

# The **STANDARD BEARER**

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

. . . We must see and experience our own sin and guilt and our own hopelessness. We must desire and long for the fellowship of the living God, see our damnableness, and know that our only hope lies in Him Who, being rich, became poor for our sakes. Then the Mystery of Bethlehem will speak to us.... And then we will return from Bethlehem, glorifying and praising God for all the things which we have heard and seen.

See "The Necessity of the Incarnation"

— page 130

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## THE STANDARD BEARER

ISSN 0362-4692

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

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

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

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Subscription Policy: Subscription price, \$10.50 per year. Unless a definite request for discontinuance is received, it is assumed that the subscriber wishes the subscription to continue without the formality of a renewal order, and he will be billed for renewal. If you have a change of address, please notify the Business Office as early as possible in order to avoid the inconvenience of delayed delivery. Include your Zip Code.

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

## MEDITATION

## The Worship of the Magi

Rev. M. Schipper

*"And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary His mother, and fell down, and worshipped Him; and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."*

Matthew 2:11

"And when they were come into the house. . . ."

The gospel narrator has in mind here the magi, or, as the translation has it, "wise men from the East."

We know not how many they were, nor are we told precisely from which country they came. From

of old we have been told that they were three in number, evidently on the ground that the gifts they presented were three: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And tradition has speculated as to their geographical origin — some insisting that they came from ancient Babylon, while others believe they came from either Persia or Arabia. Yet there is



nothing in the description in verse one which determines either their number or the country from whence they came. Very simply Matthew informs us: "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came magi from the rising unto Jerusalem." Or, as our King James version has it, "wise men from the East." It is evident, however, contrary to the explanation of some, that they were not Israelites of the Diaspora, but they appear as representatives of the Gentile world who, all their lifetime, had lived outside of the land of the Promise—as it were, in the shadows of death. Nevertheless, they are men now impelled by the grace of God, and enlightened by His Spirit and truth, who came seeking the Christ-Child, Whom they believed had lately been born King of the Jews.

They came, first of all, to Jerusalem. Contrary to general belief, His star, which they had seen in its rising, had not directed them over the sands of the desert to the city of peace. Quite naturally, since they were seeking the King of the Jews, they would come to the king's city, looking for the object of their hope.

But Jerusalem and its king knew not the answer to their question: "Where is He that is born, King of the Jews?"

O, indeed, there were some in Jerusalem and its environs who could have enlightened them, had they only known it. And, had the wise men gone directly to them, they would have been sufficiently informed. There was the aged priest Zacharias with his wife Elizabeth who would have rejoiced to instruct them in their search. And the aged Simeon, with Anna the prophetess, who would have exuberantly explained to them how they had seen Him with their eyes, and had lifted Him up in their hands. But these favorites of special revelation were not among them to whom the wise men had appealed. Rather, their question had been directed to the other inhabitants of Jerusalem, and its self-seeking king. That Jerusalem with its king was sore troubled when they heard the question of the magi can easily be understood. Herod, the king, who had already slain even the members of his family whom he suspected were aspirants to his throne, would quite naturally be disturbed by the announcement that there was born another Who was reputed to be King of the Jews. And the citizens of Jerusalem would also be perplexed when they imagined the awful consequences that might follow should the king give vent to his diabolical nature and the extremity of his wrath, if another should arise who would remove him from his office.

The king, however, hiding for the moment his wrath, initiated an investigation, and instructed the chief priests and scribes to come up with an answer

to the question wherewith the magi had confronted them. Mind you, they had the Scriptures, but had failed to pay attention to its contents; nor were they looking for the fulfillment of its prophetic word. Only after searching did they discover that in Bethlehem of Judea the promised King should be born. With that information given, the king, feigning piety, sends the wise men on their way to Bethlehem.

Not only were the magi assured by the word of Micah the prophet, but their hearts were gladdened when once more the star appeared which they had seen in the East. That star now guided them—not to the lowly cattle stall, where the King had been born, but to the house, which Joseph evidently had procured for his family in the little town of the city of David.

And so, we read in our text, when they came into the house, they saw the young Child, with Mary His mother. And they fell down and worshiped Him. For that purpose, and none other, they had come.

Remarkably, in the brief description given in our text of their actions, no mention is made of any conversation which may have taken place, either on the part of the visitors or the visited. No special greeting is directed to the mother, nor is any mention made of their praise and rejoicing before God when they behold the Child, Who was the object of their quest. No words of astonishment are expressed on the part of the mother at the sudden intrusion of perfect strangers into her home. Remarkably, too, no mention is made of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and the foster father of Jesus. That he was alive and well is evident from verse thirteen, where the Lord appeared to him in a dream, commanding him to take the mother and Child into Egypt.

Are we perhaps allowed here to conjecture that Joseph was busy elsewhere in the town of Bethlehem performing his occupation to earn daily bread for himself and his family? Is it permissible for us here to supply any conversation which may have taken place?

In answer to these questions, it should be evident that because of the brevity of the announcement here, it is not the intention of the Holy Spirit that we should become romantic, and insert a novel based on our imagination concerning what may or may not have taken place. But it is obviously His intention that we should focus our attention on the Scriptural givens and take special note of the worship the magi rendered, and the presentation of the gifts they brought and laid before the Christ-Child.

Then we note, first of all, their worshipful conduct.



They fall down, prostrate themselves, with their faces to the ground, before the little Child.

O, you must see this with me! These great, wealthy, mature men, falling flat on their faces before the holy Child Jesus! Here, indeed, was recognition by inspiration! There is no other interpretation possible.

And they worship Him! Not His mother, as the Romish Church would have us believe. And the word which the gospel narrator uses here for worship signifies literally to bow down in reverence, while the worshipers kissed the hand of Him before Whom they had prostrated themselves. In holy reverence they acknowledge the little Child as their Lord and Potentate.....Moreover, they recognize in Him more than His humanity. They know Him to be very God of God, Who alone may be worshiped. It is their understanding that He is indeed the God of their salvation, Who is come down unto them in the flesh to redeem them from all their sin and iniquity.

Moreover, they recognize in this little Child their divinely appointed King.

New-born King of the Jews!

Him they had now come to acknowledge, and to present unto Him their regal gifts.

And again, we stand amazed at their knowledge and worshipful conduct.

All kinds of questions arise here that cry for an answer. How could they know that the star they had seen in its rising was related to Him? Did they perhaps have access to the Hebrew Scriptures, particularly to the Book of Numbers (24:17) which spoke of the star which would arise out of Jacob? Were they acquainted with other Old Testament Scriptures, which predicted that the Gentiles would also come under His dominion? Still more significant is the question: How is it to be explained that they know this particular Child to be their King?

Once more, all these questions must be dismissed when we consider the brevity of divine revelation. All we must do is stand in awe and worship before God, Who is now performing the central wonder of wonders. How great is His grace revealed even to these Gentiles brought by Him to the Light! How marvelous is His work of grace in them who humbly prostrate themselves before God's appointed King of kings! We need not make, nor should we offer all kinds of conjectures to explain how all this came about. When God works, we silently behold in humble adoration the mighty evidences of His loving kindness, shown here to the representatives of the Gentile world, whom He is pleased to bring into His everlasting kingdom.

And having opened their treasures, they present unto Him their gifts which they had carried with them from the land of their origin.

Gold, frankincense, and myrrh!

How fittingly they enacted the fulfillment of prophecy!

"The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before Him, all nations shall serve Him" (Psalm 72:10, 14).

"The multitude of camels shall cover Thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come; they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall show forth the praises of the Lord" (Isaiah 60:6). And in the last part of the preceding verse, the prophet states that "the forces (probably, the wealth) of the Gentiles shall come unto Thee."

No matter that David in the above-mentioned Psalm prays concerning his son Solomon and for the exaltation of his kingdom; it is always the Christ to Whom the types refer. And when Isaiah penned his prophecy concerning the coming of the Gentiles with their gifts, he had in mind ultimately nothing less than the fulfillment of the kingdom of Christ, which in its beginning must be seen in the birth of the King of the Jews, here literally so acknowledged when these Gentiles bow down before Him, presenting unto Him their gifts.

Gold! The very symbol of royalty, which they recognized to be in the Child before Whom they prostrate themselves.

Frankincense! The symbol of divine worship, which they acknowledged Jesus is worthy to receive.

Myrrh! Which prophetically pointed to His great humiliation! For this King would come into His kingdom only after He had first suffered for the sins of His people.

Wonderful, indeed, was the appearance and the worship of the magi!

Wise men endowed with profound, spiritual insights! Not to be understood in the light of natural phenomena.

Enlightened by divine revelation and motivated by the Spirit of God to bring their worship and gifts, as representatives of the Gentile world, to the Christ Child.

Significantly, they appear shortly after Christ's birth, as examples of unexcelled faith. Never doubting, though from the point of view of the flesh there was much occasion to halt and stumble. When His star which they had seen in its rising as they searched the heavens was blotted out from their



vision, they hesitated not to begin their long search, trekking to the Holy Land, looking for their King. Though Jerusalem's inhabitants with their king appear to be oblivious of the birth of the King of the Jews, these men cannot rest until they have worshiped Him, Whom they believe to be their Saviour. Though their King is surrounded with poverty and is only a Child, their faith moves them to prostrate themselves as His humble subjects.

They appear as the first fruits of the Gentiles, who must also be gathered into the kingdom.

They are our representatives at Bethlehem! That should bind them to us. For what they did was in our name and in our place.

In this Christmas season, let us also bow down and worship Him, not only as the lowly Babe of Bethlehem, but as our eternal King!

