

THE *December 15, 2005* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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Volume 82 ◆ Number 6

Let Us Go to Bethlehem

"Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which the Lord hath made known unto us."

Luke 2: 15b

It was the night of the Savior's birth. The darkness of the shepherds' night had been broken by the brilliance of the angel of the Lord. The angel gave them the good tidings of great joy because the Savior, who is Christ the Lord, was born unto them in the city of David.

Any remaining darkness was completely taken away when a multitude of the angels suddenly appeared. They made known the joy of the heavenly host concerning the announcement of the birth of the Savior in Bethlehem.

And then the darkness of the night returned. The angels went back into heaven. But they left

behind some light — the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And the shepherds, believing the report told them by the angels, decided to go at once to Bethlehem. They wanted to see this thing that the Lord had made known to them. The sign given them was of a manger, and so to this manger they felt compelled to go in order to see that which had come to pass.

With the greater light that is ours let us also go and see that manger in Bethlehem. Let us go often in order to look on the Word of God that has come to pass.

Those who gathered around the manger in Bethlehem knew that lying in it was the God of salvation — of their salvation. Mary was there and she knew it. Nine months earlier the angel Gabriel had appeared to her, informing her that she would bring forth a child who "shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). She knew it from her absolutely amazing and unique experience of conceiving a

child without a man. She knew it when her cousin's yet unborn child informed her that the event announced by Gabriel was realized within her.

Joseph also knew it. In a dream the angel of the Lord had revealed to him not only that what was conceived in Mary was of the Holy Spirit, but also that her child should be called "Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). So Joseph stood gazing at the manger with the knowledge that lying in it was the Savior.

And now the shepherds joined them — knowing it. The angel and the heavenly host had told them. And they believed.

We know it too. By faith we know it. We know it with a greater and fuller revelation, for the Child has spoken to us concerning Himself. We see the Child in the manger in the light of His cross and resurrection, which enables us to understand better what we see in the manger. Also, the Spirit of the ascended Christ Himself leads us, the church of the new dispensation,

Rev. VanOverloop is pastor of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.

The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692) is a semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc., 4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the Standard Bearer, P.O. Box 603, Grandville, MI 49468-0603.

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EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prof. Russell J. Dykstra
4949 Ivanrest
Grandville, MI 49418
(e-mail: dykstra@prca.org)

BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
Mr. Timothy Pipe
P.O. Box 603
Grandville, MI
49468-0603
PH: (616) 531-1490
(616) 538-1778
FAX: (616) 531-3033
(e-mail: doezema@prca.org)

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger
6597 40th Ave.
Hudsonville, MI 49426
(e-mail: benjwig@juno.com)

NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
c/o B. VanHerk
66 Fraser St.
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Sean Courtney
78 Millfield, Grove Rd.
Ballymena, Co. Antrim
BT43 6PD Northern Ireland
(e-mail: cpraudiostore@yahoo.co.uk)

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\$17.00 per year in the U.S., US\$20.00 elsewhere.

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16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm and 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms International.

Website for RFPA: www.rfpa.org
Website for PRC: www.prca.org

into the truth that God is come near to us in the Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

How is God near? In the manger God came very near us. He came near so as to dwell with us and to have fellowship with us. In the manger God came down to our level, for the divine united itself with our humanity. God came down to live our life. After the record of the angel's visit to Joseph in a dream, the Spirit used Scripture (Is. 7:14) to interpret the angel's message, declaring that the virgin's son should be called "Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matt. 1:23). He who is eternally in the form of God assumed the likeness of sinful flesh. God with us is the Eternal entering into the limits of time, and the Transcendent being wrapped in swaddling clothes.

This truth is the joy of Christmas. This is what gave the angels reason to praise God. This is what Gabriel said was the good tidings of great joy. If the Baby in the manger is not God with us, then there is no joy — at Christmas or any other time. In the stable in Bethlehem He who was rich became poor, that through His poverty we might be rich. *The* news of the gospel is that the frail Baby in the manger is God!



God came near. Yet He was hidden. Hidden to the physical and natural eye.

Neither the shepherds nor we can see with our physical and natural eyes that the Baby in the manger is God in human flesh. The Child looks like our children. In the likeness of our sinful flesh the Son of God is very weak. So weak that He is subject to the chill of the night and needs to be wrapped up and covered. So weak that He is subject to death in every sense.

When God made His greatest revelation of Himself, He completely hid Himself from our sight.

To the physical eye God was completely hidden. We see, not God, but a little baby — helpless and weak — just like us. But God with us in the manger in Bethlehem does not mean that the Son of God dismissed His divine nature in order to become man. He did not cease being God. Remaining divine He becomes a "babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." The Word of God was lying in the manger, but could not speak. He would have to be taught to talk. Any words of worship and praise given by the shepherds, He did not hear. In Bethlehem's manger God was very near, but at the same time so far. God revealed Himself, but as a Baby He was hid.

The only way to see the Savior who is Christ the Lord in the manger is by faith. That was true for Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds, and it is also true for us. By faith we believe, and believing we see that the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes is God — God in our flesh.

If Bethlehem's Babe is God, then the manger can only be the beginning. There had to be more to come. We must not imagine the manger to be an end in itself. No one can see the Savior who is Christ the Lord unless he realizes that the manger is only the beginning. God with us in the manger of Bethlehem became God with us on the cross of Calvary. If faith is required to understand Bethlehem, then it certainly is at Calvary. Earthly eyes saw, on the cross of Calvary, the weakness of the manger swallowed up in death. You could not see there the Savior who is Christ the Lord except by faith.

The glory of God with us was hid. This was deliberate. This was according to God's determinate counsel and foreknowledge. God hid His glory as the way to bring elect sinners, conscious only of their sin, to Himself that they might learn

that with Him there is forgiveness. The shepherds were afraid of the angels and their light. Those who are aware only of their sin are terrified of the glory of God and would never come to Him. Like Adam, instead of approaching such glorious Majesty, we hide and cover ourselves. The weary and heavy-laden sinner would not come, but would run away, if the sovereign God did not draw him to Himself. In the manger God opens the way to Himself for conscious sinners to see the Savior. God came down to us in His incarnated Son, in order to draw us to Himself.

The Mighty God came in profoundest humility, so that we might see this thing that is come to pass, namely, the birth of the Savior, who is Christ the Lord. The shepherds went to Bethlehem to see, and so also do we see. There is no flaming sword to prevent sinners from coming to see.

As we commemorate the birth of the Savior, who is Christ the Lord, let us go to Bethlehem. Let us not make the manger in Bethlehem an end in itself. It is only the beginning. Let us also go to Calvary. But let us realize that Calvary too is not the end. It is the way to the resurrection unto life.

As we go to Bethlehem to see the thing that is come to pass, let us realize that He is drawing us to Himself. See the wonder of God in human flesh. See the wonder that the God of glory stooped so low. See too that this wonder leads to another wonder: the Man of sor-

rows is exalted to God's right hand. Faith enables us to see the birth, the death, and the resurrection of the Savior, which is Christ the Lord. This is what the Lord has made known unto us. God came in our flesh to save unto Himself a people. God in the manger of Bethlehem is the God of our salvation!



*God with us
in the manger
of Bethlehem
became God with us
on the cross
of Calvary.*

Celebrating the King's Gifts (With Gifts)

To the King who enriches His subjects with great wealth, the people bring gifts. Celebrating the birth of the King, whose birth itself brings richest gifts for the people under His reign, is appropriate. To celebrate the birth by *worshipping* the King (with gifts) is obligatory.

Our brethren of Presbyterian background in Northern Ireland, Australia, and elsewhere, do not celebrate Jesus' birth on December 25. They commemorate His birth, but not with a special worship service on a special day. The history of Presbyterianism excludes worship on special days. These brethren will not think ill of us if we take time to call the church to honor King Jesus — with gifts.

Royal Son of David has given us gifts.

King Jesus has fulfilled God's covenant, God keeping the promise to be Emmanuel, God *with* His people (Is. 7:14; see Matt. 1:23). That the King Himself would come down to live among His undeserving people is the surprise of greatest joy. What delights them is not so much what He would *give* them as what he would *be* for them. His *birth* is their boon. He came to them as poor among poor, joined them in their suffering, united with them in their woe, assumed their responsibility to make right what they had wronged.

Those for whom He comes are all those, and those only, who were *given* Him by the Father (John 6:39; 17:2, 9, 11, 24, etc.). So His commission was not to look for subjects who might be willing to be His. It was to gather to Himself

the elect citizens by giving them willing hearts. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power" (Ps. 110:3).

To accomplish all this, God the Son must come among His people. He descends among His subjects. He is born. Being born, He can suffer as one of His own to satisfy the strictest justice of Father—who would otherwise discard us, find us as repulsive as a faithful husband would a filthy whore. King Jesus accomplishes His saving, covenant work.

This is news worth celebrating!

By this suffering, which satisfies God's justice, King Jesus established His kingdom. By it, He also earned and "gathered up" gifts—kingdom gifts. Since then, these gifts have overflowed from His hands and heart to His own. First, to each of His family He gives membership in His kingdom (church!). Second, each receives the essential (do not minimize that word!) blessing of righteousness, justification, the "forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7).

Third, not one of His children misses out on the gifts of faith, victory over sin, holiness, hope, charity (read Luke 1:67-

79 for the blessings this newborn King will bring). Fourth, for all but the fewest, He grants lengthy membership in His kingdom on earth (the church institute). Those other few are granted heaven before or at birth, or perhaps are isolated by persecution where oppressive governments suppress Christianity. Fifth, according to His perfect wis-

dom, King Jesus even gives to each one ability to live a full and rich life in the world—in family, church, school, business, and the earthly state. Finally (although this list does not exhaust His gifts), by trying His children as with fire He places in their hearts the growing hope for His return: "Someday soon our King will perfect His kingdom in the glory of heaven!"

If we know this about King Jesus' gifts, what are a few large or small gifts of earthly possessions? Who should care about a set of titanium golf clubs, or a shiny Kitchen Aid mixer to replace the yellowing Wal-Mart set, or even a studded diamond ring? What joy does a new bike give that even comes close to the joy of knowing God is with us?

The King has gifted us. These are His gifts.

For them we give thanks.



But not everyone is satisfied with these gifts from the King. Some in the church would excite you with the hope of different gifts, better gifts (according to them). They turn up their noses at the "old gifts" of faith, righteousness, hope, and church membership, like a school boy would at the gift of a pack of new underwear for his birthday.

Instead, they would have the King's citizens anticipate the boon of earthly power over earthly enemies, the wealth of silver and gold, the joy of a Christianized world, and this for thousands and

*This is news
worth celebrating!*

thousands of years. Along with this hope, these teachers (in churches, Christian colleges, and Christian day schools) call the King's citizens to put "earthly power in government" on their wish list to the King. They urge the citizens to ask for the gift of strength to eradicate poverty, clean up slums, eliminate diseases, and restructure society according to justice. They even dare to hope for (and because hope is not doubt, they really expect) the gift of a Christianized entertainment industry. These are the gifts newly desired from King Jesus.

