

THE **STANDARD BEARER**

**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**



Faith Protestant Reformed Church
Jenison, Michigan

Vol. 69, No. 9
February 1, 1993

CONTENTS:

February 1, 1993

Meditation — Rev. Wilbur G. Bruinsma	
Patient in Adversity	195
Editorial — Prof. David J. Engelsma	
The Kingdom Has Come (1)	197
Letters	199
All Around Us — Prof. Robert D. Decker	201
A Cloud of Witnesses — Prof. Herman C. Hanko	
Peter Martyr Vermigli: Italian Reformer	202
Contributions	
New Facilities for Faith Church — Rev. Kenneth Koole	205
Self-Esteem in Humility — Dale Bekkering	206
Jesus, Son of Nathan and Son of Solomon — Mr. David Dykstra	208
Family Devotions — Rev. Cornelius Hanko	210
A Word Fitly Spoken — Rev. Dale H. Kuiper	
Angels	211
The Strength of Youth — Rev. Steven R. Key	
Proper Christian Self-Esteem (5)	212
Book Reviews	214
News From Our Churches — Mr. Benjamin Wigger	215

In This Issue...

Numerical growth which, after only 15 years, makes necessary and possible a church building project which doubles the size of the structure is surely cause for gratitude to God. Such was the case with Faith Church in Jenison, MI. We thank their pastor, Rev. Kenneth Koole, for his "Contribution," which makes it possible for us, in this issue, to share in some measure the excitement and pleasure of the congregation as they begin to make use of their renovated and expanded facilities.

This issue has in fact no fewer than four Contributions. The second is a takeoff from Rev. Key's current series in the "Strength of Youth." Agreeing heartily with Rev. Key's characterization of unbiblical self-esteem, Mr. Dale Bekkering adds to the treatment of this important issue by elaborating on the developing of a biblical self-image. Interestingly, he attributes both high and low self-esteem to one and the same cause — pride. To see why that is, read "Self-Esteem in Humility."

The third Contribution also comes as something of a response to previous articles in the *SB*. You might recall that, a year or so ago, there was in the *Standard Bearer* an exchange over the question of whether Jesus was the son of David through Solomon or through Nathan. Mr. Dave Dykstra suggests that it may be that we have here a both/and, rather than an either/or, proposition. Read "Jesus, the Son of Nathan and the Son of Solomon."

The fourth unsolicited contribution came from Rev. C. Hanko. He writes of family devotions. In the article he wonders aloud if devotions are, because of the hectic pace of life in today's world, becoming a lost art. Have we perhaps made ourselves "too busy"? Family devotions however, says Rev. Hanko, are not a preference, but a duty.

We thank Rev. Hanko, and the others, for contributions which, we are sure, add both interest and variety to the *SB*.

D.D.

THE STANDARD BEARER

ISSN 0362-4692

Semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August.
Published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc.,
4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418. Second Class
Postage Paid at Grandville, Michigan.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the Standard Bearer,
P.O. Box 603, Grandville, MI 49418-0603.

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Editor: Prof. David J. Engelsma
Secretary: Prof. Robert D. Decker
Managing Editor: Mr. Don Doezema

DEPARTMENT EDITORS

Rev. Ronald Cammenga, Prof. Robert Decker, Rev. Arie
den Hartog, Rev. Barry Gritters, Mr. Fred Hanko, Prof. Herman
Hanko, Rev. John Heys, Rev. Steven Key, Rev. Kenneth
Koole, Rev. Jason Kortering, Rev. Dale Kuiper, Mr. James
Lanting, Rev. George Lubbers, Mrs. MaryBeth Lubbers, Rev.
James Slopeema, Rev. Charles Terpstra, Rev. Gise VanBaren,
Rev. Ronald VanOverloop, Mr. Benjamin Wigger, Rev. Bernard
Woudenberg.

EDITORIAL OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
4949 Ivanrest
Grandville, MI 49418
BUSINESS OFFICE
The Standard Bearer
Don Doezema
P.O. Box 603
Grandville, MI
49418-0603

PH: (616) 538-1778
(616) 531-1490
FAX: (616) 531-3033

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger
6597 40th Ave.
Hudsonville, MI 49426
NEW ZEALAND OFFICE
The Standard Bearer
c/o Protestant Reformed
Church
B. VanHerk
66 Fraser St.
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

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 Reader Asks 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 fifteenth of the month. All
communications relative to the contents should be sent to the
editorial office.

REPRINT POLICY

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting of articles in our
magazine by other publications, provided: a) that such reprinted
articles are reproduced in full; b) that proper acknowledgment
is made; c) that a copy of the periodical in which such reprint
appears is sent to our editorial office.

SUBSCRIPTION POLICY

Subscription price: \$12.00 per year in the U.S., \$15.00
elsewhere. Unless a definite request for discontinuance is
received, it is assumed that the subscriber wishes the
subscription to continue, 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
interrupted delivery. Include your Zip or Postal Code.

ADVERTISING POLICY

The *Standard Bearer* does not accept commercial advertising
of any kind. Announcements of church and school events,
anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be
placed for a \$3.00 fee. These should be sent to the Business
Office and should be accompanied by the \$3.00 fee. Deadline
for announcements is at least one month prior to publication
date.

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 year.

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

Patient in Adversity

Ecclesiastes 7:8-14

Solomon exhibits in this passage, as always, a keen insight into human nature. He knows the pride that resides in our flesh. He knows that there is nothing that hurts our pride more than when we are shown our weakness and helplessness. And he knows that there is no greater way our weakness is revealed than through adversity or calamity in life. This is something no man can avoid. Neither can he overcome it in his own strength. How often this results in frustration and rebellion against God, even in the life of one of His children!

To set us on a straight course when dealing with adversity, Solomon instructs us in verse 13, "Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which He hath made crooked?" This is where it all begins, is it not? Everything that takes place in our lives is a work of God's hand and has been ordered for us before the world began. Already in His counsel, from eternity, God has determined every little detail in the unfolding of history. There our lives in all their perfect plan have been ordered by God. Nothing happens to us outside of that which God has decreed from eternity. And it is according to that counsel of His will that God also works all things in our lives.

Rev. Bruinsma is pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan.

By His sovereign power God directs all the affairs of this world. As almighty God of heaven and earth, who upholds and controls all things, He makes sure that every detail of His counsel comes to pass. Providentially God controls the details of our lives. Not one thing takes place in our lives that He does not direct — and that *exactly* as He has planned it from eternity.

This includes, first of all, the good times in life, or the "day of prosperity," as Solomon calls those days in verse 14. God gives to us our labor, wealth, strength, and earthly joy. And He gives us as well those days or times of our lives when we truly enjoy all these gifts. These are times when all seems to be running smoothly, without any snags — or at least without any major ones. Solomon speaks of these ways as "straight" ways — ways when our pathway in life runs straight and smooth with no sudden turns for the worse. There are no major problems in our personal lives, in the lives of those who are close to us, or in the

*... under God's sovereign control
are sickness and death,
poverty and desolation,
and even sin.*

churches in which we are members. We experience the comforts of life, we are not struggling financially, we are not laid low by any serious sickness in our lives or the lives of our loved ones, we can go out and enjoy ourselves, and even spiritually we seem to be on the mountain top in our

struggle against sin. These are good times in life, prosperous times, times which make our hearts joyful and happy. *And God gives us these times!*

But God also sends us what we would consider evil times or the bad times. We must not forget that under God's sovereign control are sickness and death, poverty and desolation, and even sin. And God Himself determines and sends those times or days in our lives when we experience these "evils." This Solomon refers to in verse 14 as the "day of adversity." During these times our pathway is crooked and rocky. There are trails and crosses we are given to bear. We experience sickness and suffering, pain and sorrow. And these can last for long, long periods of time in our lives.

There are other times of difficulty which can arise due directly to sin. There are times when we as God's children, or perhaps our loved ones, fall into the deep way of sin. These times disrupt our whole lives, the lives of our families, and the life of the church. They are crooked ways down which we are led — long, hard, twisting ways of strife and struggle that leave one hurting and weary. These ways are good only when they have ended. When we walk this way we say with Solomon in verse 8, "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof!" We are glad to see it over and ended!

But if we are going to learn to deal with such adversity in life in a positive, spiritual way it is necessary that we understand God's hand in it all. Adversity is not the work of some cold, cruel fate. It is not simply an accident that things occur the way

they do in our lives. Neither do we say, "Well, we cannot avoid these hard times anyway, so we might as well put our nose to the grindstone and bear it." This is not the conclusion to which Solomon leads us in this passage.

Neither ought we to think that all adversity is sent by Satan and not by God. For some reason this has definitely become a popular notion in our day. God would not do these things to us! He is a loving and a caring God and would never do anything to hurt anyone! All calamities that befall us in this life must be sent by Satan, surely not by God! Satan is the one who wants to hurt us. Satan wants to bring misery in our lives.

*Satan is not a power that
God must reckon with.*

So the reasoning goes. But anyone who believes this does not believe the Word of God we receive in this passage of Ecclesiastes. Consider the work of God: He makes crooked. He sets adversity over against prosperity. God does this! Not Satan. Is Satan a force equal to God? Is he so powerful that God cannot hinder him from doing well? And if God could hinder him but chooses not to, is not God just as guilty as Satan by allowing him to do these terrible deeds? Satan is not a power that God must reckon with. He is a power who is under the direct control of our sovereign God! And although it is true that Satan is there tempting us to sin in times of adversity, it is equally true that he tempts us in times of prosperity, too. Adversity is a work of God.

Do you believe all this? If you do, then you will be comforted by the Word of God in this passage.