## EDITORIALS

Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

# The Decline of the GKN

Not long ago a brother from one of our churches wrote me concerning his evaluation of the church situation in the Netherlands after he had visited there for several weeks. In his letter he mentioned several things which I had up to this time not noted in any of the Dutch church papers which I receive on an exchange basis; I refer especially to items concerning the GKN (Gereformeerde Kerken van Nederland), the churches in which most of us have our spiritual ancestry and which have been so frequently in the news because of the rapid doctrinal and spiritual deterioration taking place in them. However, not long after I received the personal letter referred to, I was also able to confirm some of the items mentioned in that letter. For they are mentioned in "*Brief uit Nederland*" (by Wiebe Feenstra) in *De Wachter*, November 23, 1982. This article-letter also makes mention of the source of the information, the official organ of the GKN called *Kerkinformatie*, as well as some comments by a Rev. Kwast in *Friese Kerkbode*.

Various items concerning the GKN are frequently in the news currently. Recently attention has been drawn especially to such things as the recent report on the nature and authority of Holy Scripture called "God With Us," which represents a total departure from the Reformed doctrine of Scripture. Besides, there is the decision to admit homosexuals to the Lord's table and to church membership, as well as the more recent refusal either to retract that decision or even to attempt to furnish Scriptural grounds for it.

But mentioned in the article referred to is something which points to the *actual* decline of the GKN, namely, a loss of 13,229 members in 1981. That amounts to more than one and one-half per cent of the membership. The Rev. Kwast remarks in this connection that, "Taking into consideration that

the decline in the number of members began in 1974 and has gradually become stronger, we can already make a provisional reckoning of the point in time when we will be back to zero." Now it must be kept in mind, too, (though I have no statistics on this) that much of this membership loss is not through transfer to other denominations but simply through people becoming unchurched and dechristianized. And the Rev. Kwast complains — rightly — that up to now the GKN, while it can be concerned about many other things, shows little concern about this.

Even more disturbing, however, is the news concerning the movement known as "*Samen op weg*" (literally: Together on the way). This is an official action begun some years ago toward reunion of the GKN and the Hervormde Kerk. For those not so well acquainted with Dutch church history, let me explain that the Hervormde Kerk (Reformed Church) is commonly known as the State Church. It is the denomination from which the present GKN were separated. First there was the Secession of 1834, under Hendrik de Cock and others. Then, in 1886 there was the separation known as the Doleantie under Abraham Kuyper. In 1892 the two movements, Secession and Doleantie, came together to form the present Gereformeerde Kerken van Nederland.

According to *Kerkinformatie*, it is hoped in connection with this "Together on the way" movement that by 1984 it can be said that this process of reunion must be continued. Mind you, 1984 is the one hundred fiftieth anniversary of the Secession! Further, according to *Kerkinformatie*, it is hoped that then in 1986 a Declaration can be made in which the synods (of the GKN and the Hervormde Kerk) say that both churches shall be considered to be in a state of reunion. And that date, mind you,



will be the centennial of the Doleantie!

How ironic!

And how sad!

What would men like Hendrik de Cock and Abraham Kuyper say?

And what would all the saints who literally suffered persecution in these reformations say?

But this also raises some questions.

In the first place, what will be the reaction to all this in the GKN? There can be no question but that vast segments of the GKN badly desire this union and would feel entirely at home in the Hervormde Kerk—at least in its liberal modality. They have long since abandoned any pretence of being Reformed, even when it comes to such fundamentals as the blood of atonement. But what will the conservative minority of the GKN do in the face of such blatant action? Will they simply go along under protest, as they have so often done in recent years? Or will they try to continue separately as the GKN?

In the second place, what will be the reaction of others to this development? It is a well-known fact that the GKN has been a perennial problem in one way or another for the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, both because of its membership in the World Council and because of things such as its stand on homosexuals. And some of these matters are up for discussion at the next RES. But what if

the GKN in effect becomes one, or openly states that it hopes to become one, with the Hervormde Kerk? And what effect will this intention of the GKN have on its relationships—already troubled—with other Reformed denominations throughout the world, all of whom have their roots, to one degree or another, in the Secession of 1834 and the Doleantie of 1886?

In the third place, it is still a question as to what the reaction will be in the Hervormde Kerk. The latter, you will recall, is already a modalities church. In it there are three distinct wings: the ultra-liberal wing (with whom the GKN would feel at home), the group that may be termed middle-of-the-roaders, and those often spoken of as ultra-conservative, a group which is in many respects very Reformed, the Gereformeerde Bond. With the latter the GKN will surely not find favor. But it may also be a question whether the GKN will find favor with others. Eight or nine years ago, when Dr. G.C. Berkouwer and Dr. Herman Ridderbos appeared at the Synod of the Hervormde Kerk with the proposed Unanimous Testimony of Faith (cf. *Standard Bearer*, Vol. 50, p.318), they found favor with neither the ultra-liberals nor with the Gereformeerde Bonders. Have things changed? Has the way been smoothed for "Together on the way"? Would it not be ironic if the GKN would say, "We want union," but the Hervormde Kerk would take a negative stance?

Only time will tell what developments lie ahead.

## An Appeal for Help With a Large Project

### The Project

How often, as parents or grandparents, have you wished for a Bible story book that was in every way dependable and satisfactory for use with your children and grandchildren?

The R.F.P.A. Publications Committee is planning — and, in fact, is already deeply involved in producing — just such a Bible story book.

Elsewhere in this issue you will find an exact replica of one of the stories to appear in this book, so that you may see for yourselves—and, frankly, to tickle your appetite for this book.

But let me tell you about this project.

First of all, there will be 198 stories from the Old and New Testaments, varying in length from two to three pages. Each story will also be accompanied by a picture appropriate to the story. The manuscript

has already been completed. The art work is in process and is more than half finished.

As to the stories, here is the important data: 1) The author is Gertrude Hoeksema, who has drawn on her many years of experience in teaching young children, and, besides, tested several stories through actual use by several families before proceeding with the whole book. 2) The stories are specifically designed for children from the ages of 3 or 4 to 8 years old. They are characterized by conscious use of simple terms and by the graphic language which appeals to little children. 3) The stories are all dependably Biblical and Reformed. You will be able to trust this book in using it with your young children, and will find that it is unnecessary to edit out non-acceptable elements or to skip unacceptable stories. 4) There is an attempt to establish a continuity in the stories, rather than to



tell isolated Bible stories. For example, the Old Testament stories all converge on the coming of Christ. 5) At the conclusion of each story there is a "point to remember" which emphasizes the heart of the story and which serves to stress a spiritual truth. Hence, these are more than just stories: there is in them the element of personal application.

As to the art work, first of all, we are fortunate to have the services of an artist from our Kalamazoo Protestant Reformed Church, Mr. Jeff Steenholdt. His regular work is that of a commercial artist. But from the start of this project he expressed interest in it, and he has become deeply involved in the work, spending many, many hours of his spare time on it. He has been working closely with the author in countless conferences. At this stage, the illustrations for 80 stories have been completed; and the illustrations for the stories up to number 150 are at various stages of completion. Most of the art work will be in half-tones (as in the sample in this issue); but we are aiming to include several full-color illustrations. With regard to the latter, our problem is expense: it costs approximately \$1000.00 for the printing of each colored illustration! What is the artist striving for? The following: 1) Reverence. There will be none of the harum-scarum pictures which appear in so many stories. 2) Realism. The illustrations will be as accurate as possible. But also, there will be no frontal views of faces of Bible characters which are simply the product of the artist's imagination. 3) The artist strives to illustrate the positive element in the story. For example, in the sample story in this issue he focuses on the ram which the Lord provided, rather than on a gruesome picture of Isaac on the altar and Abraham with his knife uplifted. Further, each illustration is being carefully placed in the exact place where it belongs in the text of the story. Those of us who have had the opportunity to see some of this art work are excited about its quality!

### The Appeal

Are you interested in seeing this project succeed? As soon as possible? Think of your own children

and grandchildren!

The simple fact is that this is the most expensive project which the R.F.P.A. Publications Committee has ever undertaken. It will cost us thousands of dollars to market this book. And we are striving mightily to keep the price within reach, too—approximately around \$24.95, not a high price in these times for a book like this.

But we need money! Not hundreds, but thousands! Right now we are at least \$10,000 away from being able to publish.

How can you help?

There are two ways.

In the first place, we need several very large outright gifts, gifts of several hundred or a thousand dollars. These, by the way, are tax-deductible. Why not contribute before the end of the year?

In the second place, we need *hundreds* of additional RFPA Book Club members. Do you know that there are fewer than one-fourth of our Protestant Reformed families who are Book Club members? Let me explain again the advantages of this Book Club. They are as follows: 1) As a Book Club member you automatically receive all RFPA books. And these books ought to be in every Protestant Reformed home! 2) As a Book Club member you receive our books at a discount. And the more members we have, the greater the discount! At present it is only 20%. But if we had a few hundred more members, we could easily make that 30 or 40%! 3) Here is the biggest factor for us. If you are members of the Book Club, you automatically help us with the publication of every RFPA book. For if we have a guaranteed market for a large number of books, it also means that the costs of producing a book are guaranteed in advance.

Will YOU help? For the sake of your children and grandchildren?

The address is: RFPA Publications Committee, P.O. Box 2006, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49501.

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## ALL AROUND US

Rev. G. Van Baren

# The Church and Persecution

One might be inclined to say that persecution of the church is rather out of the question within freedom-loving countries such as Canada and the United States. However, these countries have

maintained a certain "separation of church and state" —going to absurd and evil lengths to see to it that there is no reference to God, His Word and law, in any public institution. Now, attempts are



being made for the state to impose upon the church its own standards of morality. A report of one such attempt is made in the *Clarion*, Canadian Reformed Magazine, of June 4, 1982. In it, Rev. W.W.J. Van Oene quotes from Hon. Mr. Walter Baker, a member of the House of Commons in Canada, and quotes from other sources, about a bill which would create havoc in the faithful church:

In his letter, Mr. Baker states that his concerns with Bill C-10 relate to clauses 116, 214, and 215. The relative clauses are too long to insert here, and therefore I pass Mr. Baker's summary on.

