, for the most part, God bestows on believers only, when by the internal illumination of the Spirit he causes the word preached to take deep root in their hearts" (8). The "special call," or efficacious call, which consists both of the preaching of the gospel and the "internal illumination of the Spirit," is for the elect alone. The call in the preaching comes also to many reprobates, but God's "design" with the call to them is that it be to them a savour of death and the ground of worse condemnation. Calvin does not regard the external call of the gospel as grace to all hearers or as an expression of God's sincere desire to save all.

Calvin comes back to the assertion that the preaching of the gospel, and particularly the call of the gospel, has a two-fold effect and that this effect is determined by God's eternal purpose in election and reprobation. "As the Lord by the efficacy of his calling accomplishes towards his elect the salvation to which he had by his eternal counsel destined them, so he has judgments against the reprobate, by which he executes his counsel concerning them. Those, therefore, whom he has created for dishonour during life and destruction at death, that they may be vessels of wrath and examples of severity, in bringing to their doom, he at one time deprives of the means of hearing his word, at another by the preaching of it blinds and stupefies them the more" (12). So far from being grace to the reprobate, the preaching of the gospel is a judgment against them, for by the preaching God blinds and stupefies them. "God sends his word to many whose blindness he is pleased to aggravate" (13). This is the teaching of Holy Scripture. God sent Moses to Pharaoh with His Word in order to harden Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 4:21). "But the prophecy of Isaiah presses still more closely; for he is thus commissioned by the Lord, 'Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not, and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert and be healed' (Isa. 6:9, 10). Here he directs his voice to them, but it is that they may turn a deafer ear; he kindles a light, but it is that they may become more blind; he produces a doctrine, but it is that they may be more stupid; he employs a remedy, but it is that they may not be cured" (13). After referring to John's explanation of this prophecy, in John 12, that

it was spoken of the Jews' inability to believe on Christ, Calvin declared to be "incontrovertible, that to those whom God is not pleased to illumine, he delivers his doctrine wrapt up in enigmas, so that they may not profit by it, but be given over to greater blindness" (13).

Calvin concludes his treatment of the doctrine of the call by considering certain texts appealed to by those who object to the teaching that God's call unto salvation is grounded in and determined by election. Strikingly, these texts are the same as those always appealed to by defenders of the offer and, as Calvin remarks in his "Treatise of the Eternal Predestination of God," the same as those appealed to by Pelagius against Augustine: Ezekiel 18:23; I Timothy 2:4; and Matthew 23:37. Whether one agrees with Calvin's interpretation of these texts or not, it is clear that he does not explain them as teaching that God is gracious in the gospel to elect and reprobate alike or that God sincerely desires all men to be saved. Calvin's remarks on Ezekiel 18:23 show this. The text reads: "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?" Calvin's opponents appeal to it as proof that God loves every man and, in that love, sincerely desires every man to be saved. Replies Calvin: "If we are to extend this to the whole human race, why are not the very many whose minds might be more easily bent to obey urged to repentance, rather than those who by his invitations become daily more and more hardened? Our Lord declares that the preaching of the gospel and miracles would have produced more fruit among the people of Ninevah and Sodom than in Judea (Matt. 13:23). How comes it, then, that if God would have all to be saved, he does not open a door of repentance for the wretched, who would more readily have received grace? Hence we may see that the passage is violently wrested, if the will of God, which the prophet mentions, is opposed to his eternal counsel, by which he separated the elect from the reprobate" (15). The "genuine meaning" of this much-abused text, says Calvin, is that "the prophet . . . only means to give the hope of pardon to them who repent" (15).

Calvin's doctrine of the call of the gospel is also on the foreground in the first of the two treatises that make up his *Calvin's Calvinism**, "A Treatise of the Eternal Predestination of God." Calvin wrote it, shortly before his death, against Albertus Pighius and Georgius the Sicilian, who denied predestination and affirmed free-will. Pighius made grace common to all men in the offer of salvation, although it depended for its efficacy on the will of the sinner. Calvin calls this a "fiction": "The fiction of Pighius is puerile and absurd, when he interprets grace to be God's goodness in inviting all men to salvation, though all were

lost in Adam. For Paul most clearly separates the *foreknown* from those on whom God deigned not to look in mercy . . . he (Pighius) holds fast the fiction that grace is offered equally to all, but that it is ultimately rendered effectual by the will of man, just as each one is willing to receive it" (pp. 49-51).

Pighius, "this worthless fellow," thought to find an argument against election in the fact that "Christ, the Redeemer of the whole world, commanded the Gospel to be preached to all men, promiscuously, generally, and without distinction." Calvin replies "that Christ was *so* ordained the Saviour of the whole world, as that He might save those that were given unto Him by the Father out of the whole world, that He might be the eternal life of them of whom He is the Head; that He might receive into a participation of all the 'blessings in Him' all those whom God adopted to Himself by His own unmerited good pleasure to be His heirs." The grace of Christ in the gospel is intended for and given to the elect only: ". . . the virtue and benefits of Christ are extended unto, and belong to, none but the children of God." "If we see and acknowledge, therefore, the principle on which the doctrine of the Gospel offers salvation to all, the whole sacred matter is settled at once. That the Gospel is, in its nature, able to save all I by no means deny. But the great question lies here: Did the Lord by His eternal counsel *ordain* salvation for *all men*? It is quite manifest that all men, without difference or distinction, are *outwardly called* or invited to repentance and faith. It is equally evident that the same Mediator is set forth before all, as He who alone can reconcile them to the Father. But it is as fully well known that none of these things can be understood or perceived but by faith, in fulfilment of the apostle Paul's declaration that 'the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth'; then what can it be to others but the 'savour of death unto death?' as the same apostle elsewhere powerfully expresses himself" (pp. 93-95).