This knowledge, that God sends adversity as well as prosperity, is the beginning of the wisdom we are encouraged to possess in this whole matter. Solomon writes in verses 11 and 12, "Wisdom is good with an inheritance? and by it there is profit

to them that see the sun. For wisdom is a defense, and money is a defense: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it." The wisdom of which Solomon speaks here is the spiritual wisdom given by God with salvation. It therefore belongs only to those who believe that God is the center and purpose of all things. We are told that by such wisdom there is profit "to them that see the sun." There is another phrase, used often in the book of Ecclesiastes, which sheds light on the meaning of this expression. Oftentimes Solomon refers to those who are "under the sun." By this phrase Solomon speaks of those who refuse to acknowledge God as the end and purpose of all things. They are unbelievers who refuse to fear God in their ways. If this is true, then those who see the sun are those who do acknowledge God as the beginning, the center, and the end of all things. They believe in God and fear Him. The wisdom of our text, therefore, is that which belongs only to those that fear God. This virtue is worked in their hearts by the Spirit of Christ, who is the wisdom of God. Through the cross Christ has lifted us from the darkness of unbelief and given us eyes to see the sun. That is to say, He has given us to know and understand the things of the kingdom of heaven. In that knowledge of spiritual things we are given to know that it is truly God Himself that controls all things in this world and in our lives. We are given to know freely by God's grace that God sends us adversity as well as prosperity.

Now, Solomon encourages us to take that knowledge and adapt it to our lives in such a way that when we experience adversity we can use it for our profit. That is true wisdom! We must take a hard look at the hard times in life and evaluate them in light of the fact that our God sends them. We must ask the "why" of life. Why does God send us hurtful times, painful times, times that so often bring sorrow to our hearts and tears to our eyes? Why?

When we ask that question in

wisdom (not in rebellion), then the answer we receive is: "God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him." God sets adversity and prosperity one against the other in our lives. God makes sure that all of us experience at one time or another both prosperity and adversity. He offsets the one with the other. He gives us joy and laughter, but He also gives us sorrow and crying. God tempers the one with the other. All that "to the end that man should find nothing after him." This phrase simply means that God sets the one over against the other in order that we might never determine what the future holds for us. God offsets the one with the other in order that we might be unable to discover what the morrow brings. Our life can change so suddenly from one day to the next. God teaches us by this of the transitory character of life. If we cannot be certain of what will befall us on any certain day of our lives, no doubt we will be driven to look upon God alone who is our Rock. The wise child of God who sees the sun, therefore, learns from all this to take no thought for the morrow, but to leave it in the hands of almighty God. That we must learn!

*...we need never fear
that whatever God
sends us in this life
might not be for our good.*

Listen: is not this mighty God of heaven and earth our God? Does He not love us from all eternity? Has He not shown to us His great love in the very death of His only begotten Son? Are not we saved in the blood of Jesus Christ? Are not we adopted in that blood to be God's very own children? Well, if all of this is true of us, then we need never fear that whatever God sends us in this life might not be for our good. Ought not we then, when we are troubled with a load of care, or overwhelmed with the burdens of this life, simply trust in our heavenly

Father? He will never leave us or forsake us in our times of need. And is it not true that it is exactly during those times of adversity that we learn all of this the best? When in prosperity we have a tendency to look to our own arm of flesh for strength. We are apt to forget God. But when God offsets this with adversity in life we are again drawn to Him, for when we are weak then He is strong. Ah, to be able to learn that in our lives!

To know all this and to apply it to our lives, especially when adversity strikes, is the greatest of all wisdom! That wisdom is as good as an inheritance. It is something that is sure, that cannot be taken away, and is of the greatest value to us. In fact, its value is found in this: wisdom is a defense just as money in an earthly sense is a defense. We can run under the shadow of this wisdom and hide there for shelter and protection in the hard times of life, just as many in this world hide behind money for protection. But wisdom is of greater value than all the money in the world, for its knowledge gives life — eternal life — something which money cannot do!

When we apply to our lives this knowledge that God is in control, then we will be given patience. Patience is the end of wisdom. "The

patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit," Solomon teaches us in verse 8. And in verse 9 he commands, "Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry; for anger resteth in the bosom of fools." One who is proud in spirit is one who rebels against God in adversity. He fights and struggles and is discontent in these ways. He is quick to grow angry and frustrated with life and everyone in it: it is the doctor's fault, or the family's fault, or the church's fault. He will blame the hard knocks of life on everyone else — when perhaps he ought to be blaming himself for not quietly resting in his God. How often is it not true that one who experiences hardship in life becomes bitter, angry, and resentful with everyone around him save himself. And ultimately he comes out and blames God. "What is the cause that the former days were better than these?" (v. 10). Why cannot my life be as it was before, when times were good? Why send me these adversities, since I do not deserve them any more than anyone else? This man considers not that he inquires not wisely, but all his anger rests in his own bosom, the bosom of a fool.

Better than a man who is proud and hasty in spirit is the wise man who is patient. When we rightly

consider the work of God in our lives, and when we are quick to apply this, then we are going to be patient. A patient man is one who bears hard and long under the burdens of life. He is a man who will not be quick to open his mouth and complain, but will cheerfully carry his burden to the Lord and receive grace to go on — and even be blessed by his burden. Such patience can only result in contentment. And that contentment is the greatest of all gain! Applied to this life of adversity and trouble it is perhaps the greatest of all gifts. We are told that wisdom gives life. This is true because when one is wise he is also patient. And when one is patient he will not curse God in adversity, but will confess His God and humbly bow before Him and adore Him.

The excellency of such wisdom and patience therefore is this: it tends toward eternal life! What better way to secure damnation than to curse God and die. What better way to secure salvation than to say with Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." That must be our confession in the worst of calamities. And it will be, too — but only when we realize that God controls every event in our lives! □

Editorial

The Kingdom Has Come (1)

The need of the hour — this last hour — is that the Reformed church give clear, bold, public expression to her distinctive faith concerning the last things.

There is heated controversy in evangelical, conservative circles today over eschatology. Eschatology is

the biblical doctrine of the second coming of Christ and the happenings that precede, accompany, and follow this coming. It is the fascinating answer of Jesus to the question of the disciples in Matthew 24:3, "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of

the end of the world?"

Those who profess to be Bible-believing Christians differ radically over future history as controlled by the coming of Christ. Calvinists are deeply involved in the debate.

But the controversy rages between "premillennialists" (premill)

and "postmillennialists" (postmills). The former teach the rapture of the believing church into the air at any moment. This is followed by a period of seven years in which Antichrist comes to power and persecutes the Jews. At the end of the seven years, Christ returns personally and visibly to establish an earthly kingdom of peace and prosperity in all the world for a thousand years ("millennium"). He reigns from Jerusalem in Palestine where the nation of Israel has again become the kingdom-people of God as it was under the old covenant. Only after this thousand-year reign of Christ does earthly history end and the eternal state begin.

The Calvinist participants in the current debate over eschatology are postmills. They proclaim such a victory of the gospel and law of God in the future as shall result in the Christianizing of the whole world. A majority of the world's population will be converted to Christ. At the very least, great numbers will believe in Christ. Christians will hold the reins of earthly power in all nations. The church should look forward to a long period of earthly peace and prosperity before Christ returns to perfect this temporal dominion in the eternal kingdom. Some say that this long period is literally one thousand years (a "millennium"). Others prophesy hundreds of thousands of years of Christian earthly dominion.

Virtually missing from the public debate is the classic, creedal Reformed doctrine of the last things. It is high time that the Reformed faith let its voice be heard.

This is all the more necessary in view of strange, dangerous developments that threaten to affect the life and behavior of Reformed saints. Doctrine never remains safely confined to speeches and books. It always takes form in the practice of those who embrace the doctrine. False doctrine creates foolish and evil conduct. Right doctrine, orthodoxy, forms wise, godly conduct.

Recently, a widely respected and influential Bible-teacher in the United States has prophesied the return of

Christ and the end of the world in September, 1994 (cf. the editorial, "A.D. 1993: The Lord is Coming," in the Jan. 1, 1993 *Standard Bearer*). This cannot but have effects on the lives of those who believe the prophecy. These effects will be the same as the effects of similar prophecies in the past. Men and women abandon ordinary life to wait for the great day that is so near. When the expected coming does not occur (and it will not), many become disillusioned, not only with the particular Bible-teacher, but also with the Scriptures themselves which were supposed to teach the return of Christ on the particular date. The others, ignoring the huge blunder of their master, commit themselves to him even more slavishly, so that a new cult is formed.

Other dangerous developments are the direct results of the hope that the kingdom of Christ is destined to come to earthly power in history. Calvinistic postmills are forming alliances with Arminian, charismatic, premills to bring this kingdom to pass in the United States. They are calling other Reformed Christians to join these alliances. Such alliances are fatal to the confession and practice of the Reformed faith.

There is also the strong temptation to have recourse to civil revolution and physical violence in order to bring about the earthly kingdom of Christ. The hope of an earthly kingdom is always vulnerable to this temptation. There are ominous signs that some are yielding to this temptation. Francis A. Schaeffer advocated resistance to the state as the last resort of Christians against unlawful authority in his *A Christian Manifesto*. That Schaeffer does not shrink from extending this resistance to all-out war is plain from his appeal to the American Revolution in which "civil disobedience led to open war in which men and women died" (p. 130).

Operation Rescue, the movement of evangelical opposition to the state-authorized murder of the unborn, is presently engaging in civil disobedience as a tactic to overthrow the kingdom of darkness and to es-

tablish the kingdom of light. It is calling all true Christians to join in this violence in the name of Christ the King.

It is time, therefore, for the Reformed view of the coming of the Day of Christ to be aired.

This view is "amillennialism." It holds that the millennium of Revelation 20, the one passage in Scripture that mentions a thousand-year period, is the figurative description of the New Testament era from Christ's ascension until shortly before His return. In distinction from premillennialism, which thinks that Christ will come before a literal millennium, and from postmillennialism, which thinks that Christ will come after a literal millennium, amillennialism denies that there will be any literal millennium.