Let us assume that a minister is suspended and deposed on the ground of homosexual practices or on the ground of adultery; or that a member is excommunicated because of hardening himself in the sin of adultery, such a member would have the right—according to the bill—to appeal to a court of law to have this court rule on that disciplinary procedure.

Under clause 214, if the court felt that the offence was not contrary to the laws of the country—homosexuality and adultery are both legal in Canada—the court could order the church to reinstate the member or the minister. The court could further order the church to change its constitution in accordance with the court ruling.

Even if the entire church membership should support the action taken, clause 215 gives the court the right to ignore such support. As the offences as such are not against the Canadian law, are not criminal offences, every one has the right to do these things and he may not be penalized in any way for doing them....

...Clause 214 gives the court the right to order the corporation "to regulate a corporation's affairs by amending the articles or by-laws or creating or amending a unanimous member agreement." Further the court has the right to issue "an order appointing directors in place of or in addition to all or any of the directors then in office." Another right which the bill gives to the court is to issue "an order liquidating and

dissolving the corporation"....

...If a member is excommunicated for reason of hardening himself in a sin against any of God's commandments, the court may require that a Church pay all the costs not only for the defence of its own actions but also those of the complainant, of the person who appeals to a court. If the case is dismissed, the complainant will have to pay it all back, but in the meantime the Church would have to pay it with the possibility that the complainant has nothing to pay back, all of it or even part of it.

...The worst aspect is that the civil court could order the Church to change its regulations, in other words, that the civil courts could order the Church to replace the commandments of the Lord our God by human ordinances which are completely contrary to the divine ordinances.

The courts could also replace all the legitimately chosen and ordained office-bearers and appoint others in their stead, people who, of course, value human ordinances higher than the Law of our God.

Let no one think that this law does not apply to the Church. It is An Act Respecting Non-Profit Corporations. As Churches are Non-Profit Organizations, they come under this Act.

...Bill C-10, however, shows clearly that persecution may not be all that far from our doorstep, and we had better realize this....

It seems to me that I have read more recently that the above attempt to regulate even churches failed. Yet it points out the dangers which the church faces today. In the name of "liberty" and "justice" for all, government will try to force churches to conform to the standards of morality adopted by the world. Sounds like the days of Daniel when he was told what was "good for him" to eat—yet he had to refuse because it was contrary to the requirements of God's law. We may have to do this too—perhaps sooner than we think.

## 44% Believe in Recent Creation

In "Acts & Facts" of the Institute for Creation Research, there is a report of an interesting survey by Gallup Poll concerning creation (vs. evolution). October, 1982:

The first time it ever asked the question, the Gallup Poll discovered that 44% of the American public agree with this statement: "God created man pretty much in his present form at one time within the last 10,000 years."

Only 9% believed that "Man has developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life. God had no part in this process." When the second sen-

tence was changed to "...but God guided this process, including man's creation," 38% agreed. Only 9% said they did not know. Thus, 82% of a sample representing all Americans expressed belief that God was responsible for the creation of man, either directly, supernaturally, (and recently, 44%) or through somehow "guiding" a long slow process (38%). The figures are impressive. Equally impressive, but in the wrong sense, were the responses of "leading" clergymen (as reported in the *San Diego Union*, Aug. 30, 1982). These expressions of deep religious conviction, which have had to survive decades of evolutionary indoctrination and public ridicule, brought forth expressions of



*dismay* (not rejoicing, but dismay!) from "prominent" religious leaders! Kenneth Hicks, a bishop in the United Methodist Church who opposed the balanced treatment for creation-science and evolution-science law in Arkansas, thought it was almost incredible that 44% should still accept a recent supernatural creation of man. In an astonishing admission of incredible ignorance, one Episcopal bishop said that he did not know a single reputable Biblical scholar who believed in the recent, direct creation of mankind! In fact, a chief cause for "dismay" in the evolutionary establishment, religious or academic, was that a full quarter of the 44% accepting the recent creation of mankind were college educated!....

If this poll indicates the actual number in this country believing in the creation account, it would seem that the evolutionists (evidently only a minority of people), have "pulled the wool" over the eyes of many. It seems that the majority, though they do not believe there was evolution, yet allow that view to be foisted upon the whole of the people. Schools teach it as scientific "fact." Those who object to the teaching of evolution are regarded as unscientific, even backward. Any public display, whether in museum or in some national, state, or local park,

presents an evolutionary display concerning the origins of all things. Passively, the "majority" sit by, for none would dare oppose "science."

Recently, here in Hudsonville, the minister in the local Baptist Church, objected to the evolutionary presentation in an area park supported with local dollars. He claimed that if we, the people of the area, mostly church-going people at that, are to pay for such display with tax dollars, we ought to insist that it present not evolution but creation. A cry arose that we must not allow anyone to foist their religious views (creation) upon the people. There must be "separation between church and state." In the meanwhile, a small minority "foist" their views (hardly scientific either) of evolution on the majority. If a "majority" rules, then why should this happen? If it is "wrong" to foist one view on others, why is it right to "foist" the opposite view of the opponents?

It seems to me that often we dare say little about the whole idea of evolution, since that view is adopted by the "scientific" community. The Christian ought not to be intimidated by "science" or "men of science."

## Changing Congregations

The Grand Rapids *Press*, October 16, 1982, presented a survey of membership growth over the past decade. The "mainline" denominations, for the most part, declined in membership. Even the Christian Reformed Church, in Kent and Ottawa Counties, had a slight decline in total membership. That membership should decline in the larger denominations is not so very strange. The *Press* stated:

According to the survey, the major religions haven't kept pace with the population growth, while some of the smaller, more evangelical religions have experienced a boom.

"We are really riding a conservative wave culturally," said John Primus, professor of religion and theology at Calvin College.

Referring to the study results, he added that "this is the first time any big American churches have actually lost membership."

Primus said the change is "dramatic." Until the decade of the '70s, most major denominations experienced steady growth. He attributes the decline in membership to the conservative swing in the country and people's search for religions that offer them, at least as they consider it, "deeper meaning."

It is true that for all of their innovations, the large denominations appear rather to "turn people off." God's people are not being fed—so they seek such a church where they can again hear the pure preaching of the Word. And those who retain membership in the large denominations, often fail to find reason to attend church faithfully—entertainment, after all, is not a good reason to go to church.

One can not help but notice that also the Christian Reformed Church, though it is not considered one of the large main-line denominations, had an overall loss of membership in the two counties where it originated. It was, I believe, a little more than ten years ago that Prof. Dekker of Calvin Seminary had proposed that the Christian Reformed Church would be more successful in its missionary efforts if it proclaimed "God loves you" to all those encountered. Many novelties have been added to some of the C.R.C. services in the area. Great effort is directed towards those of minority races to bring these into the church. Yet for all of that, there is a decline. Even internal growth, without any outside additions, should have produced a sizable percentage of growth. The decline would appear to indicate a loss of many of those born with-



in that church. The decline, it seems to me, can be attributed to a loss of doctrinal distinctiveness and failure to maintain the Reformed heritage. So, as Primus stated, there is the "people's search for religions that offer them, at least as they consider it, 'deeper meaning.'"

The P.R.C. were not included in the survey, of course. They are just too small to count. Yet, according to my personal estimate, these churches

in Kent and Ottawa counties gained a total of 27% membership. I am convinced that there are two reasons that might be noted: first, the faithful instruction of covenant seed; secondly, the addition of such who have joined the P.R.C. because they seek that "deeper meaning" in their religion. This growth, of course, can be attributed ultimately to the graciousness of our God Who has been pleased to provide for the churches in the past years.

## ***TAKING HEED TO THE DOCTRINE***

# **The Necessity of the Incarnation**

*Rev. H. Veldman*

It is surely a good thing, in this Christmas season when our thoughts should be directed to the Wonder of Bethlehem, to dwell a few moments upon the subject we have selected for this article. To dwell upon the necessity of the incarnation is difficult in itself, even apart from the element of sin. The truths of the Word of God are profound because they involve the living God, and the truth of the incarnation is surely a truth that involves the living God. However, to meditate upon the truth of Christ's coming into our flesh and blood is also and particularly difficult because of the element of sin. Our Christmas seasons certainly do not lend themselves to spiritual study and meditation. Everywhere everything is so grossly commercialized. The devil does all within his power to have us forget the Christ-Child of Bethlehem, forget Him as He is according to the Scriptures. Indeed, in this season we see Him and hear of Him everywhere. But He Whom we see and of Whom we hear is not He Who came to seek and to save that which was lost. Let us in this article strive to see the Mystery of Bethlehem.

Why is it so difficult, in this season, to concentrate upon this Mystery of Bethlehem? Does it not seem that all the things about us today lend themselves to this concentration and meditation? Do we not see the Babe of Bethlehem everywhere about us? Does not the Christmas music we hear everywhere remind us of Him? I repeat: everywhere we see Him and hear of Him. But, do we? It is so extremely difficult even to think of Him! Why? After all, we too must go to Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass, Luke 2:15. We must see "this thing." We must not merely see a babe. Wicked modernism sees only a babe. But we must see this thing, this divine wonder, which is come to pass, which the Lord revealed, made known to us.

However, this "thing" lies in a manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes. There is nothing here of the earth. It is exactly this wondrous Babe that is denied today everywhere around us. And if we today are to see this "thing" we must cut through all the earthy of our present Christmas season to see it. We must see a Babe in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes. It is the earthy that characterizes every Christmas season. And it is exactly this earthy that is so completely absent here when the Mystery of Bethlehem occurs.