Calvin wants to "hold fast that the Gospel, which is, in its essential nature, 'a savour of life unto life,' and ought to be so to all that hear it, becomes 'a savour of death unto death in them that perish,' who thus remain in their darkness and unbelief *because* (Calvin's emphasis — *DE*) 'the arm of the Lord' is not revealed to them" (pp. 97, 98).

Calvin makes plain that he is opposed not only to Pighius' doctrine of free-will, but also to Pighius' doctrine that God wills all men to be saved — which two doctrines are ever and necessarily found together. "Now let Pighius boast," writes Calvin, "if he can, that God willeth *all men* to be saved! The above arguments, founded on the Scriptures, prove that even the external preaching of the doctrine of

salvation, which is very far inferior to the illumination of the Spirit, was not made of God common to *all men*" (p. 104).

Calvin castigates Pighius for teaching that the mercy of God extends to others than the elect: "After this, Pighius, like a wild beast escaped from his cage, rushes forth, bounding over all fences in his way, uttering such sentiments as these: 'The mercy of God is extended to every one, for God wishes all men to be saved; and for that end He stands and knocks at the door of our heart, desiring to enter' " (p. 152). By Calvin's standard — an accurate one — wild beasts abound today, running loose in even nominally Reformed churches. We will do our best to cage them and to muzzle their ravings about a grace of God for all, that wishes all to be saved, and that stands offering and begging at the door of the sinner's heart. Calvin refutes this "puerile dream" with the teaching of Romans 9 and Romans 11. God chose Jacob and rejected Esau before they were born or had done good or evil; God hardens whom He wills and has mercy on whom He wills; "the election obtained it, and the rest were blinded."

Similar is the refutation of Georgius the Sicilian. Georgius argued that the universal call to repentance and faith indicates that God willed all to be saved. For God to call a man to believe whom He had reprobated would be for God to mock that man. The form that this argument takes today is the contention that for God to call one to believe, towards whom God has no grace and for whom God does not desire that he be saved, would be to deny the seriousness of the gospel-call. Calvin's reply is that the command of God to the reprobate to repent is God's demand that they give God what they owe Him: "For surely God doth men no injury whatever when He demands nothing more of them than that which they really owe Him . . ." (p. 173). Calvin readily grants that the exhortations of the gospel are addressed both to elect and reprobate, but he holds that God's purpose with these exhortations is different in the case of the elect and in the case of the reprobate. As regards the elect, God intends that they "return to a right mind," i.e., be saved; as regards the reprobate, God's purpose is "that lying stupefied in their iniquities, they might, by such piercing appeals, be goaded into a sense of their awful condition . . . (and) prove themselves at length to be incurable" (p. 174).

Calvin's doctrine of the call of the gospel, then, is this. In the preaching of the gospel, God outwardly calls all hearers to repent and believe, and the Church must call everyone indiscriminately also. God's purpose with this call is determined by and is in harmony with His eternal counsel of predestination, election and reprobation — He wills the call to save the elect, and He wills the call to work the condemna-

tion of the reprobate. The call of the gospel to the elect is accompanied by the internal enlightening of the Spirit, so that they are efficaciously drawn to Christ by faith and are saved. The call to the reprobate is God's demand, made in perfect righteousness and in utmost seriousness, that they do what is their duty to do. When God gives this command, He withholds from them the Spirit Who alone is able to give the

repentance and faith called for — Whom God is not obligated to give to anyone — and instead hardens them in their unbelief.

We have now found for the defenders of the well-meant offer of the gospel the original hyper-Calvinist — John Calvin himself.

(to be continued)

THE VOICE OF OUR FATHERS

Angels, Devils and Evil Spirits

Prof. Robert D. Decker

"We believe that the Father, by the Word, that is, by his Son hath . . . also created the angels good, to be his messengers and to serve his elect; some of whom are fallen from that excellency, in which God created them, into everlasting perdition; and the others have, by the grace of God, remained steadfast and continued in their primitive state. The devils and evil spirits are so depraved, that they are enemies of God and every good thing, to the utmost of their power, as murderers, watching to ruin the Church and every member thereof, and by their wicked stratagems to destroy all; and are, therefore, by their own wickedness, adjudged to eternal damnation, daily expecting their horrible torments. Therefore we reject and abhor the error of the Sadducees, who deny the existence of spirits and angels: and also that of the Manichees, who assert that the devils have their origin of themselves, and that they are wicked of their own nature, without having been corrupted.

The Belgic Confession, Art. XII

Approximately two-thirds of this article on Creation is devoted to the creation of the angels, their function, and the fall of some of them. In this respect the *Confession* reflects something of the times in which it was written. During the Middle Ages and on into Reformation times many were preoccupied with the mysterious realm of the spirits. Much was made of both the good angels and the fallen evil spirits. The trouble was that all of this was mixed with a good deal of superstition and wild speculation which went far beyond the givens of the Scriptures. This accounts for the relatively detailed presentation of the truth of Scripture on this subject given in Article XII.