On the Reformed view, the Bible teaches that the wicked world will make steady increase in its rebellion against God (Matt. 24:12; II Tim. 3). The future of the nominal, visible church in history is that there will be a great apostasy from the truth (II Thess. 2:1-3). A coming Antichrist will unite the nations in a worldwide kingdom of the devil (II Thess. 2; Rev. 13). Then will take place a severe persecution of the true church of Jesus Christ (Matt. 24:21, 22; Rev. 13). During the reign of Antichrist, Christ will come bodily and visibly "with power and great glory" to consume Antichrist with the spirit of His mouth; to raise the dead; to conduct the final judgment; and to renew the creation as the home of His eternal kingdom (Matt. 24:30, 31; II Thess. 2; I Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 20:11ff.; II Pet. 3).

Reformed amillennialism observes that for all the sound and fury of the strife between the Calvinistic postmills and the Arminian, dispensational premills, there is striking, significant agreement between these two eschatological errors.

Both agree that the believing church does not face a coming Antichrist and persecution. The premills rapture the church out of danger. The postmills put the Antichrist safely into the past. Some of them explain

"Antichrist" as the Roman empire that persecuted the early church. Others make it the Roman Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation. We could say that, whereas the premills rapture the church upwards in space, the postmills rapture Antichrist backwards in time. In either case, the future of the church is rosy. This is appealing. It is also a mistake with serious practical implications for the people of God. They are not forewarned of the fiery trial that awaits them in the crucible of the kingdom of the beast.

Both premills and postmills agree also that there will be a literal millennium — a "golden age" in this world's history for the church. This "golden age" will be the kingdom of Christ. What is especially objectionable in this agreement of both premills and postmills is the notion that the kingdom of Christ in this world is a carnal kingdom. It is a reign of Christ that dominates the nations politically, culturally, and economically. It is the exercise of Christ's power by presidents, judges, executioners, national committees for the arts, and secretaries of the treasuries. It is a citizenry

that consists of all mankind, for every man will both be subject to the rule of Christ and be beneficiary of it during the millennium. It is a peace and a prosperity that are purely earthly, as earthly as international freedom from war, booming national economies, and deliverance from crime and disease.

The glorious carnal kingdom of Jesus Christ!

This carnal kingdom of Christ is still future. It has still to come.

In the thinking of both the premills and the postmills, the kingdom of Christ has not yet come. The attempt of Jesus to establish the kingdom at His first coming was a failure. The premills cheerfully acknowledge this failure. Israel's rejection of the offered kingdom by their Messiah effectively postponed the kingdom to the millennium.

The postmills pay lip-service to Christ's realization of His kingdom already by the preaching of the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. But their hearts are not in it. Especially for the "reconstructionist" postmills, prominent in the current eschatological controversy, the estab-

lishment of the kingdom that really counts is the carnal kingdom of the millennium. This kingdom represents victory. The spiritual kingdom of the confessing church with which Reformed amillennialism is content is nothing but defeat.

Some kingdom! Another carnal kingdom like the kingdoms of this world.

Some King! A failure, lo these 2000 years.

Some coming of the kingdom! After 2000 years of preaching and working in the Name of the crucified and risen Christ, the kingdom still is mainly, or even exclusively, in the future of New Testament history.

Reformed amillennialism is not impressed.

We have news for the premills and postmills, as we do for every man. It is good news. The kingdom has come. The kingdom is here and now. It is here and now as fully, gloriously, and victoriously as it ever will or can be, this side of Christ's coming and eternity.

Do the premills and the postmills not see it? □

— DJE

Letters

■ Could Christ Come in 1994?

I was embarrassed and upset by the way you ended your editorial, A.D. 1993: The Lord is Coming," in the latest *Standard Bearer* (Jan. 1, 1993).

In the main part of the article you did an excellent job of refuting Mr. Camping's false prophecy concerning the return of Christ. But your remarks at the end struck me as being almost as wrong as Mr. Camping's errors.

If no man knows the day and the hour of Christ's return, as Scripture teaches, it is as wrong for you to "declare with absolute certainty" that Christ won't return in 1994, as it is for Mr. Camping to predict that the end

will occur in 1994.

The fact that a man named Harold Camping chose to prophesy falsely of Christ's return does not mean that the Lord might not return at exactly the time Mr. Camping says. The Lord will yet appear at His appointed time, regardless of men's speculation. If Mr. Camping then had the audacity to say to the Lord, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?" I would expect he would hear the Lord's answer, "... I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:22, 24). As you pointed out, Mr. Camping's prophesying in the Lord's name is not according to the truth of God's holy Word.

But for a Protestant Reformed seminary professor to make an equally

bold statement, "In the name of Jesus Christ, I declare with absolute certainty that Jesus will not come and the world will not end in 1994," embarrasses me. No man, you or Mr. Camping, should dare to speak so authoritatively concerning the Lord's return.

Furthermore, it is dishonoring to the glory of God to say that a possible return of Christ in 1994 would sanction Mr. Camping's false exegesis and contradict Jesus' words in Mark 13. God's ways are so far beyond our ways that such talk borders on the blasphemous. God considers no man in carrying out His eternal counsel, and is never limited by what weak and sinful men may or may not do.

I agree with you that it seems unlikely that all the events that must

occur before the coming of Christ would take place before September, 1994. But I dare not say that they couldn't take place in that space of time.

With all due regard for your office and position of leadership among us, I humbly suggest that you reconsider your closing remarks in "A.D. 1993: The Lord is Coming."

John Hilton
Edgerton, MN

Response:

My embarrassing and well-nigh blasphemous prophecy may nevertheless stand as true. It is the Word of God in II Thessalonians 2:3: "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition."

—Ed.

I am writing to you with regard to your editorial in the January 1, 1993 *Standard Bearer* entitled, "A.D. 1993: The Lord is Coming."

I have had a number of discussions on this article with others. What we were discussing was the statement you made:

In the name of Jesus Christ I declare with absolute certainty that Jesus Christ will not come and the world will not end in 1994.

Some felt that by your saying this you were jumping into the same boat with Mr. Camping in that, just as Mr. Camping predicted when the end would be, you predicted when the end would not be, namely in 1994.

Your consideration and reply would be much appreciated.

Brett VanKoeveering
Hudsonville, MI

Response:

As I indicate in my response to the letter that appears above, I am not in the boat with Mr. Harold Camping. There is fundamental difference between predicting a date for Christ's return and prophesying that Christ's

return will not be on that date. Predicting a date for the return of Christ lacks all biblical warrant. Indeed, it is contrary to the Word of God to make such a prediction (cf. Mark 13:32, 33). Denying that date to be the time of Christ's return is based on the Word of God, if the date is 1994. For II Thessalonians 2:2, 3 teaches that Antichrist must come before the day of Christ. Everything that the Bible teaches about Antichrist cannot happen in the short time between January 1, 1993 and September, 1994. Besides, if Christ did come in September, 1994, He would be approving Mr. Camping's prediction, contrary to Christ's own command.

Some (the premillennialists) teach that Christ can come "at any moment." This teaching is erroneous. We Reformed teach that Christ cannot come "at any moment" — not tonight; not next week; not next year. This teaching is sound. Why? Because, among other things, the sign of Antichrist has not yet been fulfilled.

So, Mr. Camping is in his boat all by himself.

I do very much appreciate your interest, your discussions, and your question.

—Ed.

■ No "Must" in the Covenant of Grace

I have been receiving the *Standard Bearer* for the past year. You uphold faithfully God's everlasting covenant of grace — the sure mercies of David. Yet, you equally uphold the New Testament letter of the Law. The letter kills but the spirit gives life. There are probably more commandments in the New Testament of Jesus, Paul, John, Peter, James, and Jude than in the Old Testament, and we as Christians have been called to obedience. But to preach and uphold this obedience to New Testament "Law" as things we *must* do is a denial of the covenant of grace. We are called to the obedience of faith, not the obedience of the Law. This faith works by

love which brings us to charity which is the end of the commandment.

Peter Cawthorn
Tasmania, Australia

Response:

The "must" of the Law of God for the saints in no wise contradicts the sure mercies of David in the gospel. There are demands in the covenant of grace for the covenant people. God *demands* that believers and their children love Him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength and love their neighbor as themselves, according to the "Ten Words" of Exodus 20. It is a "must" for the saints that we do whatever is exhorted as part of the Christian life in the New Testament by Jesus and the apostles.

The explanation is not that this obedience is part of our righteousness with God. Neither is this obedience a condition upon which our salvation depends. Nor do we earn salvation by it. But the "must" is, first of all, the absolute necessity that God be honored by the holy lives of those who bear His Name in the world. As regards the Christians, the Law, which always comes as a "must," ("Thou shalt!"), is the demand and guide of their thankfulness to God for gracious redemption.

This "must" itself is engraved by the Spirit of sanctification upon the heart of the elect so that he is determined to keep the Law, and begins to do so, although never perfectly in this life. He loves the "must" of the Law, just as a woman who loves her husband for this reason also loves the demand to be faithful to him and to be a help to him.

For the believer's imperfection and outright disobedience, there is free forgiveness, when he repents.

It is really high praise when you write that in one year you have noticed that the writers in the *SB* uphold both the covenant of grace and the Law. This is the confessional Reformed faith. This is genuine Christianity.

—Ed.

■ Saturday Worship Services

Recently Lake Pointe Baptist Church, in suburban Dallas, Texas, began offering an alternative worship format that is now being considered by as many as 10,000 churches across North America. The Southern Baptist congregation of 2,200 added a Saturday night worship service to its weekly schedule, challenging the centuries-old norm of Sunday morning as the only viable time for corporate worship. Why? "There is a population of unchurched people who cannot be reached by a Sunday-morning service," explains Mark Yoakum, Lake Pointe minister of education. "And secondly, we don't have educational or parking space available on Sunday mornings to accommodate the kind of growth we've experienced in recent years."

It is estimated that some 3,000 to 4,000 churches in the United States are already offering alternative-day worship services in addition to their Sunday services. While this figure represents only one percent of the nation's churches, it includes ten percent of America's 100 largest churches. Among these is the highly visible and increasingly influential Willow Creek Community Church in suburban Chicago. This church, pastored by Bill Hybels, features two Saturday night and two Sunday morning services.