Besides, who is this Babe of Bethlehem? We read in II Corinthians 8:9: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor." Literally we read here of our Lord Jesus Christ that, being rich, He became poor. He remained rich when He became poor. The same truth is expressed in Philippians 2:6: "Who, being in the form of God...made Himself of no reputation," that is emptied Himself. Notice: being in the form, essentially, of God. Hence, while emptying Himself, He remained God. And this we also read in our Heidelberg Catechism, in Answer 35: "That God's eternal Son, Who is and continueth true and eternal God." So, the Babe of Bethlehem is God, the eternal Son of God, rich as God is rich. And, mind you, He became poor. We read in II Corinthians 8:9, "for our sakes," because of our sin. Our sin and poverty necessitated His coming into our flesh and blood. This explains the difficulty of concentrating upon the Mystery of Bethlehem. Fact is, this Babe of Bethlehem has no form or comeliness that we should desire Him. He has no attraction for the natural man. Everything about Him is repulsive to the sinner. He saves from sin, and we love sin and cannot have any desire to be delivered from it. He alone can pay the debt of sin and no sinner is able to do this. He comes to do



His Father's will, to satisfy all the righteousness of God; and that God maintains and justifies Himself is so repulsive to the sinner. The sinner hates the idea that God is just when condemning all men to eternal damnation and that this Babe appears as the Servant of that Jehovah. He Who is and remains rich became poor for our sakes. His coming speaks of our sin and guilt and the absolute hopelessness of the sinner, of a salvation which we hate and despise because of our hatred of the alone living God.

We speak of the necessity of the incarnation. The Holland word *vleeschwording* means "become flesh," and it means that God, Who is and remains God, became flesh. The English word incarnation means "in the flesh." The meaning is the same. Holy Writ very plainly and emphatically teaches us this truth of the incarnation, also called the truth of the virgin birth. We are all familiar with the Word of God of Isaiah 7:14: "Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." It is true that the word translated "virgin" may also be translated "a young married woman." However, it may also be translated "virgin." And this is, of course, the meaning here. Where would the sign be if merely a young married woman conceived? Besides, His name is Immanuel, which means "with us God." And then there is also the passage in the Word of God of Matthew 1:19-25. Mary and Joseph were engaged to be married. Mary, however, was with child. And Joseph was minded to put her away privily, break the engagement, because he believed, understandably, that Mary had been unfaithful. And now the Holy Spirit reveals to him that that which had been conceived in her was of the Holy Ghost. Clearly, therefore, this passage teaches the virgin birth, that Mary had conceived without the will of man. The truth of the incarnation, the virgin birth, is clearly Scriptural.

Wicked modernism would have us believe that Jesus could have been born the way He was born, that is, as Immanuel, God with us, through the will of an earthly father. Why could Jesus not be born in the ordinary way, in the way all men are born, and still be Immanuel, God with us? Are not all things possible with the Lord? Could not the almighty God, had it pleased Him, be born as all men are born? Imagine, however, if Jesus had had an earthly father! Even now, when the Scriptures so clearly teach that Jesus was born without the will of man, that He was born of a virgin, that that which was conceived in her was by the Holy Ghost (do not the Scriptures "go all out" to set this forth so very clearly?), wicked modernism continues to deny the virgin birth, insists that our Saviour had an earthly father. What would that wicked world

say if the Scriptures would actually teach that Jesus had an earthly father as well as an earthly mother? Would it say that with God all things are possible, that Immanuel could be born even as having an earthly father, and that the Babe of Bethlehem is the eternal Son of God, Immanuel, God with us? Indeed, the world would surely deny the divine origin of this Mystery of Bethlehem.

We speak of the necessity of the incarnation. We mean that sin necessitated the coming of the eternal Son of God into our flesh and blood. This, we understand, is the viewpoint of our Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 14, Questions and Answers 35 and 36. And this, of course, is surely true. However, although it is true that Jesus came for sin's sake, it is also true that sin came for Jesus' sake. When we say that sin necessitated the coming of Christ this does not and cannot mean that the Lord is ever determined by circumstances outside of Himself. This is the Arminian presentation which teaches a divine election and reprobation as based upon foreseen faith and unbelief. God, however, is the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth. He is never determined by things outside of Himself. He is the divine Potter and we are always the clay. He forms the light and creates the darkness; He makes peace and creates evil; He, the Lord, does all these things - Isaiah 45:7. He declares the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure," Isaiah 46:10. He willed sin and darkness, sovereignly, for the glory of His Name. Of course! The Lord does all things to glorify Himself. He alone is the absolute, living God. And, yet, we understand that sin surely necessitated the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Sin necessitated the incarnation. Sin necessitated the virgin birth because it is only the eternal Son of God united with our flesh and blood Who could destroy this power of sin and merit for us everlasting life and glory. Our Saviour must be born without the will of man because He must be the eternal Son of God in our flesh and blood. Our Saviour must be the Person of the Son of God as He enters into our sin and guilt. Guilt is imputed to the person. That we are all guilty is because we are all personally in Adam. The sin of Adam is, therefore, imputed to the whole human race. If Jesus were a human person He would Himself be guilty and then it would be necessary for Him to pay for His own sin and guilt. The Babe of Bethlehem, however, did not inherit our guilt. He was not guilty because He was personally in Adam. He took it upon Himself. He entered into our human race, through the wonder of the virgin birth, voluntarily assumed responsibility for all the sins of His elect own, having Himself no sin and

(continued on page 134)



## *Sample story from Come, Ye Children*

### **Abraham Obeys God**

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When Isaac grew up a little more, God came to Abraham and asked him to do a very hard thing — the hardest thing in all his life to do — harder even than waiting for Isaac to be born. This is what God said, “Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, and offer him for a burnt offering.”

Was Abraham hearing God’s words right? God said, “Take your only son” — he had waited one hundred years for him. God said, “your son, whom you love” — he loved Isaac more than anything else in the world. God said, “offer him for a burnt offering” — he would have to take a knife in his own hand and kill his own son with it. Maybe Abraham would tell the Lord he could not do that. Do you know what Abraham did?

He got up early the next morning, made some of his donkeys ready for a trip, and started out with two of his servants and his son Isaac; for God had said he had to offer Isaac on a mountain far away. He did just what God told him to do. It took three days to reach the mountain. Abraham had three whole days to think about the hard thing God had asked him. He must have said to himself, “How can my children be as many as the stars of the sky, if I must kill my only son?” Or, “Maybe the Lord will let me find a lamb to offer on the altar when we get there.” Or, “Maybe the Lord will raise Isaac from the dead if I must kill him.” Abraham *could* have changed his mind and turned around and gone home, and said, “No, Lord, I can’t kill my only son.”

But Abraham kept traveling toward the mountain. I don’t think he talked very much those three days, do you? How could he tell Isaac what he had to do? God was making Abraham choose between his dearest son Isaac and his great love for God. Would Abraham choose Isaac or God? Whom did he love most? Abraham loved God above everything, and he obeyed God, but he could not understand why he had to do such a hard thing.

When they were near to the mountain, Abraham left his donkey with the two servants and he told them that he and Isaac would go on alone to worship God. Then Isaac noticed something was wrong. He knew how to worship God: build an altar, put wood and fire on it, and offer a lamb. They had the wood and carried some coals of fire, probably in a little pot, but he asked his father, “Where is the lamb?”

Abraham told him that God would take care of it. Abraham trusted God, but don’t you think his face became more and more unhappy, and it was hard for him to drag his feet up the mountain?



When they were at the top of the mountain, Abraham built an altar, laid the wood on it, and took his dear son, and tied him on top with ropes. Isaac did not kick and scream and fight. Quietly he obeyed his father Abraham and his Father God. As Abraham raised his knife, the Lord, the Son of God, called to him, "Abraham, Abraham."

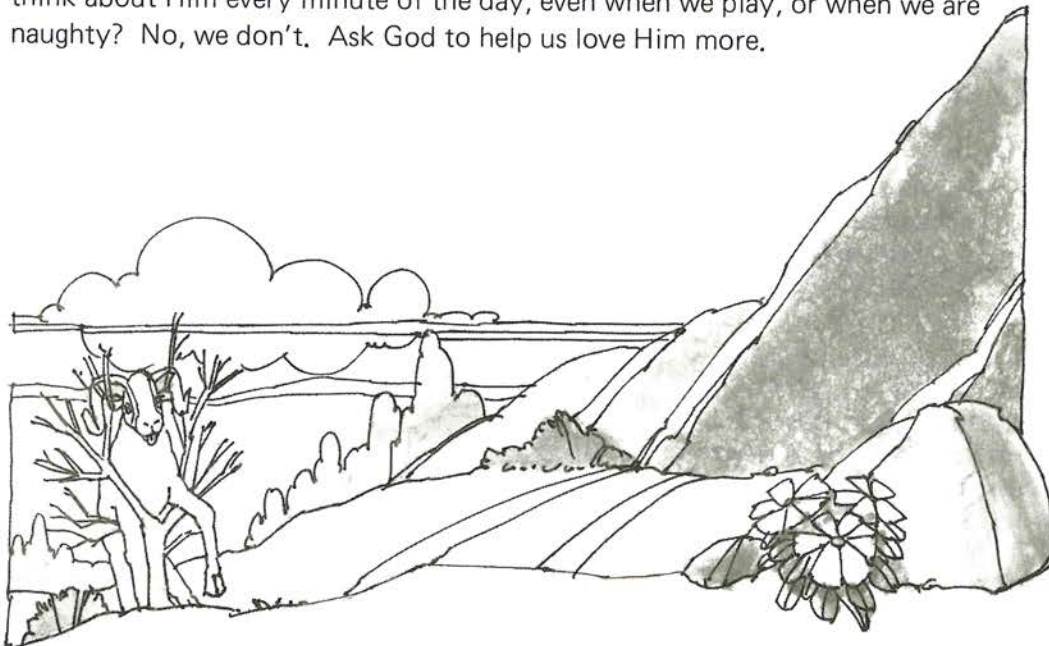
Oh, how glad Abraham was to hear that voice! What a relief that he could answer, "Here am I."