We do well in our own day to devote a bit of study to this whole matter. Today the pendulum has swung to the opposite extreme from Reformation times. Now very little attention, almost none at all, is given to the truth concerning the angels and the devils. Many know almost nothing about them. Many, too, deny their very existence. Let it be understood the angels are real creatures of God who serve God's pur-

pose in the salvation of His elect in Christ. The devil is also real! So is the host of evil spirits who with Satan "left their first estate" (Jude 6). The Bible has something to say concerning both and, therefore, we ought to know that teaching. As we turn to the Scriptures we ought to heed the advice of John Calvin who writes: "Let us remember here, as in all religious doctrine, that we ought to hold to one rule of modesty and sobriety: not to speak, or guess, or even to seek to know, concerning obscure matters anything except what has been imparted to us by God's Word. Furthermore, in the reading of Scripture we ought ceaselessly to endeavor to seek out and meditate upon those things which make for edification. Let us not indulge in curiosity of the investigation of unprofitable things." (*The Institutes Of The Christian Religion*, Book I, Chapter XIV, Section 4)*

*Anyone interested in making further study of this subject is urged to consult Calvin's *Institutes*; Book I, Chap. XIV, Sections 4-19.

There is a briefer passage dealing with the same subject in H. Hoeksema's *Reformed Dogmatics*, pp. 248 ff.

The *Confession* correctly affirms that these spiritual beings, including also the fallen angels, the devils, were created by God. "He also created the angels good, to be his messengers and to serve his elect; some of whom are fallen from that excellency . . ." As created beings the angels are as fully dependent upon the will of God as any other creature. They all were created good in the beginning, as is evident from Scripture. In Genesis 1:31 we read: "And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold it was very good." Just when the angels were created we do not know. Some think the angels were created on the first day of creation week. They base this conclusion on Job 38:6, 7, where Scripture says: "Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the cornerstone thereof; When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" H. Hoeksema offers the following comment on this passage: "From this passage the conclusion has been drawn that the angels were created on the first day, although it must certainly be said that the text offers no strict proof for this contention and that if we may conjecture that there is a parallel between the creation of the earth and that of heaven and the heavenly beings, it would seem more natural to suppose that the angels were created on the sixth day. But for the time of the creation of the angels we have no proof in Scripture." (*Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 249)

The Bible says several things about the angels. They are spiritual beings who do not have flesh and bone. (Luke 24:39) There is no marriage among them: "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven." (Matthew 22:30) These spiritual beings are personal beings with intelligence and will, for Scripture speaks of their intense interest in the "sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow . . . which things the angels desire to look into." (I Peter 1:11, 12) Although they do not know all things, Scripture does indicate that they know more than we. (cf. Matt. 24:36) As is evident from the fall and consequent judgement of Satan and the devils and evil spirits (cf. Jude 6) the angels possess a moral nature, and just as we they are answerable to God. We know, too, that the angels constitute a mighty host. The Apostle John writes: "And I saw, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands." (Rev. 5:11) Apparently, too, there is distinction of class or rank among the angels. Scripture speaks of the "cherubim" who reveal the glory and majesty of God (Gen. 3:24) and of the "seraphim" who stand about the throne of God. (Isaiah 6:2, 6) There are "archangels" who shall accompany the Lord when He comes in final judgement. (I Thess.

4:16) Two of these latter are mentioned by name: Gabriel (Luke 1:19, 26) and Michael. (Jude 9; Rev. 12:7) In addition we read of "principalities and powers, of thrones and dominions in the heavens." (Eph. 3:10 and Col. 1:16)

The *Confession* emphasizes two of their tasks. They are messengers of God. Their very name "angel" in both the Hebrew and the Greek means "messenger". They are present at special revelations of God, such as the giving of the Law to Moses. (Gal. 3:19) They appeared at crucial points in the history of redemption. Several times the angels appeared to Abraham and other of the patriarchs, to Israel when delivered out of Egypt, and in the days of the exile and restoration. They are mentioned especially in connection with the birth, ministry, suffering, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. In all of this the angels were created "to serve the elect." Of this the Bible speaks often. Angels are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be the heirs of salvation." (Heb. 1:14) Thus we read that the angels: rejoice over the conversion of sinners (Luke 15:10); watch over believers and preserve them from harm (Ps. 34:7; 91:11); care for God's little ones (Matt. 18:10); are present in the church (I Cor. 11:10); and seek to learn something of the manifold grace of God (Eph. 3:10). Thus do God's messengers serve in the saving and gathering of God's Church. And together with them the people of God look forward to that great day when they shall stand before God's throne and cry with a loud voice: "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." (Rev. 7:9-17)

The Article also speaks of the fall of some of the angels. The details of this fall are not given in Scripture, for it is neither necessary nor profitable for us to know them. Evidently Satan was moved by pride and followed by a host of angels, who became evil spirits or devils. (Cf. I. Tim. 3:6 and Jude 6) The two principal names of the devil are *Satan*, which depicts him as the enemy, adversary of God and His cause in Christ, and *devil*, which emphasizes that he is the great liar or deceiver of men. He is also called "the prince of this world" (John 12:31; 16:11; I Cor. 4:4), "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." (Eph. 2:2; 6:11, 12)

We ought never underestimate the power of Satan and his evil spirits, for, as our Creed says, "they are so depraved, that they are enemies of God and every good thing, to the utmost of their power, as murderers, watching to ruin the Church and every member thereof, and by their wicked strategems to destroy all . . ." Indeed we must "be sober, vigilant; because our adversary the devil as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." (I