Although they would deny it, those who hope for these gifts show by their writings and by their prayers to the King that they esteem lightly the other gifts—forgiveness, strength to overcome unholy desires, power to live godly in marriage, families at peace, and churches where elders rule in wisdom and preachers skillfully wield the Sword for the King's name.

I take this opportunity to celebrate King Jesus' birth by giving thanks to God for preachers who hold before the people of God the Christian's true hope. I thank God for the teachers in our many Christian grade schools and high schools who teach antithetically about worldviews and the future. I call us to praise God for administrators who point the teachers to good literature that makes clear the difference between the prevailing worldview and the old Reformed worldview, and the proper view of God's kingdom (readers may ask the *SB* for a list of such articles). In these days when many of our school teachers are trained in secular institutions, and the others are trained in institutions that have this new view presented as the Reformed view, *we* ask God for this gift: preachers and teachers who know their way on the "old paths," and can lead us on that "good way."



To the King who enriches us so, we give gifts. To the *King!*

That people would celebrate Jesus' birth by giving gifts to *each other* is another matter. True, for believers to exchange gifts in celebration is not unheard of in Scripture. In the time of Esther, the Jews memorialized their victory over their would-be destroyers at a feast of "Purim" by exchanging gifts. Mordecai mandated that the people rejoice that their sorrow was turned to joy and their "mourning into a good day." The celebration included "sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor" (see Est. 9:16ff.). But this kind of celebration was unusual.

More common was the giving of gifts to the king.

In the days of godly Hezekiah—but there are other examples, too—when Sennacherib invaded God's Judah and threatened to destroy Jerusalem and all God's people there. Wise king Hezekiah comforted the people ... and then knelt in prayer with prophet Isaiah. God answered their joint prayer with a miraculous deliverance. An angel "cut off all the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains of Assyria." Sennacherib returned "with shame of face to his own land." The wicked king was butchered by his own family. Judah's response to this deliverance was wonderful: They "brought gifts unto the Lord to Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah ... so that he was magnified in the sight of all nations from thenceforth" (II Chron. 32:1-23).

We rejoice in King Jesus' deliverance of us and in His giving us the spoils of His victory. So believers today bring *Him* gifts. They are thankful for His beneficence and wish to promote His name among the nations. Let all the earth magnify King Jesus ... with gifts!

Bring the gift of worship, the sacrifice of praise, the fruit of your lips, confessing Him (Heb. 13:15). Psalm 72 indicates that appropriate gifts for the king are that men "fall down before him; all nations ... serve him."

One gift laid at the feet of the King is praise in *public* worship. Protestant Reformed (and other) congregations gather on December 25 to spend the morning in celebration of Christ's birth. As in a normal assembly for worship, they sing Psalms, give offerings, and hear a sermon on a particular aspect of the birth—usually the history. What better activity than this on a day when most of the members are relieved of their obligation to work? They awake with the consciousness that this is a day of praise in the sanctuary with believers of like faith. It is one gift to the King.

Bring the King the worship-gift of battling for His cause: with the spiritual Sword of the Word, against evils within the PRC and without, against both moral and theological sins. The worshipping Christian is a battling believer. These are the activities of a people that honor him for His coming.

Let your celebration of His birth be the offering of love for His kingdom—for His church and for His rule in our hearts. Let it be love that shows itself in a liberal support of the kingdom's causes, Christ-like care for the poor, humble devotion to the needy in the congregation. Why gifts for the rich?

Even Mordecai's mandate for exchanging gifts in Esther's day was to give "gifts to the poor."

Return to Him the *life* he gave you. The "reasonable sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1, 2) is your body, and the whole of your life.

Celebrate His birth with gifts to the King!

Let your celebration of His birth be the offering of love for His kingdom—for His church and for His rule in our hearts.

In my judgment, such celebrations of the King's birth by Reformed believers would go a long ways toward gaining a hearing from our Presbyterian brethren on the matter of commemorating Christ's birth on a special day. That is, celebrations on *the* day which focus on God's gift to His people and theirs to Him. And if we are too optimistic in our wish for a hearing, certainly we can pray for a better appreciation of our engaging in a God-centered activity.

Giving gifts to each other lasts a day. Gifts of thanks to God go

on all year. And the next. Till the King returns. Then, into eternity. Imagine!




Every morning of December 25, congregations of believers gather to offer the gift of singing (joining hosts of saints already gone on). Maybe this year some will offer the gifts of these Psalms:

Let all to Him their presents bring,
To Him Whom all the world
should fear;
Ye kings and princes, own your
king,

With rev'rence and with awe draw
near.¹

Vow, and pay ye to Jehovah,
Him your God forever own;
All men bring your gifts before
Him,
Worship Him, and Him alone.²

Give gifts to the King. "Praise is thy holy duty." Why would we not? 

1. *The Psalter* #208, a versification of Psalm 76.

2. *The Psalter* #207, a versification of Psalm 76.

Letters

■ Personal evangelism and the antithesis

Regarding the article "Equipping Our People for Personal Evangelism (3)" in the July 2005 issue of the *SB*, I have some questions and concerns. My primary objection is to the notion that we must invite the wicked into our homes to evangelize (witness to) them. Doesn't this go against everything that we as Reformed believers stand for, and especially the antithesis? We are not supposed to bring wickedness into our homes via the television or the Internet, but yet we are to bring the wicked physically into our homes? Although the child of God must live in this sinful world, he is called to be separate from it: "in this world, but not of it."

Rev. Mahtani asserts, "Jehovah has shown His great love to sinners and has drawn us to His own house; we, His covenant people, must manifest that great love by drawing sinners, even into our homes." I believe it is God who *draws* sinners, not us. Isn't this the purpose of the promiscuous preaching of the gospel?

Rev. Mahtani says that as long as we object to the wickedness displayed and let that person know that he is not welcome back, that this is OK. Isn't this playing with fire? We are willingly to invite a son of Belial

into our homes so that we can "be a good influence to him"? I believe this is in stark contrast to the principle in I Corinthians 5.

Rev. Mahtani states, "We let such a one know that if he insists on displaying his sin in our home, he is not welcome back." This implies that those who do not display their sin are not only welcome back, but that we are to have them back in an on-going relationship. If this is true, then this is a seeking of ungodly friendships, which is against II Corinthians 6:14-17.

If believers are to take unbelievers into their homes, then I would think the Scriptures would be replete with examples of this. Where are the scriptural examples of this supposed principle?

I am not saying that we are *not* to witness to unbelievers. God places unbelievers in our paths and gives us opportunities to talk to them. But I don't believe the Holy God of Israel intends for His elect to invite wickedness into their homes. (See Nehemiah 9:2; I Peter 1:14-16, and 2:9.)

Matthew Medema
Saint John, IN

RESPONSE:

I wish to take this opportunity to thank the readers of the *SB* for their positive and encouraging re-

sponse to my article on "Equipping Our People for Personal Evangelism." This is an important subject and one that I believe is worthy of lively discussion among our people as we seek to continue to be faithful in the glorious work of preaching and witnessing.

I appreciate also the questions and concerns raised by some of our readers as indicated by the above letter. This evidences a serious consideration of what is printed on the pages of the *SB*. I therefore thank the brother for his letter, and also the editors of the *SB* for giving me the opportunity to respond, clarify, and further write on this important subject of evangelism.

The reader refers to the third installment of my article published in the July 2005 issue of the *SB* and states that his "primary objection is to the notion that we must invite the wicked into our homes to evangelize (witness to) them." He questions my assertion that since "Jehovah has shown His great love to sinners and has drawn us to His own house, we, His covenant people, must manifest that great love by drawing sinners, even into our own homes." The reader believes that this is "playing with fire," that this is akin to inviting "a son of Belial" into our homes, and that this "goes against everything that we as Re-

formed believers stand for, and especially the antithesis.”

I wish to respond by dealing first with the example that the reader himself gives. He asks: “We are not supposed to bring wickedness into our homes via the television or the Internet, but yet we are to bring the wicked physically into our homes?” My response is this: it is not the television or the Internet that is wicked, but the filth that is transmitted via those and other means. We must examine our use of those things, and if indeed the television set and the computer, or for that matter the radio or any other gadgets in our homes, introduce and influence us and our children in the ways of the world, we ought to remove them. We may use the things of this present life only to serve the Lord and honor His name.

Likewise, if by inviting anyone to our homes we thereby allow worldliness to enter there, we ought not to do it. If an unbelieving neighbor (or for that matter an unbelieving family member) insists on his or her wicked ways, we must not allow an ongoing relationship and we must not open ourselves and our children to an evil influence by having them in our homes. We are called to a life of holiness, and we ought not to be fellowshiping with the wicked, whether that be an unbeliever or one who confesses to be a Christian and yet walks in impenitence, for then we open ourselves and our homes not only to a bad influence but I dare say to the just judgment of God.

However, we must not use the biblical truth of the antithesis to excuse ourselves when we do not reach out graciously and hospitably to the unbeliever. The very Greek word translated as hospitality in the Scriptures means “the love of strangers.” Whilst we must show that hospitality one to another in the body of Christ (1 Pet. 4:9), we ought also to invite others — our neighbors, our colleagues, visitors to church, etc. — into our homes, where we might im-

part the rich blessings of a covenant home as we sing the Psalms, read the Scriptures, and discuss the things of God and of His kingdom (Lev. 19:33, 34; Rom. 12:13-21; Heb. 13:1, 2; Gal. 6:10).

On the other hand, I say again, for the sake of emphasis and warning, that we must not misuse the calling to be busy in evangelism by condoning the evil deeds of the wicked in our homes under the guise of being a good witness. That same warning must be sounded against those who establish sinful romantic relationships with unbelievers, excusing them as a means to witness to the unbeliever. That is playing with fire indeed! By the same token, allowing on-going relationships with family members who continue in public and gross sins, insisting that earthly ties must be honored in spite of open violations of God’s commands, brings serious consequences.

It is my hope that this response not only clarifies but is also found to be instructive and useful. The calling to walk antithetically and at the same time perform our evangelism labors enthusiastically is not an easy matter. Many questions can and do arise. What ought to be our attitude generally towards an unbeliever? Does it make a difference if such a person confesses to be a believer but evidences all kinds of error both in doctrine and in walk? Do the Scriptures give us clear guidelines regarding fellowship with one who continues to walk in sin, whether that be an unbeliever or one who confesses to be a Christian but is under discipline? Should we make all kinds of rules and regulations that will govern us in our fellowship or contact with others?

There are several basic principles that I believe, when properly understood, will help us balance our evangelism work and our antithetical life. I will briefly state them here. First, we must be sure to walk in holiness ourselves and never compromise with sin (1 Pet.

1:14-16). Secondly, we must know it to be our calling to admonish the brother who walks in sin (James 5:19, 20). Thirdly, we must be convinced that it is the calling of every Christian to give a good witness to the gospel both by his walk and by his talk (1 Pet. 3:15; Col. 4:5, 6). Fourthly, we must be conscious of the fact that whatever we do or say does have an effect on our fellow-believers, and that we must even strive to serve as a good example to others, including especially our covenant seed (1 Tim. 4:12; 1 Cor. 8:13). Fifthly, we must not mock God, who in His just judgment will punish both the sinner and him who condones or promotes sin in his house (Ex. 20:5; II Cor. 6:14-18). And finally, as with everything else, we must be sure to do all things out of love for God and for the neighbor (Matt. 22:37-40). Both our antithetical walk and our evangelism zeal must be rooted in the love of God.