The Lord told him not to kill his son for, he said, "Now I know that thou fearest God." God always knew that, for He knows everything. But Abraham had to show how much he loved God by doing this hard thing.

In a bush nearby, Abraham saw a ram (a father sheep) caught by his horns; and he offered the ram on the altar instead of his son. The ram was a picture of Jesus, Who was God's Sheep Who would die, just as the father sheep had died. Abraham did not have to kill his son Isaac, for God would offer up His Son Jesus to die on the cross instead, for the sins of all His people.

**REMEMBER:**

Can you think how much Abraham loved his God? So much that he would kill his own son when God asked him to? How much do **we** love God? Do we think about Him every minute of the day, even when we play, or when we are naughty? No, we don't. Ask God to help us love Him more.





guilt. This explains the necessity of the incarnation and of the virgin birth. This is the Mystery of Bethlehem. And it is only because this Babe of Bethlehem is the eternal Son of God that He is able to bear the infinite and eternal wrath of God, and that His amazing passion and death have an eternal value. The humiliation of the Son of God, that, being rich as the eternal Son of God, He became poor for our sakes, demanded an exaltation of similar degree, into the highest heavens. This explains the mystery of why our Saviour must be born without the will of man, born of a virgin, conceived by the Holy Spirit. And to this truth the church of God has clung throughout the ages. All the powers of hell have not been able to overthrow it.

"And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us." Are we able to do as these shepherds did, to go to Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass? Are we able to separate ourselves from all the

activity of our present Christmas season, from all the business and materialism of our present day and age, to go to the manger, to see this thing and actually appropriate it unto ourselves? Do we understand this "thing" that has come to pass? And are we doing what the shepherds did? This we can and will do provided that we understand personally the necessity of the incarnation. We must understand, spiritually and personally, *His* coming into our flesh and blood. We must see in that manger the divine Wonder of grace. We must see and experience our own sin and guilt and our own utter hopelessness. We must desire and long for the fellowship of the living God, see our damnableness, and know that our only hope lies in Him Who, being rich, became poor for our sakes. Then the Mystery of Bethlehem will speak to us. Then we will see that He, with His perfect innocence, covers all our sin and guilt. And then we will return from Bethlehem, glorifying and praising God for all the things which we have heard and seen. This is really what it is all about in this season. May we ever understand the necessity of the incarnation.

## THE STRENGTH OF YOUTH

### The Duty of Obedience

*Rev. Rodney Miersma*

Youth in the Lord, the last time we met together we saw that the strength of youth and the beauty of youth is the spiritual adornment of obedience. The earmark of the child of God is obedience unto one's parents in the Lord, for the Lord's sake, for this is right. This was based on the Word of God as recorded in Ephesians 6:1-3. We concluded our discussion last time by pointing out that obedience is well-pleasing unto the Lord, that He loves obedience.

Youth who are obedient to their parents for the Lord's sake will also be obedient in all spheres of life. We wish to elaborate on this a bit in this article by drawing your attention to I Samuel 15:22 where we read, "And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."

What we see here is that God demands of both you and me perfect obedience. Outward appearance will not be enough, but He who searches and knows the heart requires that obedience be from the heart, an obedience of love as a friend-servant.

As youth you look to the future contemplating a successful and happy life. You can have it only if you possess obedience. This is not some philosopher or psychologist speaking, but God Himself. Turn with me to Proverbs 3:1, 2: "My son, forget not My law; but let thine heart keep My commandments: For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee." Through the Psalmist in Psalm 91:14-16 the Lord says, "Because he hath set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known My name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him My salvation." And if this were not enough we have yet I Peter 3:10-12, "For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil."



This truth Samuel conveys to King Saul, and thus also to us. As king of Israel Saul had been commanded by the Lord to smite utterly the nation of Amalek. Total destruction was the command of God: all men, women, children, and animals were to be destroyed. However, King Saul was not of a mind to obey this Word of God, which was unmistakably clear. He destroyed much, *almost* everything; but he spared the life of Agag, king of Amalek, and took back with him the best of the sheep, oxen, fatlings, and lambs.

Upon return he piously informs Samuel that he has obeyed the commandment of the Lord. Samuel was not to be deceived, for, in addition to the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen which he could hear, the Lord had appeared unto him revealing the disobedience of Saul. He demands of Saul an explanation.

Saul excuses himself under the pretext that not he but the people had spared the animals. To make it even more honorable he claims that the people were highly motivated, in that these animals were to be used for sacrifice unto the Lord. Noble indeed! As high-sounding as this may sound, Saul's heart is not pure. He does not seek to please God, but desires to please men; thus he condones this sin so that he may hear the people say that he has made them rich, rather than God. This evil deed he is trying to cover with the cloak of righteousness.

Even if we give Saul the benefit of the doubt and say that in his heart he really was trying to supply the altar of the Lord with the best, does it change anything? May we ever maintain that the end justifies the means no matter how wicked those means are? May we say that as long as the result is good it does not matter how we obtain it?

Do not ask me this question; ask the Lord. Through his mouthpiece, the prophet Samuel, He shows how impossible such a position is. "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." In other words, outward form and sacrificial service have meaning with God only when they are done from the heart and in obedience and love. It does not matter how many sacrifices are made, even if of the best quality. If they are made with enmity in the heart then they are only so many abominations.

As in all sacred, Bible history there is also here the Word of God to us. God is saying something to us concerning our daily life here on earth. The Amalekites were an evil people whose cup of iniquity was full. The Word of the Lord to Saul was to destroy them utterly. That same word of God comes to us, although in different form. "Purify

yourselves; cleanse yourselves from all wickedness; be ye holy, for I am holy." God speaks this to all of us, but the emphasis in this article is upon you, the young people. God requires also of you young people that you put away every sin, forsake every evil way, and walk before Him in love and obedience according to His Word. Young people like to think that they are exempt from this command of God, that somehow they have a special privilege and do not have to walk uprightly until they are married and settle down. Youth, you say, is the time to sow one's wild oats, to indulge so that one can get it out of one's system. Later in life one can become serious. Perhaps you even put off making confession of faith with the mistaken notion that now you can do many things which you will not be able to do after you make confession of faith.

Is this what you read in the Bible? Is this what you hear preached from the pulpit? Do your parents and teachers leave you with that impression? You know better. Of course not! God's demand is far-reaching, embracing every sphere of your life. There is no such thing as a "sin-privilege" for youth. Right now this command covers all that you think, speak, and do. Your relationships toward each other must be free from sin. This includes your dating practices, your entertainment, the music you listen to, the places you go to, and all other areas of your life. You must separate yourselves from all ties by which you are bound to worldliness, and you must seek the purest manifestation of the church of God, submitting yourselves to its doctrine and discipline.

You must not be like Saul and make excuses for yourselves. You must not piously pride yourselves in the fact that you are not using illicit drugs, are not addicted to alcoholic beverages, are not sexually promiscuous, and are not in attendance at the theater and dance. You may even say that there is much good. You go to church regularly, attend Young People's Society, even taking part in the discussion.

But does this make you obedient to the command of God? Did not Saul also destroy the vile and worthless? Saul did not sin in destroying the vile, but he disobeyed when he kept that which was good in his and the people's eyes. This is only partial obedience, not complete submission.

However, when this sin is exposed and pointed out, the excuses begin to flow abundantly. Suddenly there is a redeeming value, a little bit of good to be gained from the bad. You may ask, "But how do I know it is wrong or bad if I do not do it or try it? I have to see for myself." You try to make yourself believe that the only "fun" for yourself is that which is wrong, shoving aside the reproof that



happiness and blessedness is only in the way of obedience to God in love.

But wait, do not take my word for it, listen to God. On the one hand, in Deuteronomy 28:15-20 He says, "It shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee and overtake thee; cursed shalt thou be in the city and cursed shalt thou be in the field; cursed shall be thy basket and thy store, cursed shall be the fruit of thy body and the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The Lord shall send upon thee cursing, vexation and rebuke, in all that thou settest thy hand unto for to do until thou be destroyed." As can be seen, the miseries of today are a result of God's wrath upon disobedient mankind. Greater miseries will follow as the cup of iniquity continues to be filled.

On the other hand, the prophet Jeremiah tells us, "But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey My voice and I will be your God and ye shall be My

people and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you that it may be well unto you." In Matthew 7:21 the Lord confirms this by saying, "Not all that say Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father." Disobedience is certain death while obedience is eternal life.

To walk such a life of obedience takes much practice. In order to live in obedience you must know that you can not do this all by yourself. By yourself you are disobedient and gainsaying, hopelessly lost and helpless. You also must know that Jesus Christ is perfect in obedience. This He demonstrated by obeying God from the manger to the cross. That obedience was rewarded by God on the third day when He raised Christ from the dead and exalted Him over all. Finally, you must know that your obedience is possible only in Christ. It is a gift from God which He gives to you through His Son. His Spirit now reigns in your heart by which you resist the evil of the world and walk in the joy of the Lord. Hear the Word of the Lord and trust and obey, for obedience is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams.

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## FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

### The Nicene Creed

*Rev. James Slopsema*

#### HISTORY (cont'd)

The statement of faith adopted by the Council of Nicea (AD 325) had certainly been a victory for the truth. Nicea had condemned the error of Arius that Jesus was merely a creature and not truly God. Positively, Nicea had confessed that Jesus Christ is "the Son of God, begotten of the Father (the only begotten, i.e., of the essence of the Father, God of God, and) Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father."