Peter 5:8). At the same time, however, we must not be discouraged in the battle, for Christ is Victor also over the devil (Heb. 2:14). Already now the devil and his evil spirits are "cast down to hell, and delivered into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment." (II Peter 2:4, Jude 6) Powerful as he may be, the devil cannot touch us apart from the will of our heavenly Father. (cf. the Book of Job, Revelation 20) Besides, "they that be with us are more than they that be with them." (II Kings 6:16) In that confidence the believer "fights the good fight of faith" (Eph. 6), "giving no place to the devil." (Eph. 4:27) Calvin puts it well when he says: "The fact that the devil is everywhere called God's adversary and ours also ought to fire us to an unceasing struggle against him. For if we have God's glory at heart, as we should have, we ought with all our strength to contend against him who is trying to extinguish it. If we are

minded to affirm Christ's Kingdom as we ought, we must wage irreconcilable war with him who is plotting its ruin." (*Institutes*, Book I, Chap. XIV, Sec. 15)

The article concludes by rejecting the errors of the Sadducees and the Manichees. The former denied the whole realm of the spirits and thus, too, the resurrection from the dead. The Manichees taught that evil is in matter, or is matter itself. The only escape from evil is escape from this creation. If a man wishes to escape evil he must separate himself from the earthly, even from his flesh. He does this by the power of his mind. For this reason Manicheism taught that the devils could not have fallen or been corrupted, but originated by themselves and were wicked by virtue of their nature. Both of these errors are rightly condemned for they clearly stand in conflict with the teaching of the Word of God.

ALL AROUND US:

Shall We Take Inventory

Rev. H. Veldman

In a magazine, *THE BANNER OF TRUTH*, July, 1975, page 14, appear a few statements which I wish to pass on to our readers. After writing that he had no true religion at all up to the time that he was about twenty years old, the writer offers the following which, though not an excuse for his conduct, may serve to some extent as an explanation of it:

I really had no opportunities or means of grace, so to speak, when I was young. My father's house was respectable and well conducted but there really was not a bit of religion in it. We had no family prayers at all, except on Sunday nights and that only occasionally. My father and mother went to church and took us on Sundays, but I never could see that the service, or sermon, were regarded as anything but a mere form. Conversation on a Sunday went on much as on weekdays. Letters were read and written, newspapers read just the same as on weekdays. We dined early and had plum pudding, which was always a joyful thing, and we also had an extremely good hot supper, and sometimes oysters and hot ale. The elder members of the family on Sunday evenings in winter used to read sermons to themselves in separate corners of the room. But they all used to look so unutterably grave and miserable over them, that I privately made up my mind that sermons must be very dull things, and religion must be a very disagreeable business. Macclesfield with only 35,000 people had only two churches and in neither of them was the gospel

preached. The clergymen were wretched high and dry sticks of the old school and their preaching was not calculated to do good to anybody. I can truly say that I passed through childhood and boyhood without hearing a single sermon likely to do good to my soul.

I do not quote this because I believe that it is completely applicable to our homes and to our conduct upon the Sabbath. I certainly do not believe in legalism, and that what we do or fail to do as such upon the Lord's Day has any merit in itself. But I do believe that the first day of the week is the Lord's day, and that we should not spend this day as we spend any other day. And I have quoted this because I would ask our readers to take inventory of themselves, and to ask themselves: how do I spend this day which the Lord has separated from the other days of the week? I believe that this question is of great importance.

WOMEN IN ECCLESIASTICAL OFFICES

In the *Banner* of August 22, 1975, appears the following from a Rev. B. Mulder, pastor of a Christian Reformed Church in Alberta, Canada, a delegate to that church's synod, which the editor of the *Banner* has quoted in his editorial:

The other day I began to reminisce a bit about

that long and emotional discussion we delegates had on the floor of Synod of 1975 regarding women in church office.

There was the traditional view, born of good and long tradition, which holds that Scripture must be taken at face value, also with regard to this question. In that view there are two golden strands running through the whole Scripture. The one strand has to do with the salvation of male and female alike, the bestowing of the gifts of the Spirit on both sexes, the realization of the Pentecostal dream that your *sons and daughters* shall prophesy. Those who take this road assert no inferiority on the part of the female, no slavery for her, neither hidden nor overt. They simply believe that God has made both sexes magnificently in their own way and in their own order, so that they are both fellow heirs of salvation as well as living witnesses to the grace of God.

The other strand, equally clear in Scripture, shows that male and female do not have the same function before God. The woman is to be submissive to the male because of the creation order, for the male was created first and the woman after that. This, says Paul, is what the Torah, the law, says about her.

There is yet another reason mentioned in I Tim. 2, but we are not going to indulge in all sorts of repetitions of what has been said *ad nauseam* on the subject already. In any case, as the study report said, "the literal enforcement of this (biblical) rule . . . would forbid the ordination of women to the office of elder . . . as defined by the Church order."

Then, after asserting that the big question is whether it is to be enforced what the Bible says about this matter, and that the Bible says NO to women when it comes to holding office, and also stating that there was another approach on the floor of Synod to this question, namely that the Bible must always be read against its own cultural and historical background, the writer concludes:

If, then, anyone thinks that the matter of the ordination of women is a rather innocent affair once it is stripped of its emotional overtones, he or she ought to have another look at it. A ship run aground is a warning for sailors, says a Dutch proverb in free translation; it would be utter foolishness for them to steer the same course as their hapless examples. The vote on the floor of the 1975 Synod was uncomfortably close, I thought. The whole matter will be back with us before long; in the corridors of the Fine Arts Center there was some foreboding talk about battles won and wars lost. Sad business, really.