On the basis of the above truths of God’s Word, my contact with the unbeliever, whether a stranger or a family member, as well as with the brother walking in continuing sin, will be according to the following lines: I will not simply mingle with unbelievers, or with those who claim to be Christian but who walk in open sin, in order to have a good time with them. This is wrong. My friends and companions ought to be the people of God who love God and who walk out of gratitude for His salvation in Jesus Christ, and thus honor His Holy name. If I have anything to do with the unbeliever, whether at work or at leisure, whether at a coffeehouse or in my own home, my motive must be to stand as a witness — to bring the gospel of grace in compassion and love. If the unbeliever or wicked-doer persists in unbelief, I must stand as a witness to his or her condemnation, and not compromise with an ongoing-relationship as if all is well. I must not simply buddy up to such a person. This will not only offend

God's people but bring mockery to God, who commands me not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

I offer some final thoughts that will answer the other questions and concerns raised in the above letter: I will walk in the consciousness of my calling before God to turn the sinner (whether an unbeliever or a brother or sister) from the error of his or her ways. I know it is God who alone can draw and convert, but I also know that He is pleased to use the means of the preaching of the Word and the witnessing of His people, both of which together serve the labor of evangelism. I must not remain silent but admonish such a person to repent. I will not conclude that such a one is a "son of Belial," because he or she could very well be a wayward child of God, as I myself was and am constantly prone to be by nature. If, however, after several warnings made with patience and love, the unbeliever or sinning brother persists in his or her wickedness, I will humbly and firmly inform the person that I am not being unfriendly when I say that I no longer can fellowship with the person walking in sin. Instead of simply avoiding the neighbor or showing cruelty or discourtesy, I will seek by God's grace to speak the truth in love and explain myself for the glory of God and the good of the neighbor. With that attitude, instead of reacting in unnecessary condemnation, I will say to that person that my ongoing contact with him or her not only puts me in a compromising position but will also give a wrong impression and offend the people of God, possibly my own children. And finally, because I must honor God in all my actions, I will let that person know that I must not in any way condone or promote his or her continuing sin or unbelief. I will still pray for that person and be cordial, but I will no longer be able to have that person over to my home (or go over to his or her home). I will furthermore make clear that the one who has caused this distance is

the person who continues to walk in sin. This may be my own child, but I must remember that the sword of the gospel cuts right through flesh and blood.

I trust this is helpful to the reader who expressed concerns over my statements in the article, as well as to all our readers. May God help us to be faithful in the work of evangelism in such a way that we continue to maintain the antithesis as lights in the midst of darkness (Phil. 2:15, 16).

— Rev. J. Mahtani

■ Land mines?

A quotation from a source outside the PRC which sets forth an extended definition of monergism in regeneration was given in the September 15 *SB* editorial. The quotation was given with apparent approval and without qualification. The following was included in the quote:

We are granted the spiritual ability ... to comply with the conditions of the covenant of grace....
...to accept the terms of salvation.

Upon reading the quotation, my mind's eye flashed back to a picture imprinted some 53 years earlier. The 1st Marine Division was deployed to take a position blocking the Chinese communist threat to Seoul. A Korean Marine artillery battery, with its USMC advisor, was ordered to occupy a battle site just vacated by a Republic of Korea army battery. While the position itself was sound, the poorly disciplined ROK unit had scattered land mines about its perimeter and left no chart showing their placement. To shorten the account, soon after the KMC battery had dug in, a land mine was tripped exacting 5 casualties — 2 killed, 2 wounded, and 1 errant civilian pig obliterated.

Another battle fought at about the same time surely was instantly recalled by many others reading the quotation. This was the doctrinal struggle in which the PRC

sustained more than 50% casualties. These readers are those who would stand with their fathers in holding fast to the truth of the *unconditional covenant of grace*. For them to see such phrases quoted in the *SB* without sharp doctrinal analysis escapes reason. Equally unthinkable is the "clean getaway" of the idea that the monergistically regenerated child of God is now able to "accept the terms of salvation." No mention that, in the wonder of being saved by the sovereign hand of God alone, the new fleshy heart within lives only by beating out a loving, though imperfect, commitment of obedience in thankfulness to the Savior.

On the battlefield, have a care for mines. Including those of careless and/or ill-trained "friendlies."

Joel Sugg
Katy, Texas

RESPONSE:

It was not our intention to quote the site's introduction to itself with full approval, but simply to let the site introduce itself in its own words. It is our judgment that readers of the *SB* are mature enough not to stumble into error over the words Brother Sugg brings to our attention. But Brother Sugg is correct, the phrases have been used to smuggle a host of errors into the Reformed and biblical truth, and he alerts the reader to their danger as well as any could. So, let the discerning reader take note.

Brother Sugg's letter gives us opportunity to underscore once more our perspective: while we recommend the site in question, this is not to say we do so uncritically or without qualification, no more so than we would all of the books we have in our own PR Seminary library. We trust that those who read the *SB* have the spiritual maturity to read what others write with a discerning, critical eye and so avoid being injured by every land mine laid along the way.

— K. Koole 

■ "The Scandal and Silence of Divorce"

The publication of various pamphlets by different Protestant Reformed Churches has proved to be a valuable tool in the spread of the truths of God's Word in many places. And it is with great appreciation that one finds on occasion favorable reviews of one or more of these pamphlets. That was true recently with a pamphlet published by the South Holland, IL Protestant Reformed Church's Evangelism Committee. The pamphlet consists of a series of editorials by Prof. David J. Engelsma in the *Standard Bearer* some years ago. The admittedly hard-hitting editorials point out not only the evil of divorce and remarriage, but especially the ignoring of this sin that exists within evangelical and conservative church denominations and educational institutions. The pamphlet, "Until Death Do Us Part," is available from the South Holland Protestant Reformed Church's Evangelism Committee or can be downloaded from the PRCA.org Web Site (see under: "News and Views").

Christian News is an independent weekly publication directed primarily to the members of the Missouri Synod Lutheran Churches. South Holland's Evangelism Committee had sent the pamphlet to that publication for review. Though lengthy parts of the pamphlet were quoted with evident approval, the "review" was relatively brief. Rev. Herman Otten, pastor of the New Haven, MO Missouri Synod Lutheran Church and editor of *Christian News*, writes at the conclusion of the lengthy quotes:

The stand CN has taken from its beginning against unscriptural divorce has not helped CN financially. Others, who have remained silent about unscriptural divorce, have been able to get large sums of money from unscripturally divorced major donors. They do not hesitate to run after the money of the unscripturally divorced.

CN shares Engelsma's concern about divorce and yet disagrees with him when he also opposes the remarriage of the innocent party in a divorce. Jesus said "I tell you, if anyone divorces his wife, except for adultery, and marries another, he's living in adultery." Matthew 19:9. A Short Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism with An American Translation Text says: "God forbids desertion. He permits the innocent party to procure a divorce when the other party is guilty of fornication."

One could wish Pastor Otten had been more specific in his opposition to Engelsma's instruction concerning remarriage of the innocent party. Certainly Otten's quotation from Martin Luther in no way shows support of his contention that the innocent party may remarry. Luther, in the quote given, expresses that with which the PRC would not disagree: there can be divorce on the grounds of adultery or fornication. I have not investigated what Luther's position may have been on the question of remarriage of the "innocent" party. But surely if Luther's position is as Otten seems to maintain, there should be a different quote to show this.

But of greater importance is that which Scripture presents. Pastor Otten quotes without further explanation from Matthew 19:9 — and only a partial quote at that. Nor is there even an attempt to harmonize Otten's contention with parallel passages in Mark 10:11 and

Luke 16:18. The latter two passages do not mention any legitimate ground for the divorce. The question addressed there is rather the question of remarriage of the one divorced. Luke 16:18 specifically teaches that both the "guilty" and "innocent" party are guilty of adultery in marrying another. That can be true only if God does not regard the "divorce" as in fact breaking the earlier marriage tie.

Matthew 19:9 teaches the same. The first part of the text quoted by Otten indeed has in it the "except it be for fornication" clause. The meaning of that clause has been debated. Does it mean that one cannot divorce "except it be for fornication"? Or does it mean that one who puts away his/her partner on the grounds of fornication (and *only* on that one ground) has the right to remarry? If such a one has the right to remarry, it must be that in God's eyes the original bond of marriage is broken. And if it is truly broken for this "innocent" party, surely it must be maintained that the original bond of marriage is broken likewise for the guilty party. Then the "guilty" party may have become guilty of a single act of adultery (at which point the marriage tie is broken), and he would have every legal right in God's eyes to remarry as well. And the church would have to accept him in this marriage if he repents of the original act of sin.

But the last part of the verse Pastor Otten did not quote: "...and whoso marrieth her which is put away (this must be the "innocent" party) doth commit adultery." One who marries her commits adultery only because the original tie of marriage remains in God's eyes. That is in harmony also with the passages of Mark and Luke. I would wish Otten had explained how his disagreement stands in the light of the teaching of these passages.

Rev. VanBaren is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

I would have Pastor Otten know, however, that we are grateful that he has so prominently displayed this pamphlet for the benefit and discussion of many.

■ Natural Disasters

We're living in a world where natural disasters are increasing, and the silent crises are increasing. It is difficult to choose between all of them" — Trevor Rowe, the World Food Program's U.S.-based spokesman.

The quote was found in the *Rocky Mountain News*, October 13, 2005. The secular press generally has been pointing out the unusual number of disasters taking place across the world. *World* magazine, November 5, 2005, lists also some of the devastating disasters across the globe.

Aid organizations nationwide and across the globe are stretched thin by the worst year they have seen of natural disasters. This has been the Atlantic's busiest storm season on record, and they can only hope it will end on its official deadline of Nov. 30. Such disaster responders are not there just when earthquakes or hurricanes first strike. They stick around to rebuild, and that means an ever-increasing workload as disasters pile up.

Mr. Lundstrom must now track his group's relief work for Hurricane Katrina; Hurricane Stan in Central America; Hurricane Wilma in Florida and Mexico; and the earthquake in Pakistan. Then there were the less publicized catastrophes earlier this year: major flooding in Mumbai, India; and a typhoon that lashed Vietnam.

The same day Mr. Lundstrom returned home from the Gulf Coast Oct. 25, Samaritan's Purse sent a 53-foot trailer of tools and supplies to Florida, where Hurricane Wilma made landfall after killing 17 people in Haiti, Mexico, and Jamaica. In Florida Wilma left millions without power, \$10 billion in damage, and long lines of storm victims waiting for food,

gas, and water—a now passé sight unless you are waiting in one.

Still, Wilma stole headlines before the impact of its predecessor, Stan, fully registered. Stan barreled through Central America on Oct. 5, killing about 2,000. Worst hit was Guatemala, where a devastating 40-foot mudslide buried whole towns and villages in the Mayan highland area near Lake Atitlan. More than two weeks later, authorities were able to recover less than 100 buried bodies in the town of Panabaj. They declared the site—and several others—mass graves.