The victory gained at the Council of Nicea, however, was rather short-lived. The three parties that had emerged at the Council of Nicea remained. In fact, each became hardened in its position. The Arians as well as the majority that had taken a middle ground between the Arian and Orthodox position claimed that they had signed the creed of Nicea under pressure. Consequently, the battle resumed with three very discernible positions to be found in the Christian church. There were the Arians who

used the term *hetero-ousion* as the test of orthodoxy. By that expression they meant that Christ was of a *different* essence than the Father. In direct opposition to the Arians was the Orthodox party. Their watchword was *homo-ousion*. By this term they meant that Christ was of the *same* essence as the Father and therefore with the Father is co-equally and co-eternally God. Finally, there were the Semi-Arians who took the middle ground. Their watchword was *homoi-ousion*, which meant that Christ was of *like* essence with the Father. They differed from the Arians in that they acknowledged that Christ is indeed eternal and divine. But they were not prepared to side with the Orthodox party which maintained that Christ is God in the full sense of the word as the Father. Hence, Christ is of *like* essence with the Father.

As a result of these various views, a number of regional councils were held, each taking a position in this matter, often contradicting and condemning one another. Many bishops and church leaders



were deposed and banished. Athanasius, who had emerged as the leader of the Orthodox party, was deposed several times as bishop of Alexandria and forced to flee in exile. The fortunes of these various parties also rose and fell according to the theological inclinations of the various emperors that ruled in Rome. The Roman emperors often took definite sides in this debate and were not above using their power and influence to champion the cause of the party with which they sympathized. As the controversy continued to develop it began to appear as though the orthodox position, adopted at the great council of Nicea, would ultimately be rejected and that the Semi-Arian view would finally emerge victorious.

In all fairness to the Semi-Arians, two things must be noted. First, they soundly rejected the error of Arius that Christ was simply a creature and not divine. The Semi-Arians maintained very strongly the divinity of Christ. Secondly, many of the Semi-Arians were hindered by a confusion in terminology. A clear enough distinction had not been made between the terms "person" and "essence." Consequently, when the Orthodox party maintained that Christ was of the same *essence* as the Father, many understood them to teach a unity of persons. In other words, they suspected that the Orthodox party was obliterating any real distinction between the Father and the Son, so that they were simply one and the same. Hence, they clung to the term *homoi-ousion*—Christ is of *like* essence with the Father.

With the rise of a new generation of theologians, that which separated the Orthodox party from those that clung to the *homoi-ousion* position slowly melted away. Many of the Semi-Arians had in their heart agreed with the Nicene faith; but because of the confusion of terminology had rejected the formulation of Nicea. Hence, through the efforts of men like Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nizanzus, and Gregory of Nyssa the Semi-Arians were slowly won to the orthodox position originally expressed in the Nicene creed.

At the same time, however, the question of the Holy Spirit also came more and more to the fore. Not only are the Father and the Son mentioned in Scripture; so also is the Holy Spirit. In fact, they are often mentioned together. Consequently, the church also faced the question of the identity of the Holy Spirit. This was not the center of the controversy. The controversy in the church centered in the identity of Christ and His relation to the Father. But the question of the Holy Spirit was unavoidable.

Various positions were held concerning the Holy Spirit. The Arians viewed the Holy Spirit as a crea-

ture, a created being. Even as the Father had created the Son, so also had the Son created the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit therefore is subordinate to the Son even as the Son is subordinate to the Father. This left the Arians with one God and two demi-gods. The Semi-Arians by and large also asserted the creation of the Holy Spirit. This followed from their repudiation of the fact that the Son is of the same essence as the Father but is only of like essence. Even the Orthodox party was at first unsure as to the identity of the Holy Spirit. There were some in fact who wanted to make the Holy Spirit merely a divine power or attribute of God.

As the question of Christ's identity became more and more settled, so too did the question of the identity of the Holy Spirit. If the Son is of the same essence as the Father, so too is the Spirit. If the Son is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father, so too is the Holy Spirit. This simply follows from the fact that all three are so often mentioned together in the Scriptures. In light of the Scriptures, God can not be two in one; He must be three in one—triune.

This truth which the church now came to see rather universally was officially adopted by the second ecumenical council held at Constantinople in A.D. 381, well over 50 years after the Council of Nicea. This council was called by the emperor Theodosius I who himself was convinced of the orthodox view. After the exit of 36 Semi-Arian bishops the council consisted of 150 bishops. These represented the eastern branch of the church. The western branch or Latin church was not represented at all. This was perhaps due to the fact that the Latin church had quite some time before this come to see the truth of the Trinity. The council of Constantinople did essentially two things: first, it re-affirmed the truth of Nicea; secondly, it went beyond Nicea and confirmed also the true Godhead of the Holy Spirit. Especially two changes were made in the statement of faith adopted at Nicea in A.D. 325. First, the conclusion of the original statement of faith was elided. This had been a condemnation of all those who denied the true deity of Christ (cf. our previous article for this conclusion). The second change was an additional paragraph spelling out more in detail the identity and work of the Holy Spirit. The original statement of Nicea had merely stated, "(We believe) in the Holy Ghost." The statement, adopted by the council of Constantinople, was quite more extensive, "(We believe) in the Holy Ghost, Who is Lord and Giver of life, Who proceedeth from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spake by the prophets...one holy catholic and apostolic church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.



Amen."

The council of Constantinople gave us our Nicene Creed in its present form with but one exception. In the statement concerning the Holy Spirit as adopted by the council of Constantinople, the Spirit is said to proceed from the Father. At the Synod of Toledo (A.D. 689) there was added the fact that the Holy Spirit also proceeds from the Son. This addition is rather significant in that it leaves no room for subordination in the Godhead. The Arians and Semi-Arians had such a subordination. In their views the Holy Spirit is subordinate to the Son Who in turn is also subordinate to the Father. The statement of Constantinople which confessed the procession of the Spirit only from the Father left room for this kind of subordination. To attribute the procession of the Spirit solely to the Father makes the Father the sole fountain of the Godhead. This is one step away from giving to the Father a

position of rank over the Son and the Spirit. Hence, there was added the truth that the Holy Spirit proceeds also from the Son.

This addition was not received by the eastern or Greek branch of the church. The Greek church opposed this insertion from the beginning and still does today. This insertion, known as the Filioque clause ("filoque" meaning "and the son") along with the question of the supremacy of the bishop of Rome as pope led eventually to a split between the Greek and Latin church in A.D. 1054. The Greek or eastern church is known today as the Greek or Eastern Orthodox church. The Latin church which retains the Filioque clause in the Nicene creed became known as the Roman Catholic church. Our roots are historically in the latter church. From her we have received the Nicene creed in its present form.

## ***BIBLE STUDY GUIDE***

# **Colossians — Christ the Head of All Things (Conclusion)**

*Rev. J. Kortering*

In combating the evil philosophy that had affected the members of the church at Colosse, Paul sets forth the gospel of the headship of Christ. Rather than to turn from this world in an evil spirit of asceticism, Paul exhorts them to see its glory in relation to Christ the Head of all things.

### **A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THIS LETTER**

1. The salutation (1:1,2). Paul identifies himself as the sender of this letter and includes Timothy who is with him at Rome (1:1). He also addresses the church at Colosse as saints and faithful brethren and extends to them the apostolic greeting (1:2).

2. Paul expresses thanks for the Colossian Christians (1:3-8). He directs his thanks to God, Who is also the Father of Christ, for he acknowledges that He is the real source of all the spiritual virtues present in the church (1:3). He also rejoices in that God was pleased to use Epaphras as His mouthpiece to bring to them the good news of the gospel (1:7). This same Epaphras reported to Paul that the Colossian believers excelled in faith, love, and hope as the manifest fruits of the gospel which was preached to them (1:8, 4-6).

3. The inspired apostle assures the Colossians

that he prays continually for their welfare (1:9-12). He mentions specifically that they may be filled with knowledge, wisdom, and spiritual understanding (1:9), that they walk worthy of the Lord (1:10), that they be strengthened unto patience and longsuffering (1:11), and that they may give thanks unto the Father for being made partakers of the inheritance (1:12).

4. He now sets forth the glorious truth that Christ is the exalted Head of all (1:13-23). Christ possesses a kingdom into which we are translated through the redemption and forgiveness of sin (1:13, 14). He is the image of the invisible God (1:15), the firstborn of every creature (1:15); He is before all things, hence all things were created by and for Him. This includes all things in heaven and earth, and by Him all these things consist (1:16, 17). He is the Head of the church (1:18); He is the beginning, the firstborn of the dead (1:18); He has the preeminence for in Him all the fulness dwells (1:18, 19). By His blood on the cross He has reconciled all things unto the Father, things in earth and heaven (1:20), including the Colossian believers who in time past were alienated, were enemies, and committed wicked works, but are now holy and un-



blameable (1:21, 22). They will remain such as long as they continue in the faith (1:23).

5. Paul the minister, now reminds the Colossians that he was made a minister in order to serve the church by bringing the gospel to them (1:24-29). This included his suffering for the gospel which he considered a way of filling up Christ's suffering for the sake of the church (1:24). The message he brings is the Word of God which was hidden for ages, but is now manifest to the saints, namely, that Christ is preached, the hope of glory (1:25-27). That preaching includes warning and teaching in order that every man might be presented perfect in Christ (1:28, 29).

6. In chapter two, Paul deals more directly with the vain philosophies that were affecting the church. In the opening statement of this chapter he assures them that he cares for them (2:1-7). Even though he has not seen them face to face he has great conflict for them (2:1). His burden is that the believers may be knit together in love and have full assurance of understanding, that is, that in Christ all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge of God are hidden (2:2, 3). If they do this, they will not be beguiled by enticing words (2:4), for in Christ alone they are rooted and built up and stablished in faith, by which they are thankful and able to walk as God would have them walk (2:5-7).