Sad business, indeed. We, too, fear that the battle may have been won but that the war will ultimately be lost. And it would surely be a tragedy for the Christian Reformed Church should that church ever decide that women may hold office within the church of God. How sad it would be that, although the Bible emphatically declares that women may not hold office within the church, the church would neverthe-

less decide that this would be proper, and this because the Bible must be read against its own cultural and historical background, and that therefore what may have been in effect years and centuries ago is no longer applicable today.

In connection with this same question, whether women should hold office in the church of God, there is an article in *CHRISTIAN NEWS*, Sept. 8, 1975, page 1. In this article it is stated that the LCMS (the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod) advocates the Scriptural position that women are not to hold office within the church of God. The LCMS has taken this position repeatedly. However, the majority of ELIMists (the moderate group among the Lutherans) reject this position of the Word of God, claim that the apostle Paul is or was in error when he forbade the women to hold office in the church of God, and they would maintain that women may hold office. Strange that these ELIMists should strive to maintain this position? Hardly! It is striking that that element who support the position that women may hold office in the church of God (and this is also applicable to the Christian Reformed Church) is constituted of those who deny the infallibility of the Scriptures throughout and who maintain that the Scriptures must be read and interpreted against their cultural and historical background.

LABOR DAY

In the *Banner* of August 29, 1975, the editor of the *Banner* writes on LABOR DAY. We need not quote the entire article. The following excerpts should be sufficient:

A holy day, Labor Day is. On which we give thanks for human energies, and organizing genius. On which we bless God for technology, and pray that He will grant wisdom for right use of it. A day to remember that all things made embody the lives of those who shared in their making. To remember that such made things are holy, for in them humanity itself is set aside for the common good.

So, now we understand that Labor Day is not only a holiday; it is a holy day. And we must remember that all the things that are made by human genius are holy, for in them humanity itself is set aside for the common good. Should not the people of God rise up in holy horror when they read this, this wicked modernism? I remind the editor of the *Banner* of Jabal, Jubal and Tubal-Cain, in the Old Testament, before the flood, the wicked children of the wicked Lamech. I assume that the editor of the *Banner* also believes that the products of these men are holy, inasmuch as they were set aside for the common good of all mankind. Well, the world was destroyed because of these men. Of course, there is nothing wrong in things, themselves. But we must thank God

for these holy things, holy because they serve the common good of all mankind? The world was destroyed because of these children of Lamech, and the same will occur at the end of the ages.

And then we read this:

How shall mankind know the use of all God's blessings lest He also tell us? And how shall mankind hear except He send bearers to this generation of His prophetic Word?

That the fruits of labor and industry may feed, clothe, and provide opportunity for all men — this, surely, is the intent of the inspired prophetic Word. That none shall lose their souls to luxury while others succumb to grinding want — this, surely is the temporal intent of the Gospel.

On this Labor Day it is imperative that the Church confront again its mandated obligations to the marketplace — that is what Biblical prophetism is all about.

And it is a measure of the Church's dereliction of its command to preach truth to power that often ideologies usurp the divine prerogative in the minds and hearts of men earnestly thirsting after righteousness.

It's a day to pray with the Psalmist, as we reflect upon another year of labor past, and anticipate doing what we can in the year opening before us: "Establish

Thou the work of our hands upon us, yea, the work of our hands establish Thou it" (Ps. 90:17).

And what can and shall we say about this modernistic corruption? Now we know what Biblical prophetism is all about. Here we read of men, all men, who are earnestly thirsting after righteousness. I know of only one righteousness, and that is the righteousness of the cross, of Calvary, the righteousness of the Son of God and the Son of Man, the righteousness which is bestowed only upon the elect people of God. This is the only righteousness I know, and this is the only righteousness which is held before us in the inspired Word of God. And now we may also know what Moses meant when he, inspired, wrote these words in Ps. 90:17: "Establish Thou the work of our hands upon us, yea, the work of our hands establish Thou it." This, Editor De Koster, refers to God's covenant people, the work of His grace and Spirit, and that the work of our hands is established by the Lord, does not mean that the Lord works, approvingly, in the hearts and upon the hands of wicked men whereby they seek the advancement of that which is from below, but that we may be active in the work of His grace and covenant. I am only amazed that an editor of a magazine, which claims to be Reformed, such as the *Banner*, could write these words.

Correspondence and Reply

The editor of *The Standard Bearer* has also forwarded to me a letter from a Rev. Arie Blok of Everly, Iowa, and we quote:

Editor in Chief of *The Standard Bearer*

Dear Rev. Hoeksema,

I am a minister in the R.C.A. and have recently become a subscriber to the *Standard Bearer* because even though I do not agree with everything I read in it, I do appreciate your point of view. In the issue of October 15, 1975, which reached me today there is an article in the section "All Around Us" (p. 536). There in an editorial comment regarding abortion I read the following comment.

Today we hear much of the movement to save the unborn child upon the ground that such a child has a right to live. This ground we must reject. The "right to live" is certainly not a scriptural principle. The sinner has a right to nothing.

While it is undoubtedly the intent of Rev. Veldman to point out that opposition to abortion on a humanist basis is something quite different from an opposition to abortion on Biblical principles, which sees the sanctity of human life as given by the commandment "Thou shalt not kill," and in the injunction of Genesis 9:6 (Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man.), I feel that a basic error is made with the statement that "The sinner has a right to nothing."