The article continues by recounting other multiplying disasters. An accompanying article speaks of the estimated 80,000 killed in the earthquake in Pakistan—with about an equal number threatened by death in the cold winter already descending upon that region and accompanying diseases.

Many attribute these things to chance. Even many Christians are reported to believe that God could not have anything to do with this. Yet the prophecy of Christ rings loudly through all of these events, "For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matt. 24:7-8).

■ The Tenth Anniversary of the URC

Christian Renewal, October 26, 2005, features articles marking the tenth anniversary of the organization of the United Reformed Churches. Decision to organize as a federation of churches was taken on November 15, 1995 at a gathering in the Lynwood, IL (formerly Christian Reformed) church. Those becoming part of the new federation included approximately 38 congregations with slightly over 8,000 members. Today, so it is reported, there are nearly 100 con-

gregations with well over 20,000 members. Insofar as this federation was established in an attempt to return to the "old paths," we can rejoice with and for them. Some of the leadership early on recognized the root problem in the Christian Reformed Church, as also reported in the *Christian Renewal*:

The tension within the denomination threatening her unity, according to the CCMCRC (Committee of Concerned Members of the Christian Reformed Church), was not women-in-office, liturgical innovation, creation vs. evolution or any other of the "issues" in the CRC. The controversies that existed were the symptoms of a much greater disease: the doctrine of Scripture within the CRC. The CRC was no longer united when it came to hermeneutics. It was that new approach to Scripture that divided the membership. Instead of the Bible having the last word, the Bible was being reinterpreted to accommodate worldly wisdom and the Word of God had been made subordinate to science and culture....

In the lead article, written and sent in shortly before his recent death, Peter Y. DeJong commented on the attempts to seek closer fellowship, perhaps even unity, with other Reformed churches.

We ought to grieve deeply that somehow churches which claim to agree on all the fundamentals of the Reformed faith cannot agree to unite with each other. All of us are carrying along so much "baggage" — much of it good and some of it not so good — which we want to impose on each other before any union can be effected. Alas, every URC attempt at a closer fellowship with the Protestant Reformed Church (sic) has foundered. And even after much zealous seeking to understand each other, we have made far too little progress with the Canadian Reformed Churches....

Interesting point is made by Dr. DeJong: the matter of "baggage."

In 1924, ministers and congregations were put out of the CRC because they refused at that time to accept the “baggage” of the Three Points of Common Grace adopted by the Synod of the CRC. Is this the baggage that the URC continues to maintain? Does the URC assume any of the responsibility yet today of the actions of their forefathers in putting out faithful officebearers with their congregations? Though probably none living in the URC today participated in the actions taken in 1924, yet for dozens of years they lived without objection with those who took that action (and precious little is heard yet today in the way of criticism of that action).


But also other baggage was assumed within the CRC since 1924.

There was the approval (within limits) of worldly amusements (on the ground of common grace). There was the condoning of divorce and remarriage. Union membership was condoned. Women were given the right to vote in the congregational meetings. Is this the baggage to which Dr. DeJong refers? Is this the baggage that is “good” or “not so good”? In fairness, the PRC ought to be informed so that profitable discussions between the URC and the PRC could begin.

The URC, according to the articles, face current tensions:

The URCNA at ten years has already seen much and dealt with only a little of what faces it. Some of the most serious controversies

in the Church today, from the proper interpretation of the very beginnings of Scripture itself to our understanding of the central issue of the Reformation, justification, rage within the walls of this young federation. Questions of tradition versus commandment, of ecclesiastical unity versus purity, of growth versus enlargement, are all subjects of vigorous discussion and occasional debate within the URCNA, and rightly so.

So the URC after ten years continues and will continue to struggle with many important issues. Our prayer for them is that the “baggage” which is good they will maintain, but that which is “not so good” they will faithfully and fearlessly discard. 

Feature Article


Prof. David Engelsma

An Orthodox Professor (concl.)

Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.

Titus 1:9

The standard

rthodoxy requires a standard by which right, sound doctrine is established and determined. The church needs a standard by which to determine that her professors are orthodox. All professors *claim* to hold fast the faithful word. But many professors lie. Reformed professors in Reformed seminaries are teaching future ministers that

the origin of our world, including humans, is evolution over billions of years. Reformed professors are teaching that the gospel is a message of the love of God in Jesus Christ for every human without exception. Reformed professors in seminaries that have a name for conservatism are teaching justification by faith and works on the basis of a conditional covenant. Reformed professors are teaching that sexual relationships of the unmarried, divorce and remarriage, and homosexual relationships are divinely approved aspects of the holy life of the church. Reformed professors are teaching that Scripture is a weak, error-filled, all too human word, subject to the professors’ learned criticism and correction, for example, regarding Scripture’s subjection of the wife to the authority of her husband and Scripture’s related forbidding of

church office to women. These heterodox professors are destroying Reformed churches. The church must have a standard by which infallibly to judge the orthodoxy of her professors.

The professor himself needs a standard in order to determine and be assured of the orthodoxy of his thoughts and teachings. “Can I be right, and all the world be wrong?” Luther asked, concerning his doctrine of justification by faith alone. I myself have struggled over controversial teachings of the Protestant Reformed Churches that are rejected by the overwhelming majority of Reformed churches and theologians. The professor cannot hold fast the faithful word, cannot carry out his task of exhorting and convincing by sound doctrine, cannot take a stand, if need be, against the whole world, without a standard.

Prof. Engelsma is professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

Previous article in this series: November 15, 2005, p. 80.

The standard is identified in Titus 1:9 in the phrase translated by the Authorized Version, "as he hath been taught." Even though the Authorized Version does not translate the phrase accurately, the translation does convey the thought of a standard. The professor holds the faithful word, and the faithful word corresponds to what the professor has been taught. Correctly, the text reads: "Holding fast the faithful word *according to the doctrine*." The professor holds the faithful word *according to the standard of the doctrine*. His teaching too is *according to the standard of the doctrine*. In fact, the exact force of the phrase is that even the faithful word, the living word of God that God utters in Jesus Christ and about Jesus Christ in the preaching of the gospel, is *according to the standard of the doctrine*.

The standard is "the doctrine," and the doctrine is the body of apostolic truth that Titus and all bishops (Titus 1:9, we remember, gives the qualification and task of bishops, that is, ministers, including professors, and ruling elders) had received from the apostles. This body of truth we now have as the inspired Scripture. Scripture is the standard. Scripture is the standard of the faithful word of God that the professor holds fast in his heart and mind. Scripture is the standard of all his teaching. Scripture can be this standard because it is the Word of God written. Criticism of Scripture, as a word of man, is the destruction of orthodox teaching, first in the seminary, and then in the churches. If orthodoxy is destroyed, there can be no exhortation or convincing.

Since the body of doctrine that is Scripture is faithfully set forth in the ecumenical and Reformed confessions, the confessions are the standard of orthodoxy, subject always to Scripture. Regarding every lesson, every lecture, every article, every book, indeed every theological thought, the demand upon the professor of theology is

this: *according to the standard of the doctrine of the creeds*.

Then, and only then, is the professor able to carry out his task.

The task

The professor's task is twofold, according to Titus 1:9. His work is to exhort and to convince. Both the exhorting and the convincing are done by teaching. Both activities are accomplished by *sound teaching*, that is, by orthodox teaching: "that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers."

The professor must convince the gainsayers. The gainsayers are those who contradict the faithful word, sound doctrine, and orthodox Reformed teaching. They are found both within and without the true church. Especially do they gainsay the gospel of salvation by grace alone. That the apostle has especially in mind adversaries of the gospel of grace is evident in the following verse: "specially they of the circumcision" (v. 10). "They of the circumcision" are men who teach righteousness by works and salvation conditioned on the will or work of the sinner. Today, these gainsayers are the Roman Catholic teachers of salvation by good works; the Arminian teachers of salvation conditioned by the sinner's free will; the Reformed and Presbyterian horde teaching the universal, inefficacious, resistible, and conditional grace of the "well-meant offer of the gospel"; and the recent swarm of heretics in the Reformed and Presbyterian churches teaching justification by faith and works and the falling away of covenant saints on the ground of a conditional doctrine of the covenant.

The task of the professor is to "convince" these gainsayers, that is, to expose, criticize, and condemn the false teachings of those who oppose the truth. The professor must be polemical; he must engage in controversy. Controversy is the task of all the ministers, but especially of the professor. Our

Reformed forms assign this task to the professor. Article 18 of the Church Order of Dordt charges the professor, "expound the Holy Scripture and ... vindicate sound doctrine against heresies and errors." The Reformed "Form for the Installation of Professors of Theology" states that the professor must "caution [the seminarians] in regard to the errors and heresies of the old, but especially of the new day."

Convince the false teachers! Refute them, at least, with regard to any influence they might have on the Protestant Reformed Churches!

This will offend many, and not only people outside the Protestant Reformed Churches. This will occasion hatred and opposition. Before long, this will engender more extreme forms of persecution. So be it. The professor must be a man of courage. More importantly, it is the nature of the Spirit of truth to be offensive by condemning error. Luther put it this way:

The Spirit of Truth is offensive and does not flatter. But it does not merely offend this man or that, but the whole world. And so our wisdom is to offend all, to annoy all, to confound all and to spare nothing, to make no concessions, to excuse nothing, so that truth may stand free, pure and upright, for all to see.

"So that truth may stand free, pure and upright, for all to see."

The positive task of the professor, as an orthodox theologian, is to "exhort." This refers to all his teaching of the people of God, particularly his students in the seminary and through them many people of God for years to come. All his teaching is exhorting, because he teaches with passion and urgency, as one who has heard the faithful word and himself holds it fast.

This teaching is sound, or healthy, for the seminary students and for the people of God. The

doctrine is itself sound, or healthy—full of vitality, beautiful, and strong. It makes the people of God healthy—full of eternal life; beautiful in holiness; strong with


the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

This is your task, Rev. Cammenga, glorious, but demanding.

You are not capable of it.

Neither am I.

Nor are our colleagues.

Our ability is in the faithful word to which we hold fast. 

All Thy Works Shall Praise Thee

Mr. Joel Minderhoud

The World Year of Physics – A Tribute to Whom?

This past year the international physics community set aside the year 2005 as the World Year of Physics (WYP). It has been primarily a centennial celebration of the work of Albert Einstein, but also of the many important advances in physics in the twentieth century. The year has been filled with pertinent programs and activities drawing the interest of many around the world. It is a celebration that pricks our interest too. We marvel at the scientific and technological changes that have taken place in the past one hundred years. These tremendous changes interest us because, as we saw in our previous article, they demonstrate something of the amazing power of our Creator, and of the unfathomable depths and riches of His creation. But it is also an opportunity for us to see the providential hand of God directing all of these events, including the works of man in order that His divine purpose with man might be fulfilled.