7. The way that Paul deals with the heresies that were attacking the church is to show how poor they were compared to the gospel of Christ's headship over all (8:8-23). There are four heresies referred to in this chapter. First, Paul deals with the *vain* philosophies, that is the deceitful notion that one must be worldly wise or be considered a fool. The answer to this is that such a notion will spoil a man. On a much higher plane, Paul points out that knowledge in Christ is complete, for in Him dwelleth the *fullness* of the *Godhead* bodily (2:8-10). Second, he combats the evil influence of Jewish ceremonialism which insisted that one must be circumcised, watch what he eats and drinks, observe holy days, Sabbaths, and moons if he is to be right with God. The answer to this is that through faith in Christ we are spiritually circumcised and baptized and quickened to spiritual life which is expressed in a far greater way than external observances. Christ, through His death and resurrection, blotted out the ceremonial laws and triumphed over all earthly powers and now reigns over the saints in a new life. He warns the Colossians not to let anyone judge their spiritual condition on the basis of what they eat or drink, etc. (2:11-17). Third, there was present the heresy of angel worship, as if angels might help us in our prayers to God. In dealing with this Paul points out that those who advocate this idea are vainly puffed up and are intrud-

ing into things which are not seen. Rather we are to turn to Christ our Head, from Whom we receive all the blessings of God (2:18, 19). Finally, the error of asceticism was present. They taught that one could attain unto spiritual perfection by abstaining from earthly things. His answer to this evil is that we are dead with Christ from the rudiments of this world and through His resurrection are alive to serve God. All denials, such as, "Touch not, taste not, handle not" are of men. All who confide in them will perish for they have a show of wisdom and humility, but not after God (2:20-23).

8. Christ, the Head of all, is the source of our spiritual life. It involves mortification of the old man and the quickening of the new man (3:1-17). The spiritual power for this is our being crucified and raised with Christ. By this energy, we are to seek the things which are above (3:1-4). This includes the mortification of our members, that is, the putting away of former sins which were committed when we gave way to our evil nature. He lists many of them: various sexual sins, covetousness, anger, blasphemy, filthy communication, including lying (3:5-9). Rather, we are to put on the new man which is a renewal in the image of God. This includes practicing mercy, kindness, humility, forbearance and forgiving one another, charity (love), letting the peace of God rule our hearts and letting the Word of Christ dwell in us richly so that we can be a blessing to each other in our singing and giving thanks to God (3:10-17).

9. The Colossian Christians are exhorted to demonstrate this faithfulness also in their domestic life (3:18-4:1). He mentions first that wives are to submit themselves unto their husbands in the Lord (3:18). Husbands are to love their wives and be not bitter against them (3:19). Children are to obey their parents in all things for this is pleasing unto the Lord (3:20). Fathers are not to provoke their children unto wrath lest they be discouraged (3:21). Servants are to obey their masters with a view to serving God and not men, for they will receive from Him their reward for doing either good or evil (3:22-25). Finally, masters also are to give their servants what is just, for they must remember that their Master is Christ Himself (4:1).

10. A closing thought is given, they are encouraged to be diligent in prayer and to include a prayer for Paul that a door may be opened unto him that he may preach the gospel (4:2-6). They are to live as a witness to those that are outside the congregation, being ready to testify to any man, having their speech seasoned with salt (4:5, 6).

11. Final greetings and salutations are given (4:7-18). Tychicus, who delivered this letter, would bring information of Paul's affairs and comfort them (4:7, 8); Onesimus will add whatever he can



(4:9). He extends greetings from those who are with him: Aristarchus (a fellow prisoner), Marcus (sister's son to Barnabas, who was reconciled again to Paul, and Paul asks the Colossians to receive him, should he come), Justus (a Jew), Epaphras (a laborer in Colosse who did much for the church as pastor and was now with Paul), (4:10-13). Luke also extends greetings (he was Paul's traveling companion and physician). Demas was still with Paul (though later he would leave him, see II Timothy 4:10). Now he in turn asks them to give his greetings to the church of Laodicea and to Nymphas and the church which met in his house, and to exchange greetings with the Laodicean congregation. He finally greets Archippus (4:15-17). The final salutation authenticates this epistle as being Paul's own and he asks them to remember him while he is in prison. He closes with the benediction of grace (4:18).

#### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Describe something of the history of the organization of the church at Colosse. See this letter and the book of Acts.
2. Tell in your own words what necessitated this letter. Describe the evil philosophy that was attack-

ing the church.

3. How does Paul's emphasis on Christ, the Head of all things, demolish this evil philosophy?

4. Demonstrate from this letter that even though the church of Colosse was influenced by an evil philosophy, Paul showed them love and patience as he wrote them this letter. See 2:1-7 especially.

5. When you read this letter, point out Paul's repeated references to doctrine and life and that he shows over and over again that evil doctrine corrupts life while the truth sanctifies our life.

6. Show from this letter how deadly it is to have religion based on external behavior and not on the spiritual condition of the heart.

7. Discuss the beautiful section in which Christ's Headship is explained (1:13-20). How are Christ's two natures interwoven in this passage?

8. How does chapter three explain daily conversion.

9. Discuss the various areas of our everyday life that are affected by Christ's Lordship as they are mentioned in this letter. See chapter 3:18-4:1. How can we apply this to our own life.

## QUESTION BOX

# The Proper Relationship of the Woman to the Man

Rev. C. Hanko

The *Standard Bearer* received the following question:

"We are living in an age when the women of the world are demanding equal rights, as we see in the E.R.A. We also see in the church world that same demand, as women seek the office of minister, elder and deacon.

"My question is this, what is the proper relationship of the woman to the man? Did God create the woman in such a way that she is subject to the man in all spheres of life, or does that submission pertain only to the marriage state and the church? Does Holy Scripture speak to us on this matter?"

As the reader suggests, a question of this nature would hardly have been brought up a few decades ago, especially not in the church.

It was during World War II that women were

called to replace the men who had gone into the service in factories and business places. After the war, women continued to hold men's jobs and soon became supervisors over them. Women voted for public officials and soon were holding public offices, so that today we have a woman in the Supreme Court, and some news commentators already predict that we might have a woman running for the vice presidency in 1984.

This is nothing less than a part of the social and religious revolution that is sweeping the whole world, in which the ordinances and laws of God are openly defied. There is talk of a "new morality" in which God is deliberately cast out and every one does what is right in his own eyes. Women demand equal rights with men. (Oh, how they will rue the day!) Even in the church the women insist on their equal rights. In many churches women already



attend and vote in school societies and congregational meetings. Women clamor for a place in the special office of deacon, elder, or minister.

We are faced with the question, what is the proper relationship between the man and the woman? Have our fathers throughout the centuries always slighted the woman in this relationship? Has a deeper insight into the Scriptures and a more thorough exegesis discovered that we have never understood this relationship properly? What does Scripture say about this relationship in every sphere of life?

We turn, first of all, to the creation ordinance in paradise as described in Genesis 2:18-23, where we read in part, "And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone: I will make him an help meet for him." Adam was created from the dust of the earth. Eve was taken from the rib of Adam. According to God's purpose Adam stood as friend-servant of God, consciously and willingly devoted to God. He was king of all that he surveyed with the calling to devote himself and the entire creation to God's glory. As such he was the head of the human race, the father of all mankind. But there was one great lack in his life. Adam was alone. He needed a companion similar to him. No, he did not need another man next to him to assume authority over the creatures with him. He needed a woman. The stallion had its mare, the lion had its lioness, even the birds had their mates, but Adam was alone. He needed a woman as his helper to fulfill his purpose and calling as our first father, as lord of creation, and as head of the human race.

This woman whom God gave to Adam was his own flesh and bone, yet physically and psychologically different. He could father children which she could bear. He could serve God as friend-servant with Eve as his assistant. Adam was qualified to rule over his wife in the capacity of husband, to rule over the children God would give them in the capacity of father, and over the creation as its king. Eve could in no way fill that position, for she was wife to her husband, mother of their children, a helper in all the work entrusted to Adam, surrendering herself to him, so that his life became her life.

This is so much the in-created nature of the woman, lost through sin but restored by grace, that Peter says in his first epistle, chapter 3:1, 2, "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands, that, if any obey not the Word, they also may without the Word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear." Even in a home where the husband is an unbeliever the wife must not play boss, but must exercise a "chaste conversation coupled with fear." In the verses that follow, Peter,

or rather, the Holy Spirit points out that these Christian virtues should adorn every woman at all times. He states, "Whose adorning ... let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." Meekness and quietness characterize the Christian woman, not only in the home but also outside of the home. Boldness, arrogance, assuming authority over a man does not fit with her virtues as woman. Her beauty, her strength, and even her influence rest in a "meek and quiet spirit." We admire a woman for her femininity, as much as we despise that in a man. This does not mean that a woman is forced to bury her talents, such as knowledge, intelligence, and wisdom, but she will wisely use them as a woman both in her home and in the church. According to the creation ordinance a woman always remains a woman, and a man remains a man.

This is confirmed in I Corinthians 11:3, 8, 9, where we read, "But I would have you know, that the Head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, and the Head of Christ is God. ... For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man." Scripture is not speaking here only of the husband-wife relationship, but of the relationship between man and woman. Here the headship, the position of authority is stressed. God is the Head, has the authority over Christ. Christ is the Head, has the authority directly over the man. The man is the head, has the authority over the woman. This follows, according to verses 8 and 9, from the creation ordinance in paradise. "For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man."

Concerning this passage the well-known commentator of the Netherlands, Dr. F. W. Grosheide writes, (I translate): "The apostle says that also in the realm of recreation, that is in the congregation, man is the one who rules over the woman. Not his own wife, but the woman. The expression is of great importance. In Greece—differing from the common practice in Rome—the woman was forced to the background. Christianity brought freedom, deliverance for the woman (compare verse 1). Now in Corinth misuse was made of this freedom. There was an urge toward emancipation, which brought the women to a misuse of their Christian freedom by wanting to be equal to the man in every respect. Paul opposes that by placing the man above the woman also in the congregation." (Korte Verklaring, pages 135, 136.)