While this is true as regards the situation of a sinful man before God, who is too pure of eyes to behold iniquity; it is very wrong in the way it is used here, because the distinction between the First and Second Tables of the Law is lost sight of. When the Bible speaks of man in his relationship toward God, man is and always remains a sinner. (Yes, after justification, man is still defacto, a sinner.) But when it comes to man's relationship to his fellow man, Scripture does not hesitate to speak of "innocent blood."

If we see what a consistent application of "The sinner has a right to nothing" would do in common applications we can easily see how false the premise is as applied to the second table of the Law. Suppose that someone were to steal my automobile, the principle that "A sinner has a right to nothing," would prevent me from reclaiming it. Self-defense, in case of an attack upon my person could not be justified, because the only justification for self-defense is that *a person has a right to live*.

While the idea of a "right to life" often arises out of a humanist rather than out of a Biblical orientation, it is not right to reject the idea of a right to live on that account. In the humanist orientation we are dealing with degenerate derivative (should be "derivative?" -H.V.) of Biblical principles, degenerate because God is not acknowledged, nevertheless, to reject the idea of a "right to live" on the part of the embryo not only ignores what is implied in Amos 1:13, but ignores that sinful people like ourselves have "rights" not because we are worthy of them, but because our God is a just God who judges the cause of the innocent, even when the "Innocent" is a sinner, as in the case of Amos 2:1, where the Moabites are condemned for burning the corpse of the King of Edom into lime.

Yours in Christ's service,
w.s. Arie Blok

First, I am glad that the Rev. Blok is a subscriber to our *Standard Bearer*. I also appreciate his writing to the effect that he, although not agreeing with everything he reads in it, nevertheless appreciates our point of view. And I also appreciate that the Rev. Blok recognizes the intent of the undersigned, namely that the opposition to abortion on a humanist basis is something quite different from an opposition to abortion on Biblical principles, which sees the sanctity of human life as given by the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," and in the injunction of Genesis 9:6. Incidentally, my thanks to the writer from Everly, Iowa, because of the good spirit of his letter. I hope to reply to him in the same spirit. Of course, if my answer fails to satisfy Rev. Blok, he is free to write again.

I believe that I must maintain the position that we must and may not oppose abortion upon the ground that the child has the right to live. I do not wish to oppose this evil as also the world would oppose it; I do not wish to join with the world in its opposition to it; I would oppose this terrible sin only upon the ground of Holy Writ.

I had written that "the sinner has a right to nothing." Perhaps I should have written: "Man has a right to nothing." This is what I meant. That he has a right to nothing is not because as a sinner he has forfeited it, but because he, as man and as creature,

never had this right. Rev. Blok writes, and I quote: "While this is true as regards the situation of a sinful man before God, who is too pure of eyes to behold iniquity; it is very wrong in the way it is used here, because the distinction between the First and Second Tables of the Law is lost sight of."

I assume that the brother means that I do not have this right because, in my relationship toward God, I am a sinner, God is too pure of eyes to behold iniquity, and I have therefore lost this right. However, when it comes to man's relationship to his fellow man, Scripture does not hesitate to speak of "innocent blood," and I do have this right.

Now, in the first place, that a man has a right to nothing is based upon Scriptural passages such as: Psalm 24:1, Psalm 50:10, and Haggai 2:8. These passages speak, I believe, for themselves. That the Lord is the Sole Proprietor of heaven and earth and everything in them is because He is God; that I have a right to nothing is not simply because I am a sinner but because I am His creature.

Secondly, the example of the theft of an automobile does not hold. If it were true that I could never reclaim my stolen automobile because it was never mine, then it is just as true that the thief may not have it because it was never his. So, this reasoning surely does not hold.

My possessions and life are "mine," as far as my neighbor is concerned, only because the Lord has allotted them to me. The heart of the eighth commandment is exactly that I am a steward and never an owner. All things, including my life, are not given to me but loaned to me. A thief proceeds exactly upon the assumption that what he has is his and he also craves the possessions of his neighbor. Fact is, every man is a thief (I am speaking now of the second table of the law), even though he never lays his hands upon any goods of his neighbor. He is a thief by nature, apart from regenerating grace, because, hating God and his neighbor, he says of what he has: "all this is mine." And I must be content with whatever the Lord has allotted to me, and may surely never lay my hands upon whatever the Lord has allotted to my neighbor, be it his goods or his life.

It is exactly the error of socialism that man views himself as an owner. Abortion is surely a great evil. But I wish to oppose it, not in conjunction with the world and as the world would oppose it, but distinctively, upon the basis of the Word of God. I believe that I have also answered, by implication, what the brother wrote about Amos 1:13 and 2:1. Perhaps I should say that I need not discuss now these passages quoted by the brother from Iowa.

Permit me to make one more observation. Rev.

Blok refers to the two tables of the law. We must never separate these tables of the law, place them next to one another. The law of God is one. Jesus emphasizes this in Matthew 23:37-40. The love of God with all our heart, etc., is the great commandment, not the greater or the greatest. And the love of the neighbor is like unto it. This does not mean that there is a similarity between them, but that the love of the neighbor is like unto it in the sense that it is like unto it essentially; it is the same. The love of the

neighbor is never anything else than the love of God as revealed to the neighbor. We do well to remember that the natural mind is not subject to the law of God, and this, of course, also refers to the second table of the law. Of course, our love to the neighbor, be he wicked, will always be a "one way street." It will never be a bond of fellowship. And, as the Saviour also teaches us in Matthew 5:44-45, when we love that wicked neighbor he will hate us and persecute us. But the two tables of the law are always one.