Why are these churches doing this? Several answers are offered. Some are saying that one operative factor involves the cultural acceptance of alternative-day worship engendered by the Roman Catholic Church. In 1970 the Vatican gave approval for Saturday masses. Now, twenty years later, a number of dioceses report that attendance is greater for Saturday's masses than for Sunday's. Many Prot-

estant churches with Saturday-night services are located in communities with large Catholic presences.

Another factor is rising building costs. It is extremely costly for growing congregations to expand or relocate their facilities.

Some churches are going to alternative-day services so that they can experiment with more contemporary music and other innovations. This trend is especially widespread among many older churches seeking to reach a younger constituency or the unchurched. For example, five years ago Calvary Church (Undenominational) in Grand Rapids began a Saturday-night service using a contemporary band, drama, testimonies, the pastor dressed in blue jeans, and a question and answer segment. The net result: two very traditional services on Sunday morning which attract 3,500 people, and one Saturday-night service that attracts an additional 600 people.

Carl F. George, director of the Charles E. Fuller Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth, calls alternative-day services "the trend of the future." We are also being told that few pastors and theologians object to alternative-day services on theological grounds. Several evangelical leaders, however, question whether the movement is more trendy than Bible based. "Is worship like snacking, which we do only at our own convenience, such as when it doesn't interfere with our favorite television show?" asks David Barrett, editor of *World Christian Encyclopedia*. "There is a point when Christianity becomes so customized and so time-serving that one has to doubt whether we are understanding what corporate worship is really all about."

What must we think of all this? There are theological reasons why we must never offer "alternative-day services." Those reasons are rooted in the Bible's teaching concerning the Sabbath Day and its observance by

the people of God. Reformed believers confess with the *Heidelberg Catechism* that God requires in the fourth commandment: "First, that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained; and that I, especially on the sabbath, that is, on the day of rest, diligently frequent the church of God, to hear his word, to use the sacraments, publicly to call upon the Lord, and contribute to the relief of the poor, as becomes a christian. Secondly, that all the days of my life I cease from my evil works, and yield myself to the Lord, to work by his Holy Spirit in me: and thus begin in this life the eternal sabbath" (Lord's Day 38).

There is certainly nothing wrong with having worship services during the week. That's obvious from the *Catechism's* answer when it says "... that I, especially on the sabbath, that is, on the day of rest, diligently frequent the church of God...." We have services on Thanksgiving, Christmas, Old Year's, New Year's, Good Friday, Prayer Day, and Ascension Day. Some Reformed churches have mid-week services as well. Worship services were conducted daily in Calvin's Geneva. This is perfectly proper. In fact, we probably should have more weekday services.

The problem with the movement we are witnessing in our day is that these are *alternative-day* services. These are worship services which are designed to attract the unchurched and alleviate overcrowding on Sundays. The result will be that thousands are taught to ignore the proper observance of the Lord's Day. An integral part of the gospel which must be preached to the unchurched is "Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy."

What we are seeing is indeed a trend, a trend away from the biblical teaching concerning the sabbath and its observance. This is a way for people to salve their consciences concerning the Lord's Day by going to

Prof. Decker is professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

church on Saturday night. If I go to church on Saturday night, I can sleep in on Sunday and use the rest of the day for whatever I please. This is but another evidence of compromise with the world of unbelief on the part of some of the American churches.

Christianity Today

■ The President and the Homosexual Community

The fact that Scripture demands that Christians obey those in authority, does not mean that Christians are to approve of or even ignore wrong doing on the part of those in authority. President-elect Clinton and his wife (this article was written on January 6) are expected to visit an inaugural-eve reception honoring gay activist David Mixner, one of the first couple's closest advisers and friends, according to organizers of the event. Mixner is credited with raising \$3.4 million from homosexuals for the Clinton campaign, and for winning campaign recognition of gay and lesbian causes. Organizers say there will be at least seven homosexual-sponsored events, including the reception, dinners, and an inaugural ball for 1,500 people at the National Press Club. The Lesbian and Gay Band of America will perform in the January 20 inaugural parade, and a homosexual cheering squad will be prominently placed along the Pennsylvania Avenue parade route.

If all this happens, and we have

no reason to believe it won't, Christians ought to write to Mr. Clinton, pointing him to the biblical truth concerning the terrible sin of homosexuality and urging him to repent and disassociate himself from the gay community.

National & International Religion Report

■ GKN Votes to Remain in REC

Adopting the advice of its Deputies for Ecumenical Affairs, the synod of the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands) decided to stay in the Reformed Ecumenical Council. The synod, however, did place a condition on continued REC membership. If the REC adopts a proposal to create a category of suspended membership, the GKN will immediately withdraw. Less than 10% of the synodical delegates were opposed to remaining in the REC.

The Deputies for Ecumenical Affairs judged that the move towards suspension was aimed at the GKN. The proposal to include suspension in the REC constitution came during debate about GKN membership at the REC Assembly in Athens in 1992. This debate caused some members of the GKN to consider withdrawing from the REC.

As reported earlier in this column, some of the member churches have withdrawn from the REC be-

cause of the Council's refusal to oust the GKN. Objections have been raised against the liberalism of the GKN, her membership in the World Council of Churches, and her tolerance of homosexuals in her pulpits.

The GKN is one of the founding and charter members of the REC, which began in 1948 as the Reformed Ecumenical Synod.

REC News Exchange

■ Persecution in Pakistan

On the evidence of one witness a judge in Pakistan sentenced Gul Masih, a Christian, to hang for blasphemy. During the course of an argument with a neighbor who claimed that Mary, Jesus mother, must have been a woman of ill repute, Masih replied that Mohammed had had eleven wives, one of them a minor. This remark is judged to be blasphemy.

The judge, in sentencing Masih, said the neighbor's testimony rang true and needed no corroboration. "Sajjad Hussain is a young man of 21 years age, student of fourth year with a beard and outlook of being a true Muslim, and I have no reason to disbelieve him," the judge wrote.

This decision, along with the government's recent ruling that all citizens of Pakistan must state their religious affiliation on an identity card are causing a great deal of alarm among the Christian minority in Pakistan. □ *REC News Exchange*

A Cloud Of Witnesses

Prof. Herman Hanko

Peter Martyr Vermigli: Italian Reformer

Introduction

Some of the men whom God used to bring reformation to the church in the 16th century are widely known, and even our children are acquainted with them and the work they did. Other Reformers are not so

well known. They stand, as it were, in the shadow of Luther, Calvin, Knox, and Zwingli. If one knows them at all, they are vague figures in the darker corners of the stage of church history when the great drama of the Reformation was taking place. Because of

Prof. Hanko is professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

this, we might conclude that they are of little or no importance to an understanding of the Reformation. Such a conclusion would be a sad mistake.

It is my purpose in this article to bring one such Reformer out of the shadows to stand for a few moments in the spotlight so that we can see him clearly and the great work he did on behalf of the cause of God in these remarkable times. His name is Peter Martyr Vermigli.

Vermigli's Early Life

Vermigli's background has two very strange aspects to it, both of which point to the inscrutable ways of God. They have to do with the fact that, although the Reformation swept through nearly the whole of Europe, from the Balkans to the Atlantic, two countries were left almost untouched: Italy and Spain. Both countries played a role in Vermigli's early life.

Italy was the birthplace of Vermigli. It was, of course, the country in which was found Rome, the seat of the papacy. Yet it would not be correct to say that Italy was the most Roman Catholic of all Europe's countries. It was almost totally unaffected by the Reformation because it was almost totally worldly. It was the country of the Renaissance at its worst. It was wholly apostate. It was corrupt and depraved. It cared not for God or man, for church or state. It was Jerusalem become Sodom. An Italian by birth, Vermigli was a "brand plucked out of the burning."¹

Vermigli was born in the city of Florence on September 8, 1499.² He was born of parents who were part of the royalty of the city, moderately wealthy, capable of enjoying the pleasures of what was the largest and most influential city in all Italy. The family name was Vermigli, but Peter was called "Martyr" after a martyr by the name of Peter, whose shrine was near the family home.

Many more children were born into the family, but they all died in infancy except one sister. This was probably why Vermigli's father disowned him when he joined a convent. It is understandable that the father

wanted someone to carry on the family name, something impossible in a convent.

Peter was a gifted student and dedicated man. His progress in his education and in the hierarchy of Italian monastic life was swift and sure. He began his monastic career at the age of 16 as a canon regular of the Order of St. Augustine, the strictest monastic order in Italy; and he spent the early years of his monastic life in the convent of Fiesole near Florence. In 1519 Vermigli transferred to the University of Padua. He was soon ordained a preacher and proved to be powerful and effective. He became abbot of Spoleto; later, principal of the college of St. Peter ad Aram in Naples.

Vermigli's Conversion

It is not possible to pinpoint that moment in time when God worked His great work of grace in Vermigli's heart. Vermigli himself did not speak of it in all his writings — and his writings were many. We do know certain influences under which Vermigli came, and which God undoubtedly used in forming him as a servant of Christ.

I spoke above of two strange events in Vermigli's life. The second was that one of the greatest influences upon Vermigli was that of Juan de Valdéz. If Italy was almost untouched by the Reformation because of its awful worldliness, Spain was untouched by the Reformation because of its total loyalty to Rome and the papacy. From Spain came the terrible inquisition, which was responsible for thousands upon thousands of deaths of God's beloved people. Spain was the one country in Europe which had as its unofficial motto: "My church, right or wrong." The pope's most loyal supporters were the Spanish. From here God brought a man to Italy, Juan de Valdéz, not a Protestant really, but one who almost believed the truth of justification by faith, who was serenely mystical in his life, and who taught and preached the literal meaning of Scripture. All three of these traits seem to have been com-

bined in their influences on Vermigli.

The latter especially, so obvious to us, was a major breakthrough for Vermigli, for it led him to a more careful study of Scripture, to a form of preaching and teaching which was expository of Scripture in character, and, finally, to trouble with Roman Catholic authorities, when his obedience to Scripture led him to refute certain doctrines held by the church.³ A close reading of the writings of Luther, Zwingli, and Martin Bucer convinced him of the truths of the Reformation. As soon as Vermigli began publicly to propagate his views, his life was in danger. Even though every heresy under heaven was rampant in Italy, the papacy would not tolerate any teachings of the Reformation.