It is in that light that we can understand I Timothy 2:12, 13, "But I suffer not a woman to teach,



nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve."

There is an obvious exegetical question here. Does Paul mean to say that a woman may not teach in the church, not even, for example, children in a Sunday School? Or does he say that a woman may not teach in the sense of having authority over the man? This question actually does not create a problem now. The point we wish to make is that the apostle emphatically states that, "I do not suffer a woman to usurp authority over the man." The word used for "usurp authority" in the original means, "to act on one's own authority," as a self-appointed master, exercising an authority to which one has no right.

Paul bases this on the creation ordinance of paradise. The woman has no right to exercise authority over the man, because of her position over against the man by God's very act of creation. It is contrary to the natural, innate, God-given position of the woman to exercise authority over a man. Paul does not suffer it, because God's ordinance in creation does not suffer it.

William Hendriksen wrote concerning this passage in his commentary on I Timothy as follows,

"Let the woman not enter into the sphere of activity for which by dint of her very creation she is not suited. Let not a bird try to dwell under water. Let not a fish try to live on land. Let not a woman yearn to exercise authority over a man by lecturing him in public worship. For the sake both of herself and of the spiritual welfare of the church such unholy tampering with divine authority is forbidden. ... Her full spiritual equality with men as a sharer in all the blessing of salvation (Gal. 3:28: there can be no male and female) does not imply any basic change in her nature *as woman* or in the corresponding task which she *as a woman* is called upon to perform. Let the woman remain woman! Anything else Paul *cannot permit*. Paul cannot permit it because *God's holy law* does not permit it (I Cor. 14:34). That holy law is His will as expressed in the Pentateuch, particularly in the story of woman's creation and of her fall (see especially Gen. 2:18-25, 3:16)."

The principle that applies to teaching, or preaching in the church, that is, the woman exercising authority over the man, applies to every other sphere of life—and that according to God's own creation ordinance.

## THE LORD GAVE THE WORD

# China in the News and the Good News in China

In September, the 12th Congress of the Communist Party in China went through a massive shake-up as the pro-Maoists were purged or forced into early retirement. This will mean more openness to the West, more trade, and more Chinese students in Europe and North America.

With one-fourth of the world's population, China can't help being in the public's attention. Furthermore, with the raising of the bamboo curtain, even more attention is being given of late to what happens in China. Moreover, Christians who have prayed for decades that God would again open China to the gospel have a special reason to be China watchers. They wonder how the church is faring.

**How to report on China: an ecumenical voice.** Raymond Fung, secretary for evangelism of the World Council of Churches, told a group of religious magazine editors at Wheaton College in May

1982 that when one writes on China, he or she should not only get the facts straight but also put them into China's context. Only then can they be rightly understood in a Western context.

China's anti-religious activity, he observes, is not specifically anti-Christian, for Buddhism and Islam are much stronger than Christianity, and they too fall under the state's regulation. Further, China is a tightly controlled society in which no activities are unrelated to the government, no public discussion occurs without reference to party policies, and no one can hold public meetings except the Communist Party and its affiliates.

In reporting on China, ecumenicals tend to praise the government-recognized Three-Self People's Movement (TSPM) in China and accept the latter's downgrading of the house churches. Evangelicals tend to take the opposite approach and suspect the TSPM of compromising with the Party



and of claiming that authentic Christianity is to be found in the tens of thousands of "congregations" meeting in homes.

**What religious liberty? An evangelical view.** In the China Prayer Letter of the Chinese Church Research Center of Hong Kong, John C. Wang warns against thinking that full religious freedom has returned to China. He reports that the Communist Party is applying the following measures to keep the churches under state control:

(1) *No private contact with foreigners.* Contacts between a Chinese church and a foreign religious group outside the TSPM's supervision is discouraged. On the surface, the TSPM is doing this to protect Chinese sovereignty, but actually it is meant to prevent outside stimulation for evangelistic expansion.

(2) *No evangelistic activity outside the church.* Any religious activity that takes place outside the appointed places of worship (which means the Three-Self churches) is frowned upon by the TSPM, and violators could be arrested.

(3) *No religion for people under 18.* Adults who are already "hopeless" in religion are permitted to continue in their faith, but preaching to children under 18 is forbidden.

(4) *No religion for party members.* Although the constitution grants all citizens the freedom of religious belief, party members are forbidden to join the church.

(5) *No contribution or assistance from abroad.* Since all Three-Self pastors are paid by the TSPM, home meetings are forbidden to collect offerings or accept any assistance from abroad.

(6) *No imported Bibles.* Despite the deplorable scarcity of Bibles in China, the Chinese customs are very strict in searching and detaining Bibles carried in by travelers to China.

Although the constitution grants the people freedom of religious belief, this does not include freedom of religious propagation.

One can go a step farther than Raymond Fung and say that in ascertaining the facts one must know the reporter, for one's viewpoint (here, ecumenical or evangelical) largely controls how one reports the facts in their China context.

**The official position.** China's draft constitution Article 35 says about religious freedom, "Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief. No organs of state, public organizations, or individuals shall compel citizens to believe in religion or not believe in religion. Nor shall they discriminate against citizens who believe, or do not believe, in religion. The state protects legitimate religious activities. No one may use religion to carry out counter-revolutionary activities, or activities that disrupt public order, harm the health of citizens, or obstruct the education system of the state. No religious affairs may be dominated by any foreign country."

It will be a step forward for all of us who are concerned about God's people in China to note China's official position on religion. This will help us to understand the progress and the pitfalls of the good news in China. However, we will also need the China watchers to tell us what it means for the church in China.

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*The  
Standard Bearer  
makes a thoughtful  
gift for any occasion.*

#### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On December 4, 1947, MR. AND MRS. GORDON VAN OVERLOOP, were married in the Lord. We thank God for giving them these 35 years together. We also thank Him for the covenant instruction we received from them. May God continue to bless them and keep them close to Him.

Their Children and Grandchildren

#### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Senior Mr. and Mrs. Society of Hope Protestant Reformed Church (Walker) expresses its sincerest sympathy to our members, Mr. and Mrs. Jon Huiskens, in the loss of Mr. Huiskens's mother, MRS. MINNIE HUISKEN. May our gracious God comfort them by His Word. "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, 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" (Rev. 14:13).

Prof. H. Hanko, Pres.  
Mrs. Bette Dykstra, Sec'y

#### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Senior Mr. and Mrs. Society of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church expresses their sincere sympathy to their fellow members, Mr. and Mrs. Darrel Huiskens, in the death of his mother, MRS. HENRY (MIN) HUISKEN.

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." (Revelation 21:4)

Mr. Henry Timmerman, Pres.  
Mrs. Elaine Faber, Sec'y



## News From Our Churches

November 29, 1982

I finally received a welcome letter from Rev. T. Miersma written by his wife Jan. The letter cleared up the question about the difficulties they were having with the Canadian Consulate in Detroit. Actually there were no difficulties, as this quote will show, "To our surprise when we had the interview, on September 27, and asked about the possibility of getting such a permit (work permit), the vice consul replied, that he could write that up for us a minute, and so we could move immediately if we wanted.... Two weeks from the date of the interview we were on our way to Alberta in a caravan of two rental trucks and our car." The trip lasted four days. Edmonton is approximately 800 miles (1,280 kilometers) from the nearest Protestant Reformed Church which is in Lynden, Washington. I am certainly happy that things went smoothly for the Miersmas.

The program presented by Rev. den Hartog was extremely valuable for all those who attended. It was a good thing that the program was held at First Church, Grand Rapids because the balconies were partially filled that fine evening. Rev. den Hartog presented an overall view of the people and the church in Singapore. I know that the people in our churches in New Jersey, Iowa, and Washington will be thankful that they were able to see the slides of Singapore and also to meet with Rev. den Hartog. We are certainly thankful to God for the work that He has performed through Rev. den Hartog in Singapore. In a heathen land, the Scriptures and those who trust in them stand out as shining lights in the midst of darkness. The church can not exist without them, as this quote from Covenant Protestant Reformed Church's bulletin informs us: "for this reason Scripture has by divine ordinance, been made so necessary, that it pertains not only to the well-being of the church, but to its very being, so that now the church cannot exist without the Scripture" (Turretin).

The following quote, also from the bulletin of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church, clearly describes the work that Reverends Houck, Van Overloop, and Hanko were involved in: we "...spent a very profitable week, visiting and ministering to the needs of various individuals and groups in Vermont, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, and Maryland this past week. Wherever we went we were able to rejoice in the communion of the saints, even with those we had never met before, and always our bond of union was the glorious truth of God's sovereign grace. We thank God that He has brought us safely to the end of this work and we pray that it may bring forth fruit, especially if it be His will toward a field for home missions labours." I hope that this is only the beginning of home missions work on the east coast. It is important to realize that their schedule was to meet with two or three families in Plymouth, Vermont; a group near Boston, Massachusetts; two families in Hagerstown, Maryland; a group in North Cape May, New Jersey; and a group in Blairstown. May God bring forth fruit from their labours.

Kalamazoo Protestant Reformed Church's Young People's Society has been studying the history of our churches. To get a clear picture of the years 1930 to 1950, they have asked Prof. H.C. Hoeksema to talk to them about the development of the church during those years. I believe that they have also asked Rev. C. Hanko to speak to them.

The consistory of First Protestant Reformed Church, Edmonton, Alberta has "decided to make the term of office of the deacons to be the same as that for elders; it has therefore been changed from two years to three years, as the consistory felt that two years was too short a time to begin and effectively carry out the work required by the office."

What about the church building in New Jersey? "The steps were installed last week on the inside of the building. We hope that the work of the electrician will also soon be finished."

DH