FEATURE

Parental Report Cards

Rev. R. Van Overloop

It is said that when the school year begins, the life of the family changes. This change is caused by the fact that now the attention of the entire family concentrates on the instruction of covenant children. It is true that after a summer of vacation, the children are wholly taken up with school; but what about their parents? Are they taken up with the education of their children?

By the time this article appears in print, almost three months of the present school season will be completed. That means that this season of covenantal instruction will be one-third finished.

Parents have already received and returned report cards for the first six weeks period and are wondering what kind of marks the second six weeks marking period will bring. The report card serves as an indicator to the parents of the development and rate of development on the part of their child. On report cards there is room for teachers to indicate how well the child is doing not only in specific subjects, but also in understanding concepts, whether he participates, whether he cooperates with other children, whether he shows respect for other students and for his teachers, whether he shows interest, whether he is courteous and honest, and what his general behavior is.

But what about report cards for parents. How well or how poorly are the parents of the covenant seed doing in the education of their children? As we have said, one-third of this school year is almost past. When we watched the doors of the school open for a

new season, many of us undoubtedly had thoughts dealing with the responsibility of parents to train their children in the way they should go. We realized then how tremendously important this matter is. We were reminded of our promise and intention "to see these children, when come to the years of discretion, instructed and brought up in the aforesaid doctrine, or help or cause them to be instructed therein, to the utmost of your (our) power." And as Reformed Christians we know this promise is so important that we could not send our children to just any school, but only to one in which the "aforesaid doctrine" is taught.

After these thoughts raced through our mind, did we not then firmly resolve to become more involved with our children's instruction? What happened to that resolution? How well have we been fulfilling our promise and intention? Is it being maintained? Or has it been forgotten?

What would a report card grading our fulfillment of this promise show? Have we been watching what our children are taught? Have we been helping the teacher by helping our children with their memory work, arithmetic, history, etc.?

* * * * *

Why must we put forth the utmost of effort and power? Is that much necessary when we have our own schools?

To answer these questions we should take a close look at our children. What should we see when we

look at our children? What must be our attitude with regard to our children?

First of all, we see totally corrupt sinners. We see those who are worthy only of damnation in hell. Do we find the reason why we should exert so much power in training them in the fact that this training is the way they can be saved from that damnation? No, that is contrary to all of Scripture. The reason for the abundance of this exertion has to be found in something else.

Besides seeing the children of the church as corrupt sinners we also see them as being OUR children, i.e., the children of believers. Scripture teaches that God establishes His covenant in the line of continued generations. Does not that mean that "godly parents have no reason to doubt of the election and salvation of their children" (Canons, I-17)? We know then that we and our children belong to God.

If they belong to God, then they are only given to us for a little while. They are given to us not merely to enjoy, but especially to teach God's covenant and testimony so that they may keep it (Psalm 132:12).

Thus, God puts upon our parental shoulders the responsibility to train up our children in the way they should go. We could do that in our homes, but the State demands that we send our children to institutions of education. As parents in the covenant, we believe that "to the utmost of our power" means that we establish and maintain Christian schools. When our own efforts and powers are not sufficient, we help or cause our children to be instructed by hiring believing and upright teachers.

Then, after establishing Reformed institutions of instruction and after hiring fellow-saints as teachers, we parents can rub our hands together, saying, "The utmost of our power has now been exerted. We are causing our children to be instructed in the aforesaid doctrine. We have done our duty. The teachers must now use the utmost of their powers, for the responsibility is now all theirs."

Right? Wrong!!! Nothing could be farther from the truth. Before God, the responsibility is still ours. The utmost of *our* power must still be exerted. The reason for this is because God's command always comes to parents, not to teachers, to train up their children. The teacher too must use the utmost of his power and will be responsible for whatever he teaches; but ultimately parents must answer for everything they allow others to teach their children. Therefore we must know not only THAT, but also WHAT our children are taught. We must be sure our children are being taught the truth and all things in the light of that truth.

Now let us get back to the idea of parental report cards. What would our report cards show? We can get

a pretty good idea what our cards would show if we check what kind of mark our children received under "Is courteous," or what they received under the following categories: "Respects authority; Respects property of others; Respects sacred things." Are not these marks an indication to us, who are examples to our children, of the grade we would receive under "Shows good time use"? That is true because a child grows gradually and constantly. His growth is not limited to the moments during which we have the time to instruct him. Because his growth is constant, the child (especially the child of the covenant) is always receptive. Our children learn from our entire life, and every waking moment of our life. They are constantly watching and absorbing all that which goes on about them. If our children are courteous and respectful, usually they have learned it from watching their parents. Do they refuse to respect those in authority? If so, it is true because of the attitudes they learn at home. What is the content of our conversations when the children are around us? Do we deal with every moment of our life as one in which we are teaching the covenant seed? Only then are we exerting the utmost of our power.

Do we have a good grade under "Cooperation"? Is there good rapport between parents and teachers? Is there a complete lack of strained feelings between the parents and the teacher? Do we speak often to our child's teacher so that there is a constant flow of communication? Do you know of better ways to have communication between the parents and the teachers? As parents are we aware of what is being taught and do we ourselves understand it? If we do not — we should not hesitate to ask the teacher. We MUST know. The teacher will gladly inform us and help us to understand it. They like nothing better than cooperative parents and themselves are very desirous to be cooperative. Do our children know that there is this cooperation? Or are they always trying to pit teachers against parents and especially parents against teachers?