We also concern ourselves with this celebration in order that we

may be faithful in our calling to be awake and watchful in these last days. We must recognize the foolish mindset of the world in its celebration and properly separate ourselves from it. It ought not be a celebration that will exalt man and his work over against God, the Creator and sovereign Governor of all things. It ought not be a celebration of a security and trust in what man can do rather than in Almighty God. But it must be an opportunity to consider the sovereign majesty of God. May God give us the grace properly to view the developments in the world about us, and to celebrate in a way that brings honor to Him.

What the world celebrates

This year the world celebrates the intellectual creativity of man that has led to many amazing developments. They celebrate the “leaps of imagination, the intuition, the new modes of thought in physics and mathematics.”¹ The WYP celebrates many accomplishments of the past century, but especially the products that find their roots in the work of Albert Einstein.

In 1905, as the world was contemplating horseless carriages and putting themselves in flight, Albert Einstein was contemplating other marvels. In that year he wrote three papers that had remarkable,

far-reaching consequences. In one paper he explained that light behaves not only like a wave, as had previously been taught, but also as a stream of particles, called photons. In a second paper he demonstrated in concrete ways that matter really is composed of tiny particles called atoms and molecules. In the third paper he explained that nothing can travel faster than light, and that “no matter how fast you are moving toward or away from a source of light, the speed of that light beam will appear to be the same, a constant 186,282 miles per second.”²

Each of Einstein’s papers directly led to fascinating practical applications. Einstein’s first and second papers of 1905 led to a better understanding of atoms, molecules, and light. A better understanding of these areas has led to many technological advances, especially in the last number of years. MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) and other such medical imaging techniques rely on a basic understanding of the atom and its

1. Zanichkowsky, Stephen. “The Beauty of the Bomb,” *Invention and Technology*, 21, no. 1, (Summer 2005): 38.

2. Isaacson, Walter. “No Mere Genius,” *Discover*, 25, no. 9, (September 2004): 14.

Mr. Minderhoud is a teacher in Covenant Christian High School and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, Michigan.

nucleus in order to image the various organs of the body. Basic technologies, from smoke detectors to solar-powered cells to lasers, find connections to radiation or light. Also, nuclear power, whether used in nuclear weapons or nuclear power plants, is connected to Einstein's third paper of 1905. In a supplement to that paper, Einstein "showed that energy and matter were different faces of the same thing, their relationship described by the most famous equation in all of physics: energy equals mass multiplied by the speed of light squared, $E=mc^2$. Although not exactly a recipe for an atomic bomb, it explained why one was possible."³

These inventions are but a few examples of the multitude of items we use daily that are direct applications of the understanding of the creation and its basic powers that were particularly unveiled by Albert Einstein.

However, the world's celebration of the WYP involves much more than the products directly attributable to Einstein's work in 1905. Part of Einstein's work in the later years of his life was the task of developing a simple mathematical expression that would tie together all the aspects of reality. Today, many modern scientists, like Einstein before them, seek for what they refer to as the "holy grail." They desire a "theory of everything" — a simple theory that combines all the aspects of reality into one mathematical expression. Their ultimate goal is to discover what fundamentally unites all of creation without acknowledging the Almighty God and the Christ "who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by him were all things created...: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist" (Col. 1:15-17). Their desire is to make themselves and their "theory of everything" to be their god. For many this is what the celebration of the World Year of Phys-

ics is all about. It is about man and his pursuit of the gods of his own imagination.

Why a celebration?

It is obvious from the writings of the International Union of Pure and Applied Physics, the United Nations, and the US Congress that their goal in declaring and promoting 2005 as the World Year of Physics was not to arouse in the world an awareness of Jehovah, the one and only God. Rather, the stated goal of the WYP is to "raise the worldwide awareness of physics and physical science"⁴ and to "make the public aware of the glories of physics."⁵ But why does the scientific community at large feel it is so *necessary* to promote physics with the WYP celebrations? The ultimate answer lies in the fact that they believe that physics has had an important impact on society and has the power to relieve the world of many of its problems. The US Congress passed a resolution that resolved to encourage many organizations and agencies to "give enhanced recognition to the role of physics in social, cultural, and economic development as well as its positive impact and contributions to society."⁶ The desire is to make society see that physics can play a "vital role in addressing many 21st century challenges."⁷

One cannot read the writings that commemorate the WYP without coming face-to-face with the humanism that permeates much of our society. Man wants no part of Jehovah — no part of a mighty God who created all things. Rather, they desire to place their trust in man. In the Humanistic Manifesto (2000) we read, "For the first time in human history we possess the means provided by science and technology to ameliorate the human condition, advance happiness and freedom, and enhance human life for all people on this planet."⁸ In short, the WYP desires to get the attention of the public by promoting the work accomplished in the

field of physics so that more exposure and popularity may be brought upon the physics realm. This desire stems from the belief that science, and in this case physics, has the tools necessary to solve the societal ills of the twenty-first century. Therefore, so thinks the world, if one wants to solve the problems of the world (i.e., how to continue in this world of sin without suffering from its consequences), then he must promote the means that best will aid in "solving" the problems, namely physics. And a great way to promote this is to make a grand celebration extolling what has already been done and encouraging others to carry on the work. This, the world has set out to do. This, it seems, is the ultimate impetus behind the World Year of Physics.

A Vain Celebration

A WYP celebration without God is a vain celebration. Many have joined the WYP celebrations this year and have ignored the sovereign and all-powerful God. Those who celebrate the accomplishments from this perspective will vainly place their hope in these accomplishments and their trust in what science, or more particularly physics, can do. And the Bible tells us that in the last days man will be capable of accomplishing many great wonders (II Thess. 2:9; Rev. 13:11-14).

By these wonders they will deceive themselves in their sin, with the hope of escaping the consequences of that sin. This certainly reminds us of the age in which Enoch lived. Professor H.C. Hoeksema declared the following about the age in which Enoch lived.

The picture here drawn by the scriptures is that of the world approaching the zenith of its glory. The glory of man is the glory of the world. At the very point when the world before the flood reaches its zenith of its glory, it also becomes great in wickedness....

And it is this very strong and swift development of natural life that constitutes a significant element in accounting for the rapid decay and development in sin of the first world.⁹

When we consider all the developments in the last century (not only in the area of physics, but also in genetic engineering and medicine, for example), we must acknowledge that our age truly is approaching the zenith of its glory. As the world approaches the zenith of its glory, man will press all these new powers at his fingertips into the service of sin rather than the service of God. Man finds newer ways to manifest his sinful desires. He follows in the ways of his spiritual fathers — Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal-Cain — to develop all aspects of creation for his own glory and for the satisfaction of his sinful desires.

The more that sinner grows in power and the more he grows in gifts, the more he develops that power and employs those gifts in the sphere of natural, earthly existence, and correspondingly grows in the ability, and the means wherewith to commit sin.¹⁰

Sin develops! And man fills the cup of iniquity. God gives the wicked many good gifts — even the powers in the creation. And man uses these good gifts for his own destruction. “Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castest them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors” (Ps. 73:18-19).

We know from the testimony of Scripture and from our own experiences that man’s goal is to develop a great earthly kingdom — without God. This was the goal of the men at the tower of Babel. This is the goal of the anti-Christian kingdom. This is even the goal of many in the nominal church world today. As the world rushes to the point of the establishment of an

anti-Christian kingdom it will seek to press all things into the service of establishing that earthly kingdom. The celebrations of WYP seem to fit perfectly. It is man-seeking, man-serving, man-glorifying, and God-denying. Sinful man desires to promote physics and its advancement in order to help in the furtherance of *their earthly* kingdom. For a world void of God, these many advances bring their only “hope” and “security.” “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands.... They that make them are like unto them; so is everyone that trusteth in them” (Ps. 115:4, 8). What vanity!

Our Response

To the Maker belongs all honor and glory for the wonders seen in creation and for the amazing applications of its power. It is God who directs all things — even these amazing discoveries. We must recognize these wonders and the “discoverers” of such wonders as the *means* that God uses to reveal His power and Godhead. They must be recognized as only that — means; instruments in the hand of God, and nothing without Him. God has chosen to display His power throughout the creation. When marvels are uncovered, the world cannot help but see another aspect of the power of God revealed. Herein God is glorified, because His power and Godhead are so openly displayed to all. As we consider the WYP celebrations we must remember that it is the handiwork of God we desire to celebrate.

Besides celebrating the sovereign and powerful work of God in creation and history, we also celebrate the good gifts He gives to us. But we must be careful how we consider and use these gifts. We face the temptation, as do all others, to place our trust in and find our only happiness in earthly things. When we see the marvelous things that are done in the realm of physics we too can be tempted to trust in these things.

There is always the danger that we allow the latest technological advances available at our fingertips to give us a false sense of security, and that we place too much confidence in these advances — as far as our health is concerned, for example. Our happiness can be too easily tied to the attainment of more and more of these things. Let us remember that God forbade the kings of Israel to multiply horses lest they put their confidence in them (Deut. 17:16). Thus God teaches us that “He delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man” (Ps. 147:10).

Furthermore, we must use the products of physics and technology in a proper way and not in the service of sin. The scientific advances are not ends in and of themselves. They are means to an end. We are to use all these good gifts in a way that serves the kingdom of God. They are to be used in a way that draws us closer to God and to His people in fellowship. We must see that God guides man to develop that creation and the powers therein for the highest goal — that we might serve Him and praise Him with it (Belgic Confession, Art. 2). This requires great wisdom! May God grant us that wisdom!

Finally, our response to the

3. Ibid.

4. See: <http://www.physics2005.org/aboutwyp.html>

5. Stone, Chuck. “The World Year of Physics in 2005,” *The Physics Teacher*, 42, no. 1, (January 2004): 20.

6. See: www.aapt.org/Events/WYP/wypsupport.cfm

7. Ibid.

8. *Humanistic Manifesto 2000*, drafted by Paul Kurtz, can be viewed at: <http://www.contenderministries.org/humanism/manifesto2000.php>


9. Hoeksema, Homer C. *Unfolding Covenant History: Volume 1*, Grandville, MI: RFPA, 2000, p. 248.

10. Ibid, 251.

WYP celebrations is that of humility. The proud man who celebrates his accomplishments and tries desperately to make the creation and the powers therein to be his god is each of *us* by nature. We, apart from grace, are that foolish and proud man. God has graciously delivered us, His people, from this folly. We see the same accomplishments, the same advances, and the

same practical applications as the world does during its WYP, but with different eyes. By the grace of God alone we have been gifted with heavenly vision, enlightened by the Light of the Word. We are no longer blind and rebellious. We see! For this we are ever thankful.

And so, our response is that of praise to God. Let us bring praise to Him who made all these things and who holds the entire creation,

with all of its powers, in the palm of His hand. Those who have been given eyes to see perceive in this the Word of God's power and His providential care over all. When we consider all that the Lord is doing, praise rises in our hearts and comes from our lips as a *tribute* to Almighty God. "For thine is the kingdom and the power and glory forever. Amen." 