Vermigli's Reformatory Work

Though by no means a coward, Vermigli fled Italy to seek refuge in Switzerland and Germany. In 1542 he found asylum in Strasburg, the city where Calvin had spent several happy years during his banishment from Geneva. Because of his vast learning, he was soon appointed to the theological chair in Strasburg and became the ministerial colleague of Martin

¹This must not be construed as meaning that God saved only Peter Martyr Vermigli from the apostates of Italy. Other men and women, though few, were saved, some through Vermigli's influence. Notable among these were Jerome Zanchius, the author of a still popular book entitled *Predestination*, and Ochino, an influential Reformer, who later was charged with Arian views. Peter Martyr was also to marry a God-fearing woman from Italy.

²Many biographical details of Vermigli are found in a biography of the Reformer written by Josiah Simler, one of Vermigli's contemporaries. The biography can be found in *Peter Martyr*, ed. by J. C. McLelland & G. E. Duffield (The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1989).

³The actual circumstances were interesting. He was lecturing on I Corinthians 3:12-15. He denied that this passage taught the doctrine of purgatory, a position long held by the Romish Church.

Bucer, the chief Reformer of the city. In 1546 he married a converted nun, Catherine Wampmartin by name. These years were happy and productive and gave Vermigli opportunity to develop in reformation thought.

In 1547 he received and accepted an invitation from Cranmer to come to England and work there. Henry VIII had died and his son Edward VI was on the throne, though a young boy. Edward was favorable to reform, and Vermigli, along with the English Reformers, found a congenial home as professor of divinity in Oxford University.

But even here Roman Catholic opposition remained. Richard Smith, a fierce supporter of the papacy, was not reluctant to stir up mobs against Vermigli which interrupted his classroom work. Smith challenged Vermigli to public debate, but fled in a funk to Scotland before the debate could be held. Edward died after a few years, and Bloody Mary, a daughter of Henry VIII and an ardent Catholic, came to the throne. Under her reign Protestantism was harassed, Reformers were burned at the stake, and many were forced to flee to the continent. Among those who fled was Vermigli himself, aided in his flight by a godly sea captain who secretly brought him across the Straits of Dover and landed him in Antwerp.

One incident of interest occurred in England: his wife of eight years died without leaving him any children. She was a virtuous woman, grave and pious, who spent her time caring for the needs of the poor. Though she was buried in England, when Roman Catholicism once more gained the ascendancy in England, Cardinal Pole ordered her body dug up and thrown on a manure pile to rot. It was an act of cruel spite, indicative of the irrational hatred of Rome towards anything that belonged to reform. She was, however, held in such high esteem that when Mary died and Queen Elizabeth came to the throne, her body was dug out from the pile of manure and given an honorable burial in a cathedral.

Vermigli, in the meantime, re-

sumed his professorial labors in Strasburg, but soon (1556) moved to Zurich in Switzerland to occupy the chair of theology in the university in that city. The call which had come from the Senate in Zurich was urgent and pressing and he could not refuse.

Here in Zurich Vermigli married again. His second wife was an Italian as he was, Catherine Merenda by name. With her he had three children: two died in infancy, and his wife was pregnant with his third child when he himself died.

An outstanding event of these years was his presence at the Colloquy of Poissy in France. The Colloquy was called because of the great struggle which was going on between Catholics and Protestants in France, in the hopes of reaching some accommodation. Vermigli was invited to attend by outstanding leaders in France: Margaret, the queen of France; the king of Navarre; the prince of Condé; and other French Protestant leaders. It is a measure of the respect with which he was held throughout Europe that he was, apart from Theodore Beza, the successor of Calvin in Geneva, the only theologian outside France invited to attend.

The Colloquy accomplished nothing. After many days of fruitless debate, the Roman Catholic prelates ruined the conference by their arrogance, intransigence, and determination to rid France of Protestant heretics. But Vermigli displayed all those spiritual gifts which made him respected and loved throughout Europe: his enormous learning, his wisdom and moderation, and his irenic spirit.

Vermigli's Death

Vermigli died in Zurich on November 12, 1562, at 63 years of age worn and old with the cares and work of a busy and eventful life. He was described by his contemporaries as

a man of an able, healthy, big-boned, and well-limbed body, and of a countenance which expressed an inwardly grave and settled turn of mind. His parts and learning were very un-

common; as was also his skill in disputation, which made him as much admired by the Protestants as hated by the Papists. He was very sincere and indefatigable in promoting a reformation in the Church, yet his zeal was never known to get the better of his judgment. He was always moderate and prudent in his outward behavior, nor even in the conflict of a dispute did he suffer himself to be transported into intemperate warmth or allow unguarded expressions ever to escape him.

Friend and foe alike acknowledged that he was one of the most learned writers of the Reformed churches.

His greatest contribution was his development of the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. It is a never-ending source of amazement to me that the Swiss Reformers could be so completely biblical in this doctrine. One would expect that they would react against the horrors of Rome's transubstantiation (along with Luther's consubstantiation) and adopt some kind of Zwinglian view which reduced the sacrament to a mere memorial service. They did not. Much of the credit for this goes to Vermigli's work. Some are even of the opinion that John Calvin was, at least in part, indebted to Vermigli for his views on the Lord's Supper. Whether this is true or not, Calvin himself expressed complete satisfaction with the work of Vermigli in this important field of Reformation thought. The fact remains that the pure doctrine of the Lord's Supper as taught by the Reformers can be explained only in terms of the work of the Holy Spirit of Christ who leads the church into all truth. Vermigli was one of those so blessed with the Spirit.

It is partly Vermigli's heritage which we have in those stirring words in our Belgic Confession:

In the meantime we err not, when we say, that what is eaten and drunk by us is the proper and natural body, and the proper blood of Christ. But the manner of our partaking of the same, is not by the mouth, but by the spirit through faith (Article 35). □

New Facilities for Faith Church

Rev. Kenneth Koole



Renovated sanctuary

February, 1993 is a significant month for our Faith Congregation. It marks 20 years of existence. Faith was organized on February 22, 1973, Prof. Hanko preaching the sermon "The Church — the Pillar of Truth," based on I Timothy 3:15b. Nineteen families organized as charter members.

Also, fifteen years ago (1978) February was the month that Faith dedicated its then newly built sanctuary to worshipping God in a Reformed and biblical manner. Worthy of note is that, of the three members of that original building committee, two (Ernie Miedema and Dale Mensch) have since been taken to glory, and the third, Dave Ondersma, served on the committee for the new addition as well. James Rau served as general contractor.

Since its organization in 1973 Faith, by God's good providence, has

grown from nineteen families to its present count of ninety-two families (420) souls. This growth necessitated the present building expansion. The sanctuary originally was built with this expansion in mind. Pews were installed with a seating capacity of 'only' 380, and the back of the sanctuary was filled with temporary meeting rooms for catechism, the council, and nursery. It was more than adequate but had its inconveniences due to the slope of the floor (as those who sat on the 'down-side' of the tables

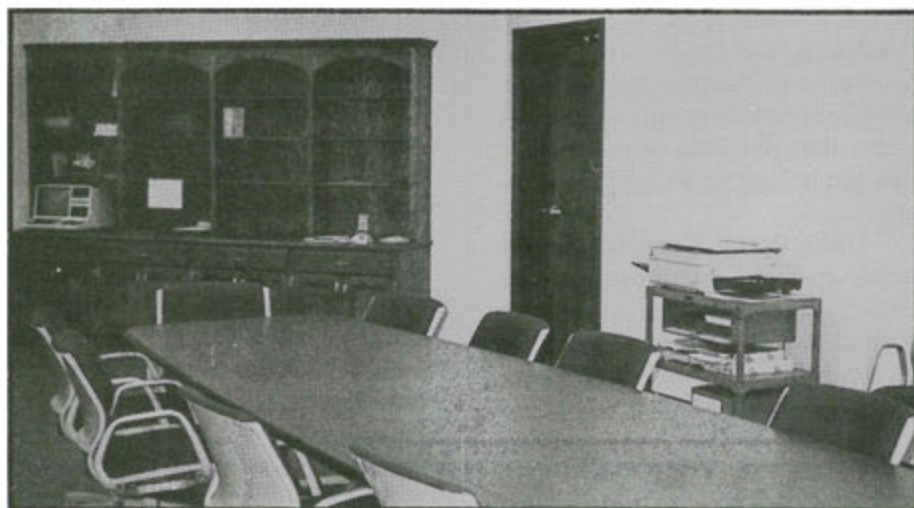
during societies know). Of late, Faith's numbers became too many to be held comfortably either by the sanctuary or by the meeting rooms.

The present addition consists of an expanded narthex and two wings coming off the narthex to the west. The sizable 'wings' have more than doubled the size of the structure.

The northwest wing consists of a large fellowship hall with a partially furnished kitchen and a room which is designed to be a spacious pastor's study, but serves well presently as a storage room.

The southwest wing houses a large consistory room, a double nursery, and two large meeting rooms which can be divided into five smaller rooms each with its own door. These are a great improvement over the former rooms, which were becoming extremely cramped.