Well, how did you do for the first twelve weeks of the school year? Did you do well; or have many of your well-intentioned plans fallen by the wayside? Let us hurriedly pick them up and do better in the rest of the year. We tell our children to try harder, to put aside their toys and to concentrate on the work at hand. Let us, as parents, do the same thing. As we have so often told our children, the exertion of the utmost of our power will never hurt us. We and our covenant seed will be the better for it. Let us not forget to create an atmosphere which is conducive to their growing as children of the covenant.

The result will be that they will be "piously and religiously educated." They will "increase and grow up in the Lord Jesus Christ." This is so that they

"may daily follow Him, joyfully bearing their cross and cleave unto Him in true faith, firm hope and ardent love." Acknowledging God's fatherly goodness and mercy, they will "live in all righteousness, under our only Teacher, King and High Priest, Jesus Christ; manfully fight against, and overcome sin, the devil and his whole dominion, to the end that they may

eternally praise and magnify" God and His "Son Jesus Christ, together with the Holy Ghost, the one only true God." What more glorious end can there be?

What a most blessed fruit upon our parental labors!!

WHAT IS THIS "FREE OFFER" OF SALVATION?, by James Payne; 12 pp.

This brief pamphlet is a reprint of an article which originally appeared in the Magazine *Watching & Waiting*, and which was sent to the *Standard Bearer* for review. In it the author takes sharp issue with the doctrine of the free offer of the gospel, and treats it in connection with other doctrines such as "Gospel Invitations," "Redemption and Justification," "Union With Christ," "The Gospel versus Mass Evangelism,"

"The Kosmos." He concludes the pamphlet with the words: "We conclude therefore that the so-called free offer of Jesus Christ to men as such does not, in fact, exist at all except as a figment in the minds of certain men."

The price of the pamphlet is not given, although other pamphlets are listed from 5p to 2p. It can be obtained from the author at 28 Cissbury Road, Hove, Sussex, BN3 6EN, England. It seems from the titles of the other pamphlets listed that the author might be a premillennialist.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On November 28, 1975, our beloved parents, MR. AND MRS. THOMAS Y. NELSON celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary.

We thank our Heavenly Father for preserving them for each other and for their covenant love and guidance they have given us. It is our prayer that Jehovah will continue to care for them as He hath done so graciously in the past.

Their grateful children:

Thomas Craig

Mr. Bruce & Kathy Nelson

Fair Lawn, New Jersey

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies Society, Ruth, of the Hope Protestant Reformed Church (Grand Rapids), expresses its sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Fred Huizinga and family, in the loss of her father, MR. DICK VANDER LOON.

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him." (Psalm 103:17)

Rev. Ronald Van Overloop, Pres.
Mrs. Jay Bomers, Sec'y.

News From Our Churches

The Fall Meeting of the Officebearer's Conference in Classis East was held in Hope Church (Walker) on September 29. Rev. C. Hanko spoke on the topic "Should We Consider Starting Our Own Institutions of Mercy?" The speaker identified institutions of mercy as sheltered workshops for the handicapped, clinics or homes for the mentally disturbed, rest homes for the long term sick, and homes for the aged. It was the speaker's contention that the need was

most pressing for the first two — both of which he felt were practical possibilities. The need is for counselling of the disturbed based on God's Word and not corrupted by the theories of modern, man centered, psychology. Rev. Hanko maintained that the proposed clinic should not supplant the work of the minister in the local congregation, but that the clinic could provide assistance in counselling.

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Rev. Bekkering just returned from a three week classical appointment in Edmonton. He had prepared a little history of the group in Edmonton for this column, but Prof. Hanko 'scooped' that report in the November 1 issue. Rev. Bekkering did send some photographs of the congregation in Edmonton and their place of meeting. In addition, Rev. Bekkering submitted the following interesting report on the Edmonton area:

Many people in the States have some misconceptions about Canada. Some may think that all of Canada is heavily wooded and snow covered with dog sleds as the main means of transportation; but the area around Edmonton is well developed and modern.



Edmonton, a city of about 500,000 people, compares very closely with any large city in the States. It has many large shopping centers, a renovated inner city area, and it is growing rapidly in all directions. In fact, there is an acute housing shortage in and around the city which has driven the cost of land and houses to a very high level. For example, an average size building lot in or near the city sells for about \$25,000.

The land around Edmonton is used mainly for agricultural purposes. Mainly grain crops are grown; some for "cash crops" and some as feed for dairy and beef herds. The fields are large and flat for the most part, with the average farmer tilling somewhere between 400 and 500 acres.

Oil wells are frequently seen in the country side pumping the black gold that makes Alberta one of the richest of the Canadian provinces.

The life in both urban and rural areas compares very closely with the similar areas in the States, but the cost of living is somewhat higher.



Our new sister congregation lives in a situation very similar to that of God's people elsewhere and faces similar problems and difficulties. Let us remember her in prayer as she fights the good fight of faith and walks in the way that our God has called her to walk.

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If you check your atlas, you may notice that Edmonton is not far from the Canadian Rockies — an ideal goal for your family vacation trip next summer. I am sure the congregation in Edmonton would be pleased to welcome you into its fellowship and worship services while away from your own church.

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Edmonton has extended its first call to Rev. B. Woudenberg. Kalamazoo has published a trio consisting of Rev. Kortering, Rev. Bekkering, and Rev. Van Baren.

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At this time of year many of our congregations are scheduling their annual congregational meetings. First Church, Grand Rapids, has departed from generations of tradition by scheduling the meeting on the Monday before Thanksgiving rather than the Friday after the holiday. A welcome change — in some households at least!

K.G.V.