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Mrs. Jan Miersma

Royal Children: Humble Servants of the King

In our fallen world, the words "royal children" or "royal family" often create in our minds visions of riches, luxury, and multitudes of servants—in fact, a life of ease and pleasure. Yet, even in earthly realms, this is only a part of the picture. In times past and present, kings and queens have trained their children for their place in life, expecting them to study and acquire the abilities they will one day need. Today, to fulfill the ideal of *noblesse oblige*, that those of noble birth should behave nobly toward their subjects, royal children are often expected to employ themselves in some way in service to others. We hear of the members of royal families involved in numerous "service" projects of one kind or another, many of which are widely publicized. To learn the place and service of our royal children, however, we will not look to

the kings and queens of this world, but to the royal Son of the great King Jehovah, to Him who came, in our flesh, as the Servant of Jehovah.

Service to others has become a watchword of our society. Schools require community service as a graduation requirement, while businesses encourage, and sometimes require, employees to perform public service of some kind. While in this way much work may be done, some of it benefiting the community as a whole, at least as far as outward material welfare is concerned, when we compare this service with the service of the child of God, we find them fundamentally antithetical to one another. First, the men and women of the world work for one another, or for mankind or humanity in general. We and our children serve the King, and even the service of the neighbor is first of all service of the King. Secondly, the world serves from a variety of motives: feeling good about oneself, receiving the gratitude or praise of men, feeling some affectionate regard for others, or per-

haps with some idea of making restitution for misdeeds or rendering recompense for benefits received. We and our children serve out of love and gratitude to the King, knowing we can never render enough service for all His benefits to us. Finally, the world serves according to its own standards of "service," according to its own standards of what is good for the neighbor, and according to its own standards of what will benefit mankind. As royal children, we strive to serve in the way of obedience to the King's standards for service pleasing to Him.

To teach our royal children to be servants of the King, we must first understand how we are servants, and then, what servants are. Royal children are the friend-servants of Jehovah. Created by God as a creaturely son to live in covenant relationship with him as His friend-servant, Adam, our first father, served as a steward of the creation, dedicating all his life and, as its head, all this earthly creation to the service of his God. Rev. H. Hoeksema writes in *Reformed Dogmatics* (second edition, Volume I,

Mrs. Miersma is the wife of Rev. Thomas Miersma, missionary in Spokane, Washington.

pp. 315-316), "He was God's co-worker.... He had a very definite mandate.... When the Lord prepared for man the garden of Eden and placed him in it, God gave man a specific commandment to dress the garden, that is, to cultivate and to keep it, which probably meant that he had to guard it against the inroads of the devil." He adds, "In all his life and work Adam was to be busy as the friend-servant of God, not as a slave who works from the motive of fear for the whip, nor as a wage-earner who puts in his hours merely for his wages, but freely from the love of God, as being his coworker and as being of his party." This was service indeed.

Adam, and we in him, fell. Rebellious, we rejected the King. Despising our own place, we wanted *His* place. We wanted to do our own works, for our own benefit, as our own masters. We delivered ourselves into the clutches of the devil, who had promised freedom, and became slaves to him and to sin. Now all men are born in this horrible bondage, heeding the lies of their taskmaster Satan: "No rules." "Do your own thing." "Free to be me." By nature we can perform no service to God or one another. All is wrought now in emptiness and vanity. Our sin in Adam brought the reign of death into this world.

In God's wisdom, this must be. Only in the way of our fall do we learn the service that surpasses even that of Adam in Paradise. God sent His royal Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who came willingly in our flesh as the suffering Servant of Jehovah. In our flesh, "...he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7). He perfectly obeyed the Father. He served the King, loving Him in all He did, even to the death of the cross. There He paid the debt of our rebellion, of our rejection, of our disobedience, of our hatred, bearing the punishment for us and obtain-

ing for us an eternal life that could never be earned.

His perfect obedience in love, His service as the Friend-Servant of Jehovah, is given to us, by faith, as our righteousness before God. Having broken the bonds by which the devil held us, He not only makes us once again the willing friend-servants of Jehovah, now as dear children, yes, even royal children, but sets before us His perfect example as the Servant of Jehovah. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:5-8; see also Eph. 5:1, 2 and Rom. 15:2, 3). In I John 3:16 we read, "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." And finally, Jesus, while on earth, exhorted His disciples and us, "And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:27, 28).

This is where we begin. When we think of training our children, we often think of things we must do or that they must do, but it is this foundation in Christ, His perfect righteousness alone and the sanctifying power of His death and resurrection to make us God's friend-servants, that must form the basis of all our training.

Understanding what makes one a servant is somewhat difficult in our day. We think in terms of employer, employee—equals who contract with each other, but that is not the scriptural idea. To understand servanthood, we will examine some of the characteristics

of a servant. We will see them in Christ, first of all; then in other scriptural godly examples; then look at how we can give our children a living example in our lives; and finally how we ought to train our children to walk in these characteristics. We begin with humility, and will consider other characteristics in future articles.

Humility means low-lying. It means seeing ourselves as the low-lying, first of all, before God. We are dust—fallen, corrupt dust. It means acknowledging that whatever we have, we have received, merely of grace. In the deepest sense, we cannot teach humility itself, but we must teach our children what it is and how it will manifest itself in the life of royal children.

Humility will manifest itself first in our relationship with God, in which we approach Him with reverence. We see this in Jesus, who, though He was Himself God, always spoke of the Father with the utmost reverence and humility. His prayers especially reveal this, particularly His high priestly prayer and His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Abraham manifested this humility when speaking to God, saying, "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes" (Gen. 18:27), as did Jacob, in Genesis 32:10, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant."

How *we* speak of and to God teaches reverent humility. Requiring a reverent manner — bowing of heads, closing of eyes, folding of hands during prayer, sitting attentively at family and public worship — is not just outward custom, but a physical representation to young children of a spiritual disposition.

Jesus manifested His humility over against sinners in all His life as "the meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:29). He did this particularly in His response to their false

accusations. It is easy to think ourselves humble when everyone treats us well, but as soon as we are maltreated by others, and especially when that treatment is not deserved, we rise up in pride to protest. We forsake lowliness. Jesus didn't do that. He did not rise up "on his high horse," though if any ever had a right to do so, He did. He either held His peace or countered with a calm, simple statement of the truth, or with a question, particularly in His dealings with the Pharisees and in His trials before the high priest, before Herod, and before Pilate. The apostle Peter calls this to our mind as an example, "...if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (I Pet. 2:20b-23).

Abraham, the father of believers, served as a model of humility (Gen. 18:27) when he allowed Lot first choice of the land of Canaan, though it was his by God's promise (Gen. 13:8, 9). Scripture describes Moses, the Old Testament type of Christ as Mediator, as "...very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth," so much so, that he bore for long years with the rebellious children of Israel, and even with his own family members (Num. 12) without retaliating, even turning away God's deserved wrath from them by his intercession. Hannah, the mother of Samuel, and Mary, the mother of our Lord, are particularly apt examples to covenant wives and mothers, both calling themselves handmaidens of the Lord. May Mary's simple and beautiful confession, "...be it unto me according to thy word," be one that adorns our lips.

If the spiritual reality of being "low-lying" servants lives in our hearts and lives, seeing where we stand, nay, lie prone, before God, we will not then be able to look down on anyone else. As husbands and wives, in our behavior in the home we will "...each esteem other better than themselves." How tempting it is to bite back when unjustly treated by each other, or by our children, let alone the world, because *our* pride is injured. We are so quick to excuse and rationalize our own sins, but then hold others around us, especially our family, to a more rigid standard. The opposite should be true of us. In humble love, let us "cover a multitude of sins" in others, but hold ourselves, as the low-lying, to strictest account before God. We teach humility by our own willingness to serve others, to "do the dirty work" at times. In His grace, God will use our godly example to teach our children what humility is.

Teaching our children to humble themselves also requires training. There are two opposite extremes to be avoided. On the one hand, we are often very proud of our children in a sinful way, and they will hear this in the way we speak of them. We delight in their appearance, their talents and abilities, their achievements, as if these were something we had given them, or which they have by virtue of being our children. We need to remind ourselves and our children, "For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" (I Cor. 4:7). Further, when children are very young, they already do and say many things that reveal the root of pride in their nature. We are tempted to overlook this, because their words and antics are "so cute" or because they are "too young to understand." Yet already at a young age, "foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child," foolishness that says, "there is no God; I am a little god." From


the beginning, perhaps first of all to form the habit in ourselves, we will seek to expose the pride that is at the root of so many sins, to help them see what is the spiritual issue involved. "Do you see that what led you to hurt your sister was really pride in yourself?" "When you shout, 'That's not fair!' do you see that it is in pride that you set yourself up as judge?" or "No, what you *want* is not really all that important. I will give you what you need." Perhaps this seems pretty obvious to us, but living in a world where "self-esteem" is so highly valued, we can easily become caught up in the spirit of the age.

The other extreme is that instead of teaching our children to humble themselves, we humiliate them. Always concerned first with their spiritual welfare, we desire to speak the truth to them in love. We should never mock our children. There may be some value in reflecting their words or behavior to help them see what they have done, but it is so easy to fall into a sinful mockery of them, because we are exasperated. God does not mock His people. He may sharply admonish, He may show us an angry face, yet he always does so in love to chasten and restore. We also humiliate our children when we tell stories about them to others, stories that may be very funny, but which embarrass them. Too often we think of our children and their lives as our possessions, to do with as we like. Training our children this way will not teach them humility, but will provoke them to wrath.

We can teach our children to be low-lying by helping them learn to put the needs of others before their own, by correcting them when they interrupt others, by rewarding and commending them when they surrender their place or privilege to another. Examples of humility to be modeled and taught could be multiplied. These have only scratched the surface.

Finally, we will teach our children that in the way of humility there is blessedness. We hold before them the promises of God's Word: "The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way" (Ps. 25:9); "But the meek shall inherit the earth; and

shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace" (Ps. 37:11). Seeing ourselves as God's humble servants, we and our children will be guided in God's ways, so that we will also grow in humility. At the same time we will have peace, abundance of peace. The humble

man, woman, or child knows the beginnings of that in this life. How much of our distress, our lack of peace, our anxiety, our strife with one another arises from sinful pride! But in the way of humility we have peace—peace with God and with one another. 

Go Ye Into All the World

Rev. Jason Kortering

Evangelism in the Established Church (3)

Hindrances to Personal Evangelism (concl.)

We direct our attention now to the fifth proposed hindrance to personal evangelism.

5. I'm not convinced that it is my duty to share the gospel with others. It is the church's duty to preach the gospel and this is evangelism, period.

We have addressed different aspects of this objection in past articles and we do not need to repeat them here. We wrote an entire article on "The Role of Every Believer in Evangelism." We also expanded on this in our answer to the third hindrance, which concerned the present-day emphasis upon personal evangelism when it seemed dormant in the past. Also, in correspondence that was addressed to the editor, we had opportunity to explain the relationship between preaching the gospel and personal evangelism.

It might be helpful if we add a few more passages from the Bible that focus upon the duty of every

Christian to share the gospel with others. These we glean from the book of G. Vandooren *Get Out and Get Rid of Dilemmas*, chapter 5. He makes the pertinent observation that our duty as individual Christians stands at the bottom of a list that astounds us. God Himself proclaimed the gospel in paradise. Then He sent angels and prophets. In the fullness of time He sent His own Son to make the Father known. After Him the Holy Spirit came to convince the world of sin and salvation. The apostles became His instruments and established churches; they were the gift of Christ to the saints (Eph. 4). And finally, we appear on the scene as the royal priesthood of God to proclaim His praises.