Once the temporary meeting rooms were removed, the sanctuary could be renovated. Those familiar with Faith's 'old' sanctuary should realize that the pictures (courtesy of Mrs. Dorothy Noorman) show rather extensive renovation. Fifteen years of use made new carpeting necessary (a



Consistory room

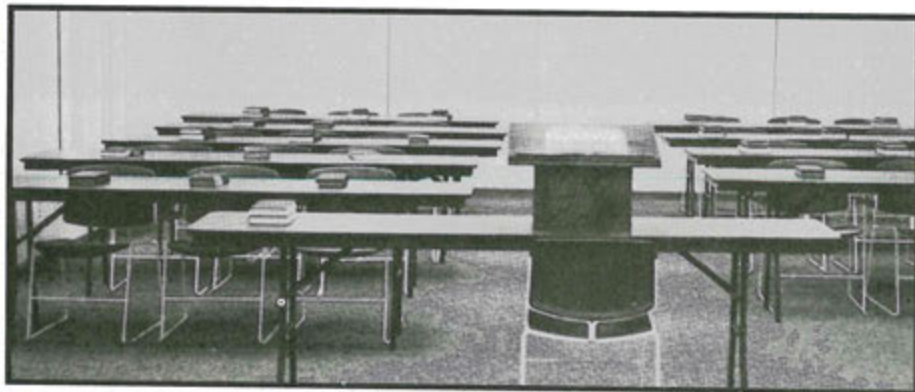
Rev. Koole is pastor of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan.

light-green fleck) as well as the re-upholstering of the pews (in dark green). Additional pews were added to fill the sanctuary. The seating capacity is now 575. As well, a sandstone wall was erected behind the pulpit replacing the temporary wooden partition.

And last, but not least, by means of a generous donation the organ was upgraded with computer stops; larger speakers in the front, placed on shelves behind the stretched cloth; and antiphonal speakers high in the back of the sanctuary, to balance the sound in the enlarged auditorium.

The renovation was completed with a flurry of activity just in time for the area Reformation Day lecture held at Faith Church this past October 25. The structure has been in full use since November and is much appreciated.

The Thanksgiving Day service focused on the goodness of Jehovah God who made the building addition necessary (through growth of families and our young people staying by



Meeting room

means of their confession of the Reformed faith) and possible (through the material means provided). A most appropriate word was found in II Chronicles 29:28-31 when Hezekiah rededicated the people to the sanctified use of the re-opened temple, and then called the people "to sing unto the LORD with words of David, and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped." So we put the 'new' organ and sanctuary to use

by singing the same 'old' psalms of David and Asaph as Hezekiah and the saints did so long ago. Some things should never change because they are always 'new.'

With its new facilities Faith was able, for the first time, to host Classis East, in January of this new year.

May the God of the everlasting covenant keep us faithful, and may praising Him by Psalms of thanksgiving never cease to fill the sanctuary.

□

Self-Esteem in Humility

Dale Bekkering

I was pleased to see Pastor Key's article on self-esteem in the December 1, 1992 issue of the *Standard Bearer*. Self-esteem is an extremely dangerous and unbiblical idea, and it is very prominent in our culture. This buzzword is heard in many areas of life, and is the focus of psychologists, counselors, teachers, and even ministers. Pastor Key succinctly points out the evil of this heresy, and he demonstrates that the idea of self-esteem does not belong in Reformed teachings.

Using Pastor Key's article as a backdrop, I will follow up on this subject. I am finishing my course work toward a Master's degree in biblical counseling, and in my experi-

ence and schooling this idea of self-esteem has come up again and again. This is a buzzword many people seize upon without looking at its implications. Pastor Key made the problem of self-esteem quite clear, so I will not need to deal with that here.

The fact that this heresy has permeated some Reformed churches necessitates the teaching of a biblical view. Our culture is telling us to look to ourselves and others; but we need to see ourselves in the light of God's Word. After reading the article by Pastor Key, many Christians might feel they still have a bad "self-esteem." They might believe self-esteem is wrong, but they still feel there is a problem with their "self-esteem." I would therefore like to comment on the process involved in a Christian's acquiring a true biblical self-image.

Using the jargon of psychology I make the following assertion: People

have a "bad self-image" because they have an extremely high view of their own self-worth. This statement seems contradictory, but it is true. I will spell this out in the rest of this article.

The Christian church teaches that man is a sinner, and everything he does is marred by sin. This is clearly not the teaching of the humanistic world. The humanistic approach is to concentrate on ourselves when we feel bad, and then to focus on improving our image. Accordingly, we need not change ourselves for the better, we need only to change our ideas. The self-esteem movement is very strong in the public school system. The teachers' manual of one public school states: "In meditation we learn to contact our inner wisdom by quieting our bodies; our feelings; and our thoughts. It is only when we quiet these activities of our personality that go on most of the time and get

Mr. Bekkering is a student at Biblical Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania.

them out of the way, that our Real Self can surface. Then we become very clear, and in that clarity the needed answers come." This notion is already strong, and it will probably increase in strength as time progresses.

Reformed Christians understand that man is a sinner; this has been our instruction all our Christian lives. This idea of man's sinfulness is the first point in the TULIP doctrine. But do we *really* see that everything we do is marred by sin? Having the knowledge of total depravity in our minds does not necessarily mean we feel it in our hearts. We need to understand this that, even when we purposefully set aside our desires and focus on helping another in love, we still sin.

It is difficult to do, but we need to see each of our sins as the sin which nailed Jesus to the cross. We need to stop comparing ourselves to others, and compare ourselves to Jesus. Only then can we see what sinners we truly are! Look at the sins of hatred, pride, and anger, in the light of the sinless Son of God. Jesus, who was perfect, died for our sins, and we need only to look to Him.

We will now examine what the Word of God declares concerning this issue. The Bible does not tell us to look to others for approval. Rather, it commands us to do the opposite. Colossians 3:1, 2: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." Philippians 2:3, 4: "Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." There are two possible outcomes when we disobey Scripture by focusing on approval from others. We might, in depending on such approval, see ourselves as respectable, decent persons. We will then commend ourselves in that we have not committed any exceptionally horrible sins, that we are active

members of our church, and that we do some things much better than others. This is pride. The other possibility is that we see other people as more successful, better looking, better husbands, and better students ("low self-esteem"). We then reflect upon how we do not measure up to others, and we turn to drinking, eating, or working ourselves into a state of depression. When we look to others for approval, the result is sin.

For instance, a popular athlete, who has good looks, good grades, and a beautiful girlfriend, might conclude that he is someone to be respected. He demeans others, whom he perceives as lesser individuals. He perceives himself as the person others want to be like. He has compared himself to others, and found himself to be excelling. These students, who examine others and feel above them in some way, are found in every school.

*Just as the popular athlete
is prideful,
so the depressed loner
is prideful.*

In a second case the student is a loner, or he feels very inferior to others. As he compares himself to others, he sees himself lacking in looks, lacking as an athlete, or lacking academically. He feels depressed, and may seek to relieve his frustration in ways which are not healthy. The student believes everyone is against him, and believes others do not see his potentiality, because the treatment he receives from others is inconsistent with his view of himself. What is this student's sin? Pride! Just as the popular athlete is prideful, so the depressed loner is prideful. This is the "high self-esteem" I referred to above. Both students are prideful; and both have a faulty idea of their own self-worth.

Let me make this next point very clear. Even though I used the example of students, this does not mean

older Christians do not deal with this issue also. For older Christians, who focus on the approval of others, still deal with the sin of pride. They are able, of course, to hide these sins better than young people. Adults have figured out how to cover up the issues, and their strategies are much more complex.

Our humanistic culture would say the outwardly proud student is an excellent example of what we should all be like. Our culture would also relate to us that the depressed student needs to get in touch with the good aspects of his life. Scripture, however, teaches that all people have the sin of pride, whether they appear arrogant or whether they appear humble. The "high self-esteem" in our human nature, causes us to feel we have a "bad self-image" when things go contrary to our desires.

So what is the solution? How do we get to the point where we have a true biblical understanding of our self-worth? We have seen that sin is the result of comparison with others. Therefore, we need to look to Jesus on the cross, not only as our example, but as a reminder of the result of our sins. When we understand our inherent wickedness, and are honest about our sin, then there is no room for pride. When we can say, "Oh, how wicked I am!" then we are at the point where we need to be. Then we can see Jesus as Redeemer, and we can see the wonderful gift of Jesus' death. Salvation is not something we somehow earned. We are not worthy of it. Our "self-esteem" must be such that we see ourselves as the lowest of men, and only then can we look to Jesus and see the great gift He gives us. By doing this we should be of all men most humbled.

Repentance is not a one-time activity. In fact, we need to repent daily. Every day we need to see our great sins. And repentance does not get easier as time goes by. Rather, it gets harder and harder, because we ask again and again for forgiveness, and we see ourselves as sinners who sin over and over. In Matthew 18:21-22 Peter asks Jesus how often we need

to forgive others. Jesus answers, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven." We know how difficult it is to forgive someone many times; so, imagine how much more difficult it is to ask forgiveness from a friend many times. This humility should be a small example of the humility we need to feel when we sin against God.

Have we truly seen the reality of the sins in our lives? Or has asking forgiveness for our sins become habitual, and effortless? Have we paused and examined our sins? Can we see the pain we caused Jesus on the cross? We need to remember that Jesus did not suffer for the unrepentant of the world, but for those who are Christians. If we can truly see our sin and be humbled, we will not be as likely to compare ourselves to others and elevate ourselves.

The continual asking of forgiveness is very difficult. It brings us to the depths of pain and humility. This is where we can indisputably see the true significance of our salvation. I believe many of us feel we sin less than others. We know it is not true; nevertheless, deep down we feel we have less sin. This is hardly a biblical

notion. Being saved in Jesus Christ does not mean we have ceased to sin. Nor does it even decrease our sinning. Being saved by Jesus Christ means our eyes are opened to see our sin as the cause of Jesus' suffering and painful death on the cross, and to understand that the cross is our forgiveness and eternal life.

As Christians we must *never* stop looking at our sins, and *never* stop feeling humility for the sins we commit. When we minimize our sins, or when we feel pride for what we have done, then we are not going to feel the true gift of salvation. We will feel we have deserved salvation, and we will expect God to give us salvation. We will fill our lives with depression, anxiety, overeating, bulimia, drinking, etc. because we feel we ought to be treated better (a "bad self-image"), and because we do not see the Gift we have in our lives.

The ideas that lead to the conception of "self-esteem" are not new. The roots of "self-esteem" go back to the heresy of Pelagianism, the denial that man is born with original sin. We need to see this movement for what it really is, the covering up of the hideousness of sin.