We are at the bottom. But let's not minimize our calling. God could have easily done without us. But He did not and He does not. Vandooren then borrows from John Stott's booklet, *Our Guilty Silence*, these references. I Peter 2:5, 9 is a reference to God's people as a holy priesthood. In verse 5 Peter calls us "to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Christ Jesus." This is our worship. In verse 9 he adds, "that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called

you out of darkness into his marvelous light." This "shew forth" is not limited to our worship. It is the word for evangelism. It is "to tell forth or to show forth." Worship and witness go together. There are places in the New Testament where believers are called "witnesses" or "fountains of living waters" (Acts 1:8; John 4:14; 7:37-39). Philippians 2:15, 16 is special. Paul reminds us of our calling to live antithetically, "be blameless ... in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation," but he also adds, "among whom ye shine as lights in the world." We do this by "holding forth the Word of life." We ought to note that the word is not "holding fast" but "holding forth," the difference being obvious. The purpose is to be a godly witness to those who are without the congregation.

Jesus said of His disciples, "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:18; 20:21). This is an injunction to the disciples as they represented the church. In them the entire church is comprehended, so we may conclude that Christ Jesus sends officebearers to preach the gospel in their capacity and office, but through them He

Rev. Kortering is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

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sends the entire church to witness concerning the same gospel. A good example of this is given in John 13:34, 35: "A new commandment I give unto you that ye love one another as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By *this* shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another." Our witness as members of the congregation is directed to the whole world, and it is so important that it confirms the gospel of love that is preached in that church.

Along this same line, if we compare John 1:18 with I John 4:12 we get the same idea. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18). I John 4:12 adds, "No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us." Now the Father can be seen by others through us by our words of witness: "we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world" (I John 4:14), and by our action, "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world" (I John 4:17). This witness of love encompasses our speech, which is confirmed by our actions.

6. I lack incentive to speak about my Christian faith to others. If this is true, why should I force myself to do something that isn't there? Are you saying that I lack spirituality and godliness in this regard?

The lack of desire to witness concerning our great God and His Son Jesus Christ is rooted in our own spiritual apathy. The Old Testament word for prophet is to boil over. The idea is that the spiritual life of God, worked in us, is like an artesian well that has natural force from within to spew water out of the ground. Our God is wonderful. He is the only God. And to live apart from Him is

death. Our only comfort in life and death is to shout, I am not my own, but I belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He alone satisfied for all my sins, and He is the One who conquered the devil and all his hosts so that I am safe from all his wiles. Not a hair can fall from my head without Father's will because of Jesus. Our Belgic Confession develops this faith in such a way that God triune is acknowledged as God, and His work of creation and recreation is in Jesus Christ His Son and applied by the Holy Spirit. Our Canons of Dordt extol God's sovereignty in salvation, which is from eternity to eternity. Every teaching of these confessions is derived from the Holy Scriptures and has stood the test of history. This is truth, God's truth, the truth whereby man may be saved. Precious few people or churches hold to them anymore today. These confessions express the complete doctrine of salvation. Witnessing to non-Christians is the blessed activity of a living Christian whose faith is real and dynamic and who earnestly desires to share it with others.

If anyone lacks zeal for this great work, it is like a mother who says to her children, "I don't feel like rearing you in the fear of God anymore, I don't have the incentive." If you ask me whether this is due to her lack of spirituality and godliness, my answer would be, "Yes, I am sorry for her, her great privilege to be a godly mother is ruined by her spiritual indifference, which contributes to her lack of zeal and joy to do this work." The same is true for any Christian who complains of lack of zeal to witness to others. The reason has to be sought from within: Why does not the fountain of living water produce a well, springing up unto everlasting life (John 4:14)? There may be many contributing factors, far too many to deal with here in this brief answer. You must be clear that indifference towards witnessing for the gospel is a spiritual

malady that must be addressed with the earnestness of prayer and the Word of God.

7. Is not our emphasis on the covenant an obstacle to personal evangelism? We emphasize correctly the importance of the Christian home, the Christian church, and the Christian day school. This makes us introspective and self-focused as people of God. If we do this in obedience to Christ, how are we supposed to reach out to others who do not share this view and who even reject it? Won't we lose our covenant perspective?

Rather than viewing our use of separate institutions (especially Christian schools) as a hindrance, we ought to view it as an advantage. Yes, obviously every neighbor is not going to appreciate this separateness, especially when you tell them how much it costs. As Reformed believers we are not recluses, nor are our churches, homes, and schools perpetuating a notion of "other worldliness" that makes our next generation ineffective in their place in the world. We could do this if we emphasize isolation rather than antithesis. But we thank God that this is not the case. We and our children live in this world and have a calling to interact with this world, but not to partake of their worldly behavior or character. The covenant emphasis that we enjoy, on the basis of the Bible, is that we walk with our God in every activity. This marks us as Christian, and we will not compromise our convictions of faith and practice.

Such Christians are not a detriment to society, they make the best citizens in every aspect. We are honest workers, trustworthy in business, we are not so driven by free enterprise that we undercut all competition and have as our goal to become millionaires. Rather we are good stewards of everything God has entrusted to us and know that the profit of our labor is for the benefit of others as well as ourselves.

Every profession is a calling to serve God in the midst of society. We do this by loving God and our neighbor. This is a high calling and we honor God this way. Our witness by our daily Christian activity does not come about because we are better than others in ourselves. It is the product of God's sovereign grace and mercy given to us and strengthened through the blessings of the covenant church, home, and school. When we live like a Christian in every profession to which God calls us, we are ready to confirm that walk of faith with our godly testimony and witness. The reason for our joyful walk of faith in every circumstance, in prosperity and adversity, is our God and His love for us.

If we take this approach, our covenantal blessings will not deter us from reaching out or tempt us to abandon them, but rather encourage us to appreciate these blessings and be ready to share them with others. Again, we cannot prejudge whether others will care about it, respond appreciatively, or mock us. This is in God's hands. One thing is for sure, we don't have to hold back because of our faith and understanding of God's covenant. As Reformed believers, our goal is not simply to "save souls" but to bring souls into God's covenant, including the church, home, and school. We can hold our heads high in thanksgiving to God for giving us such spiritual blessings. What a thrill it is when others receive eyes to see and hearts to believe such a wonderful truth. The evidence of grace is that they quickly learn to appreciate this covenant life.

8. Efforts of outreach and evangelism frequently lead to compromise of the gospel and wrongful ecumenism. We need but look to other churches for evidence. If we are going to engage in personal witnessing, we are going to be tempted to soften the hard edges of the Reformed faith and make it more attractive so that it will be

accepted by more people. This may very well relate to our Reformed distinctives in Christian life as well. Is it not better to be safe than sorry?

This question is similar to one we answered before, so we can be brief. If safety means that we neglect our calling to do what God has commanded us to do, we are pretending to be wiser than God. Our supposed safety is wrongfully conceived. Here too the danger of isolation lurks in the background. Such isolation boasts, "in separation is our strength," and when this is perceived to be physical separation and non-engagement with the world around us, we fail to let our light shine.

We do well to recognize that there are dangers in heeding the biblical injunction to do personal evangelism and witnessing. Engagement with non-Christians carries with it dangers and temptations. The Word of God makes clear that just because a divine calling carries with it dangers due to engagement (notably our calling to do spiritual warfare with the devil and his hosts, Ephesians 6), we are not instructed to disengage but to engage in battle properly, by wearing God's armor and earnest prayer. Any interaction with non-Christians occasions temptations that we either go softly to the point of compromise or go so far as to please others so that we yield to their ways. This is not cause to cease from such important work, rather it is a clear warning that we take up this task with much prayer and study of God's Word, imploring the Holy Spirit to accompany our every effort.

As noted above, if we truly love God's Word and its precious teaching of truth and practice, we will not give this up under any circumstance. History shows that when persecution became the worst, faith manifested itself the strongest. This was true, even unto death. This didn't just happen, this

was God's way of taking care of His people who preached and witnessed to a cruel world that did not want their testimony. God's gift of faith to them was so great that they were able to endure or overcome anything that man gave them (Heb. 11). Unfaithful men and women were always present in the church, but they received their reward from a just God. Their compromise never prevented the faithful from serving their God with thanksgiving. It must not do this in our day either.

9. I don't know what to say or how to evangelize with my neighbors. No one seems interested in teaching me or motivating me so I just give up. What am I supposed to do?

This is an excellent example of "blame shifting." It is wonderful if you have parents who will help you, if you have a church that pays attention to this need, or if you can reach out to those around you and get help and encouragement. Fact is that if God by His Holy Spirit impresses on you the duty and privilege to engage in personal witnessing to those around you, you can do something about it right now.

First, examine your motive why you have this desire. Is it from a heart that truly loves God and your neighbor and not because you are out to prove yourself as a Christian. Do you really desire the salvation of your neighbor or are you out to win an argument. There is a big difference — one is carnal the other is spiritual.

Second, begin by engaging in talk with those neighbors with whom you come into contact. Begin by neighborly talk and put forth effort to turn this conversation into a spiritual direction. Just try it and become familiar with this experience. This will help you to be motivated to pursue your desire so that you will not be easily discouraged and quit.


Third, get some good reading material on this subject. I men-

tioned some books earlier in this series. If you cannot form judgment on whether a certain book is reliable material or not, ask your pastor or elder to help you.

Fourth, find likeminded Christians and join together for study, encouragement, mutual activity, and prayer in order to help each other

in this important effort. Call it a small support group, whatever, this can be decisive for you, because it may be very discouraging to do it all alone. Best of all, one or two fellow members of your congregation who share this desire can do it together. You will find it exciting to grow in your faith and practice

in witnessing for the gospel.

May God use these articles to motivate and enable us to overcome any hindrance so that we can engage in personal evangelism as we witness concerning our God and His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. May your efforts be blessed by Him. 

Report of the Special Meeting of Classis West

Rev. Richard Smit

On Wednesday, November 16, 2005, Classis West met in Randolph, Wisconsin for the purpose of examining Candidate John Marcus, who had received and accepted the call to serve as pastor of the First Protestant Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. A special worship service was called by the consistory of the Randolph PRC for the evening of November 15. Pastor-elect Marcus led the special worship service and expounded II Peter 1:10 under the theme, "Making Sure Your Calling and Election." In attendance were not only the members of the con-

gregation, but the 24 delegates of Classis West, as well as the three synodical deputies from Classis East. The following day was spent in examining Mr. Marcus in the six sections of Reformed Dogmatics, in knowledge of Scripture, in knowledge of the Confessions, in Controversy, and in Practica. Each part of the examination lasted 15 minutes; and, after each section, opportunity was given for follow-up questions from the delegates.

Classis West, with the concurrence of the synodical deputies, unanimously approved the examination of Pastor-elect J. Marcus and

advised the First PRC of Edmonton to proceed with his ordination, which has been scheduled for Monday evening, December 12, in Edmonton, the Lord willing.

We may give thanks to our heavenly Father for His continued provision of well prepared and qualified men to labor as ministers of the Word and sacraments in the service of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The expenses of Classis totaled \$9,275.42. Classis meets next in its regular session on March 1, 2006, in Loveland, CO.

Sincerely in Christ,
Rev. Richard J. Smit 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Evangelism Activities

As promised in our last "News" we now continue with several more Reformation Day lectures held near the end of October in our churches. Prof. H. Hanko, emeritus professor in our Seminary, spoke at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa, October 27, under the sponsorship of the Reformed Witness Committee, the combined evangelism efforts of our churches in Iowa and Minnesota. Prof. Hanko spoke on the theme "The Reformation and Reforming in the Reformed Tradition."

As part of this year's evangelism outreach of our Hope PRC in Redlands, CA, their Evangelism

Committee sponsored a Reformation Day lecture October 28 at their church. Prof. D. Engelsma spoke on the timeless Reformation theme of "What It Means to Be Reformed."

Two of our denomination's pastors, Rev. R. Hanko and Rev. D. Kuiper, exchanged both pulpits and Reformation Day lectures the last weekend in October. Rev. Hanko, pastor of our Lynden, WA PRC, flew to Randolph, WI and our PRC there on October 28. Besides preaching there that Lord's Day, Rev. Hanko was able also to present a Reformation Day lecture the night he arrived on the subject of "The Office of All Believers." Meanwhile, that same weekend, Rev. D. Kuiper, pastor of our Randolph, WI PRC, found himself in Lynden, WA. He not only filled their pulpit Sunday, October 30, but he also pre-

sented a lecture on Friday evening entitled "Philip Melancthon: Luther's Assistant and Successor."

Congregation Activities

The Ladies Guild of our Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada invited the ladies from the neighboring First PRC in Edmonton to a lecture/ luncheon November 10 at their church. The ladies began their meeting with coffee at around 10:00 A.M., with the lecture following about a half hour later and then lunch at noon. Rev. R. Smit, pastor at Immanuel, spoke on the topic "Mothers Walking a Godly Life and Passing It Down to the Next Generation."

On Monday, October 31, the congregation of our Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI was invited to a fun-time of fellowship and good food at

Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

their annual Fall Harvest Supper.

The October 30th bulletin of Georgetown also encouraged their congregation to take a quiz on the truth of the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith, to see how they did on the various questions. The quiz illustrated the difference between the Roman Catholic heresies of infused righteousness versus the Reformation truth of imputed righteousness as the ground of our acceptance with God. For the correct answers, the congregation had to wait until that evening, when their pastor, Rev. C. Haak, gave them out after the service.

All the children nine and under of our Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL were invited to join for a 20 to 30-minute time of Bible stories, singing, and crafts once a month in their church nursery immediately following their morning service.

Rev. M. Dick, along with his wife, Grace Kay, made a special effort the month of November to get to know the young singles of their congregation at Grace PRC in Standale, MI by designating the month for "Sunday Singles Nights at the Parsonage." On those nights after church certain select individuals were invited to come, either alone or with a friend or two, to the home of their pastor for fellowship, discussion, and song.

The Choral Society of our Peace PRC in Lansing, IL invited their congregation, as well as other members of our churches in the Chicago area, to a Thanksgiving program and Singspiration at their church

Sunday evening, November 13.

Mission Activities

The congregation of our vacant church in Edgerton, MN bade farewell to Rev. R. Miersma and his wife, Sharon, after they had filled their pulpit for four Sundays in October. The next five Sundays the Miersmas were scheduled to be at our eastern mission in Pittsburgh, PA.

Rev. A. Stewart, our missionary to Northern Ireland, along with his wife, Mary, flew to South Wales on November 4 to present a lecture there on "The Apostolicity of the Church," before returning home to Ballymena, NI the next morning.

Perhaps you read in one of your church bulletins recently about an offer to purchase a unique 2006 calendar featuring colorful pictures and descriptions of the PR mission work, intended to remind all of us to encourage, support, and pray for our missionaries, mission fields, and contacts. And you may have thought, what a worthwhile idea. But then you may have also wondered, like the News did, who is behind this project?


Well, if you live in the West Michigan area you had opportunity to find out about AIM, or Action in Missions, the group behind this calendar, at an informational meeting Saturday, November 5, at our First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI. But if you don't live around Grand Rapids, or if you were unable to make that meeting, let the News provide a brief introduction for

you. AIM is a committee supervised by the Council of First Church that works closely with our denomination's missionaries, mission committees, and calling churches to provide tangible items such as books, vitamins, clothing etc.... In addition, AIM also provides encouragement to our missionaries and others involved in our denomination's mission work by doing things as simple as sending cards to them on their birthdays, anniversaries, or holidays. Their latest projects were that 2006 calendar and the coordinating of a pen-pal program with our various mission fields.

Young Adult Activities

The young people and young adults of our Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL invited the YP and YA of Cornerstone, Peace, and South Holland to a cook out on Saturday, November 5. Rev. J. Mahtani and his family opened their home for this activity. Bethel hoped to get a proportionate representation from each church and society. The purpose of this get-together was to encourage each other in the Lord and to discuss ways and means the young people and young adults in the Chicago area could be more active together.

Minister Activities

Rev. R. Miersma received two calls since our last News. On Sunday, November 6, our Edgerton, MN and our Loveland, CO PRCs extended a call to him to serve as their next pastor. 

Announcements

RESOLUTIONS OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Byron Center PRC express their Christian sympathy to Ken and Eunice Kuiper in the death of her mother,

MRS. GERTRUDE HOEKSEMA.

"Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours: and their works do follow them" (Revelation 14:13).

...to John and Amy Marcus and family in the death of her mother,

MRS RUTH STAFFORD.

"The sufferings of this present time are not

worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

...to Jared Huisken in the death of his father,

MR. LARRY HUISKEN.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

...and to Randy and Jenny Scott and family in the death of her father,

MR. THOMAS TAYLOR.

"In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God" (Psalm 62:7).

Rev. R. VanOverloop, President
Mike Elzinga, Clerk

NOTICE:

The new bulletin clerk for Immanuel PRC in Lacombe is Leah Wierenga. Her address is:

Leah Wierenga

RR#4

Lacombe, AB T4L 2N4

(403)782-2001

Her email address is:

leahwierenga16@hotmail.com

P.O. Box 603
Grandville, MI 49468-0603

THE STANDARD BEARER

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Grandville,
Michigan

2006 Winter Conference

Justification: The Heart of the Gospel

A series of lectures defending the basic doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, at First Protestant Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan

January 13 —

Justification by Faith Alone

speaker: Rev. Ronald VanOverloop

January 20 —

Justification and Good Works

speaker: Prof. David Engelsma

January 27 —

Justification and the Believer

speaker: Rev. William Langerak

Sponsored by:

The Evangelism Committee
First Protestant Reformed Church of
Holland, Michigan
3641 104th Avenue
Zeeland, Michigan 49464

All three speeches are on
Friday evenings at 7:30 P.M.
Tapes of the conference will be
available upon request.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

We rejoiced with our parents and grandparents,

BRUCE and DEB LUBBERS,

as they celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary on November 7, 2005. We thank God for the many years He has given them together. We are also thankful for the love and guidance they have given our family over the years. We pray that the Lord's blessing will continue with them as they travel together through this life. "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity" (I Corinthians 13:13).

- ❖ Jon and Melissa Lubbers
Travis, Braden, Connor
- ❖ Josh and Sara Lubbers
Kelly, Jake
- ❖ Joe and Stacey Lubbers
- ❖ Carmen and Rick Mingerink
- ❖ Carrie Lubbers

Byron Center, Michigan

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of the Protestant Reformed Church in South Holland express their Christian sympathy to Mr. James Haak, Mr. and Mrs. John C. Haak, and Mr. and Mrs. Donald Haak, and their families on the passing away of their mother, and grandmother,

MRS. HENRIETTA HAAK.

"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38, 39).

Rev. Allen Brummel, President
Gysbert VanBaren, Clerk

NOTICE

The Board of the Reformed Heritage Christian School Association of Kalamazoo, Michigan, is inviting applications for a full-time 7th-8th grade teacher/administrator beginning in the fall of 2006. Successful applicants must be committed to the Reformed faith, biblical inerrancy, 6-day creation, male headship, the antithesis between Christianity and the world, and covenantal theology. Applicants should send a letter of application and résumé to: Steve DeVries, School Board President, Reformed Heritage Christian School, 700 N. Fletcher Ave., Kalamazoo, MI 49006. For more information, phone (269) 375-8455.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With gratitude to God for His covenant faithfulness, we, the family of

FRANK and FRANCES DE BOER,

announce their 50th anniversary on December 22, 2005. We thank them for their godly example in their daily walk in life. "I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever, with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations" (Psalm 89:1).

- ❖ Albert and Sarah deBoer
- ❖ Bob and Thelma Cogdal
- ❖ Billy and Julie deBoer
- ❖ Art and Leanne deBoer
- ❖ Joey and Deanna deBoer
- ❖ Larry and Christine Whitman
- ❖ Loren and Carolyn VanDenTop
- ❖ Ed and Charlene deBoer
- ❖ Linda deBoer
- ❖ Terry and Janey Westoff
- ❖ Marvin and Marsha Molenkamp
- ❖ Jake and Amy Cheechov

43 grandchildren and 1 great grandchild
Lynden, Washington

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

We are thankful that we have been given opportunity to bring praise and thanksgiving before our Sovereign Lord, who has shown His continued covenant faithfulness to our parents,

RICHARD and JANNET MOORE,
as they celebrated their 45th wedding anniversary on November 23, 2005.

Our good and merciful God has been pleased to use them to bring us up in the fear of His name. We are thankful for the years of godly instruction and love shown to us. May the Lord continue to shine His face upon them, that in Him they might daily find their strength and refuge. "Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it" (Psalm 90:16, 17).

- ❖ Brian and Carolyn Tolsma
Derek, Cindy, Curtis, Justin, Julie
- ❖ Henry and Lee Ann Ferguson
John and Ashley Cleveland
Scott, Todd, Kelsey, Craig,
Matthew, Sean, Kent, Erin, Seth
- ❖ Brian and Denise Gritters
Michon, Brittany, Shantelle,
Rebecca, Gregory, Nicole, Jordan
- ❖ Jack and Brenda Brands
Kirsten, Larissa
- ❖ David and Kimberly Moore
Kelsey, Richard, Joel, Caleb, Jacob,
Karissa, Megan
- ❖ James and Melanie Molenkamp
Laura, Harm
- ❖ Joel and Anita Moore
Abigail, Anya
- ❖ Troy and Rachel VandeBrake
Devon, Dannika, Kelly, Morgan
- ❖ Stacie Machlet
Robert, Joel, Cody, Alia
- ❖ Matthew and Stephanie Medema
Grace, Micah, Noah, Jonah, Joshua

Holland, Michigan

NOTICE!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 11, 2005, at the Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, MI.

Jon J. Huiskens, Stated Clerk