Christian "self-esteem" is humility. Even when things are not going the way we desire, we need to look to Jesus and to the Word of God, and to see that all we deserve is eternal hell. Then thoughts of whether or not people see us as great men will not be the focus of our lives. I ask all young people and adults who are dealing with the "problem of self-esteem" to examine where they are putting their focus. The problems that accompany pride are an indication from God that we are not looking to Jesus. The change to a biblical self-image is not an instantaneous happening, and this change is not something that comes through our human nature. Our human nature urges us to see how wonderful we are. We can only change by the help of God. We need to ask the Holy Spirit for the strength to look at our sins as they really are. We need to praise the God of heaven and earth, who sent His Son to feel our temptations and sorrows. We need to praise God that Christ died for us poor sinners. "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 15:57). □

Jesus, the Son of Nathan and the Son of Solomon

Dave Dykstra

The title of this article might seem absurd at first glance. The fact is, however, it is not as absurd as it looks. Jesus' name is listed in the genealogies recorded in both Matthew 1 and Luke 3. The genealogy in Matthew 1 traces the royal line of David through Solomon to the birth of Jesus. The genealogy recorded in Luke 3 begins with Jesus and traces the genealogy back through Nathan to David. Jesus' name is recorded in both genealogies. This is important to note, and we will come back to this later.

As is evident, I am resurrecting an old discussion that appeared in the *Standard Bearer* about a year ago (cf. Dec. 15, 1991; Feb. 1, 1992; March 15, 1992 issues). In those issues one will discover that Prof. Engelsma takes the position that Christ was a blood descendant of David through Nathan, while Revs. Veldman and Cammenga argue for the position that Christ is of the royal line of David through Solomon. Both sides in the discussion present convincing arguments for their positions.

Prof. Engelsma, in defense of his position, states that "the Bible teaches that the Messiah will not come from the royal line, and may not come from the royal line. The royal line became

unfaithful, disobedient, and apostate. The judgment of God upon it was that it would not produce the everlasting King who establishes the kingdom of God. The next to the last king of Judah in the Old Testament was Jehoiachin, called 'Jechonias' in Matthew 1:11. Upon him and his descendants fell the judgment recorded in Jeremiah 22:30: 'Thus saith the Lord, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling anymore in Judah.' "

Rev. Veldman contends that Mary was of the royal line of David through Solomon. He calls attention to Psalm 89 and reasons from these

Mr. Dykstra is a member of Faith PRC, Jenison, MI.

scriptures to support his position. He writes: "Now notice in this passage in Psalm 89 the following. First, the Lord's mercy Jehovah will keep for David forevermore; the Lord will make his seed to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven (vv. 28, 29). Secondly, this passage speaks of David's children as forsaking Jehovah's law, walking not in His judgments, the breaking of His statutes, and the keeping not of His commandments (vv. 30, 31). ...Thirdly, now notice what we read in verses 33-37: The Lord will not forsake his covenant, nor alter the thing that is gone out of his mouth. Once has he sworn by his holiness that he will not lie unto David. David's seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before him. Indeed, it shall be established for ever as the moon, and as the faithful witness in heaven."

To support his contention that Jesus is of royal lineage, Rev. Cammenga points out the word of God to David in I Chronicles 22:10: "He (David's Son) shall build an house for my name; and he shall be my son, and I will be his father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever." Rev. Cammenga ends his argumentation on this note: "One of the important issues in this whole discussion of the genealogies is Jesus' right to the throne of His father David. The fact of the matter is that if Christ did not descend from David through the royal line, He has no more right to the throne than any other Israelite. The right to the kingdom of Israel belonged only to those who descended through the royal line of David."

Rev. Cammenga is correct. A most important issue in this discussion is Jesus' right to the throne of David. But Prof. Engelsma is also correct in his assertion that God's judgment rested upon the seed royal in regards to that throne. The door to David's throne had been shut by God to the seed royal. To make matters worse, the throne of David was also off limits to the seed of David through Nathan, as Rev. Cammenga implies. Somehow, however, God unlocked

the door to the throne for Christ. Jesus is at this very moment at God's right hand, "The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" (Rev. 5:5). The question is, How did God do it?

I began by stating that Jesus' name is found listed in both genealogies (Matt. 1:1, 16; Luke 3:23). In Matthew 1:16 Jesus' name appears in the royal family of Joseph along with Mary His mother: "And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ." Joseph is listed, for this is his genealogy. Secondly, Mary's name is listed, for she is the wife of Joseph, part of the royal family through marriage. And, finally, into this royal family Jesus is born. Matthew, in recording this birth, is very exact in noting that Joseph is not the begetter of Jesus. God purposed that a legal relationship be established between Jesus and the royal line of David in Joseph, not a biological one.

That such a legal relationship was established is evident from Luke's genealogy, where Jesus is listed as the son of Joseph: "And Jesus ... being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli." The word "suppose" in this verse means "to reckon as law" (Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible). Verse 23 may be understood this way: "Jesus ... being (legally reckoned) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli." By legal adoption, Jesus is the Son of Joseph. Because Jesus is legally adopted into the royal line, he has

legal rights to the throne of His father David without the judgment of God upon Him; He is not the seed of Jeconiah or of Joseph. Even though Jesus is not the seed of Joseph, we see how important Joseph is in God's plan for unlocking the door to the throne of David. Into this royal family Jesus is born, and a legal right to the throne is established.

There is a second important relationship in Luke's genealogy that is crucial to our discussion. Luke informs us that Joseph is the son of Heli (3:23). This is troubling, for Matthew reveals that Joseph is, on the other hand, the son of Jacob (1:16). Not until we realize that Luke writes the genealogy of Mary from a legal perspective will the difficulty disappear. From Luke's perspective Jesus is, as we have already seen, reckoned as to law the son of Joseph. Accordingly, Joseph is a son in law, a son-in-law, of Heli.

To sum it up, we conclude that Mary was descended from David through Nathan. Nathan's line had no right to the throne, but they had the blood of David as truly as Solomon's line. In Mary Jesus inherited the blood line of David: in Joseph, by legal adoption, Jesus inherited the legal right to the throne without the judgment, because He is not of the seed of Joseph or Jeconiah. Today, Jesus is at God's right hand, "The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" (Rev. 5). □

Family Devotions

Rev. C. Hanko

Are family devotions on the way out? Has our life become so involved that there is hardly time for family worship? Is it virtually impossible to schedule a time when the whole family is home together?

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

The question could even be cast in this form: has it become virtually impossible in our busy existence for the father of the family to function in his priestly calling? In the office of believers we have become partakers of Christ's anointing (Lord's Day 12, question 32). Thereby we are ordained from all eternity and qualified in time by the Spirit of Christ to function as God's prophet, priest, and king. The father in the family holds

that position as head of the house. Family devotions are not a matter of preference, but a duty. They are not merely commendable, but a necessity.

They are also of infinite value for maintaining the spiritual unity of the family. It is true, we are giving our children a Christian education and sending them to catechism. As valuable as that may be, so that no price tag could be attached to it, it does not relieve us as parents of our responsibility in the home. The Christian school and the catechism are not and cannot be a substitute for the home.

For most of us it is customary to hold our family devotions at meal time. This is a time-tried and commendable practice. Little do we realize the importance of these devotions for ourselves and our children. Although I am old, I can still remember the prayers that were sent up for us as children seeking aid for us in our school work, or a petition for us when we were not well. Even when we as teenagers went out for an evening we often heard our mother say, "Remember, we are praying for you."

*Family devotions are
not a matter of preference,
but a duty.*

Also the reading of the Scriptures as part of our devotions is important. We believe that the Scriptures are God's infallible Word, His Self-revelation to His children, the heirs of salvation. Even more, that Word of God through the work of the Spirit in our hearts is the power of God unto salvation. It is the spiritual manna for our souls. It is the Lamp before our feet, the Light upon our pathway. Therefore, when Scripture is read in our daily devotions it should be done with all due reverence and attentiveness. Nehemiah 8:8, "So they read the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." This is especially important when children

are present, taking into consideration that the child's mind might wander, or he might not understand.

I recall an incident in a catechism class in which a little girl seemed to be listening most intently. I thought she was drinking in every word I was uttering—when suddenly she raised her hand, and out of the blue came the remark, "My brother would not help with the dishes last night."

Let me mention another instance, when a boy failed to realize that times have changed. In telling about Jesus cleansing the temple, he said, "Jesus walked in, threw the cash register on the floor, and drove out the buyers and sellers, cattle and all."

There are also instances when the child's mind is more with the present than with the past. A father was reading about Levi, the son of Jacob. When he paused to ask his children, "Do you know who Levi was?" a little fellow spoke up, "He sells calves to the farmers."

Or, in another instance, when the children were asked whether we believe in election, a young voice responded, "Sure, Dad voted for (a candidate running for president)."

* * * * *

I have noticed when visiting in various homes, that different methods are used in family devotions at meal time.

One of the most common methods is that a chapter of the Bible is read, followed by prayer. Some fathers read while the other family members listen. In other homes everyone has a Bible and each takes a turn to read a verse. Some parents read through the entire Bible from beginning to end. Others may have different practices. But usually an effort is put forth to hold the attention, especially of the children. Some parents will ask the children to repeat the last word. I recall one instance when the father finished reading a portion of Scripture, but asked the older members of the family whether they could repeat the last word. It must be admitted that there were some red faces.

In some homes only a small por-

tion of Scripture is read, but the attention of the children is directed to each verse. Questions are asked. When necessary an explanation is given. This often causes the children also to raise questions. When young people are present a discussion can be aroused. In any case, this creates a spirit of fellowship in the home. In these families the children are usually well versed in the Scriptures.

On another occasion I was in a home where, to my surprise, no prayer was offered, either at the beginning or at the end of the meal. I felt very uncomfortable, since from childhood I had never experienced anything like that. After the meal the entire family was called into the living room, where at least a half hour was spent in devotions. At this time the children were questioned about the progress they were making with their catechism lessons. A portion of Scripture was read, accompanied by explanations and questions. The whole family was deeply involved in what could well be called a family worship service. That gives food for thought.

Another incident. This took place on a Sunday morning. We had been awakened plenty in time for church. The breakfast was concluded with the usual devotions, but after that we were all assembled in the living room. The children were requested to recite a Lord's Day, which they had learned during the past week. This was the Lord's Day on which the minister was to preach that day. Thereupon the father made some remarks about what would be brought out in the sermon. The children were urged to listen for that. Not a bad preparation for the service. Don't you think so?

Then I think of an elderly woman in the Holland Home, who on a Tuesday morning was diligently reading the Heidelberg Catechism in the back of her Psalm book. Out of curiosity I asked her what she was reading. She informed me that her memory was so poor, that if she did not read the Lord's Day for the coming Sunday every day, she would not be able to listen properly on Sunday.

* * * * *

The conclusion of the matter is that there are various ways in which our family devotions can be held. Some families have joint devotions also before retiring. We should choose the manner that is best suited for our family. But we must never fail to make this an essential part of our day and of our life as families. Devotions

at three meals a day is ideal, but impossible for most families. Yet, if it can possibly be worked out, devotions should be held in the morning as well as in the evening. How better can we start our day than by listening to the Word of God, and bringing our needs as families before the throne of grace in worship, thanksgiving, and praise?

When morning lights the eastern skies,
O Lord, Thy mercy show;
On Thee alone our hope relies,
Let me Thy kindness know.

Thou art my God, to Thee I pray,
Teach me Thy will to heed;
And in the right and perfect way
May Thy good Spirit lead.

Psalter #391 □

A Word Fitly Spoken

Rev. Dale Kuiper

Angels

Angels are mentioned in thirty-six of the sixty-six books of the Bible. The Hebrew and Greek words both mean *messenger*; they are means by whom God reveals Himself and His salvation to us. Indeed, angels are the servants of the elect, "sent forth to minister for those who shall be the heirs of salvation" (Heb. 1:14). Angels are invisible, non-corporeal creatures who owe their existence to God. "He also created the angels good, to be His messengers and to serve the elect" (Belgic Confession, Art. 12). Although the Bible does not inform us of the exact time of their creation, some theologians assign the creation of angels to the first day of the week, finding their support in Job 38:4 and 7: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? ... When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?"

The number of angels is staggering: "ten thousand times ten thousands, and thousands of thousands" (Rev. 5:11). There is arrangement or organization among these many angels, for Scripture speaks of archangels, cherubim and seraphim, principalities and powers, thrones and dominions (Eph. 3:10; Col. 1:16). Nevertheless, the angels are not related to each other either organically or federally, for the number of angels God created in the beginning is not increased through conception (Matt. 23:30), nor did the fall of a large number of them result in the fall of them all. Since angels are non-reproductive, any interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4 that has giants on the earth in the days of Noah as the result of intercourse between angels (sons of God) and women (daughters of men) is as foolish as it is grotesque.

God's eternal decrees of election and reprobation included the realm of angels. Some of the angels are elect (I Tim. 5:21), and some of them are reprobate. The fall of the reprobate angels is absolute; there is no possibility for their salvation, but they are "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day" (Jude 6). Christ did not die to pay for the sins of angels, therefore. Yet His death was not without significance for the angel world, for God's purpose in Christ is to gather together in one all things which are in heaven and which are on earth (Eph. 1:10). The reproach which fell on the angel world when its head, Satan, fell, and with him a large party, is removed, and Christ becomes the great unifying Head of all things.

As servants of God and messengers to men, the angels appeared at crucial moments in the history of salvation. Cherubims with a flaming sword were placed at the edge of Eden to keep the way of the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). Angels appeared to Abraham announcing the birth of a son (Gen. 18:10); this promised son involved the Seed, which is Christ. The law was given to Israel at Sinai through the disposition of angels (Acts 7:53). Gabriel announced the birth of the forerunner of Christ to Zacharias in the temple; then he appeared to Mary in Nazareth, and later to Joseph as well. An angel announced

Rev. Kuiper is pastor of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

the birth of Jesus to the astonished shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem, and he was joined with a multitude of the heavenly host which sang glory to God.

After Jesus is born, and as He takes up His great work having been baptized, the angels ministered to Him after His triple temptation (Matt. 4:11). An angel sat at the entrance to the empty tomb, instructing the women what had happened (Matt. 28:2-7). Two angels appeared when Jesus ascended into heaven, informing the disciples of the ascension and the coming again of Jesus. Angels are given the glorious task of gathering the elect into heaven at the end of the world; they are reapers in the great harvest (Matt. 13:39). They are used by God for the protection of His children while on earth (Ps. 91:11) and especially of His little children (Matt. 18:10).

Three passages set forth angelic activity as a standard and example for us. The angels desire to look into the things of salvation (I Pet. 1:12). Do we as the redeemed have a similar, keen interest? The angels rejoice at the repentance of a single sinner (Luke 15:7, 10). Do we have joy at the repentance of one of our fellow saints? The angels do the will of God perfectly in heaven (Matt. 6:10). Is it our desire and our prayer that God's will be thus done on earth, also in our lives?

Although we were created a little lower than the angels (Ps. 8:5), we are destined in Christ to be higher than the angels, even judging them (I Cor. 6:3). For thus it was with Christ according to His human nature (Heb. 2:6-9). □

The Strength of Youth

Rev. Steven Key

Proper Christian Self-esteem (5)

As I conclude this consideration of proper Christian self-esteem, I am convinced that there is a very important relationship between the truth of the covenant which we hold dear and this whole biblical concept of proper Christian self-esteem. That was implied when I wrote previously that the important factor in overcoming all your insecurities is that you are conscious of belonging to Christ. For when you belong to Christ, God's evaluation of you is this: "You are My friend."

Rev. Key is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Randolph, Wisconsin.

Self-Esteem and the Covenant

We may summarize that truth of the covenant as the bond or relationship of friendship and loving fellowship between God and His people in Christ. God, by the wonder work of His sovereign grace, saves a people by bringing them into His fellowship through Christ. He establishes His covenant with them, also in the line of their faithful generations.

Within God's covenant fellowship we not only experience His love toward us, but we recognize that we occupy a privileged place among all people on the earth. We live not only as creatures formed by God, but we live as His *friend-servants*.

So we recognize the truth of II Corinthians 5:15. Christ died for all His own, every last one, "that they

which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." Yes, we are His servants. But that does not detract from our self-esteem. For the fact that *we* by the power of the Spirit of Christ can serve the gloriously exalted Jehovah gives us a tremendously exalted place.

When I live in the consciousness that I am a friend of God for Jesus' sake, then I also know that God calls me His elect. God assures me of my redemption, in spite of any of my weaknesses or anything that I have done wrong in the past. By His Word He reminds me that I, who once was filthy, have been set apart unto Him, pure and holy in the midst of the ugliness and shamefulness of this world. I am all these things because of

what Christ has done for me. He says to me, "You are My friend. I take you into My love and fellowship."

In that consciousness, I have peace with God and the joy of salvation—true Christian self-esteem, esteem for Christ and myself as I stand by grace in Him. That is confirmed in my life and in my consciousness, as I walk in thankfulness to Him, striving to walk in obedience to His law, in love for God and for the neighbor.

That is the truth of the covenant with application to this whole idea of proper Christian self-esteem. There is no proper Christian self-esteem apart from such a relationship with Jesus Christ.

This becomes very clear from a practical point of view.

Any person, including one brought up in the church and well-established with the knowledge of Scripture's truth—any person can fall deeply into sin. But the person who lives in the addiction of his depravity is unable to esteem himself properly apart from Christ.

To walk in sin is to deny oneself the fellowship of the Holy God, to lose the consciousness of His love. That is the horrible reality of sin's bondage.

You have probably experienced that, as have I. In the bondage of sin, we try to deny the reality of sin, by burying that reality with many different means. It is certainly possible to do that. Much counseling today (and much preaching, I might add) seeks to help people by getting them to deny reality—although such counselors claim that they are trying to get their patients to face reality. Much counseling is devoted to denying the reality of sin and guilt. Without facing the reality of sin, without Christ, without the fellowship of God, all is deceit—a prescription of self-esteem which poisons the soul.

We can think of many examples.

One becomes involved in sports, finding his importance and worth in games. I know that scene from my younger days. There are many who make sports their god, their avenue to self-esteem. But what happens when

a guy becomes too old to participate actively? What happens when he finds out he is not good enough to advance beyond a certain level? He either finds another god, or he finds himself drowning in the sorrows of loneliness and the devastation of failure.

Another, apart from Christ, denying his own sinfulness and depravity, buries the reality of his own situation in the abuse of alcohol. Another in drug abuse. One buries his worthlessness in sexual promiscuity of every kind, finding partners in fornication who make him feel as if he (or she) is valuable to someone else. But it is not long before the devastation of those sins bears bitter fruits. Without the consciousness of God's friendship, there can be no happiness. And ultimately the reality that must be faced is that of death and hell.

Others, not getting caught in addictions to such devastating behavior, bury the reality of their sinfulness by developing certain God-given gifts. One makes music his life, another art, another this hobby, another that. One may have a gift of making investments turn out to his profit. Almost everyone can find a certain aspect of life that is positive in his or her own mind. That is the whole idea behind the worldly philosophies that promote an *unbiblical* concept of self-esteem. Build your self-worth concept and your self-image by excelling in areas that you are able to excel in. But there is no salvation in a positive self-image! There is no fellowship with God, no experience of His love, in adhering to the modern theory of self-esteem.

Our salvation is only in Christ Jesus, and is experienced by coming to Him in repentance and sorrow for our sins. True Christian self-esteem then follows. Only when you live in the conscious experience of God's friendship and love will you have a *proper* Christian self-esteem. And the reason we remain, to any degree, servants to lust and to sin, is that we are to that same degree strangers to the love of God and those pure pleasures that are found in His fellowship.

A Call to Christ-Esteem

Now, clearly, what I proclaim to you from the Scriptures is exactly the opposite of what today's self-esteem advocates proclaim. One view is biblical. The other entirely unbiblical, a deviation from what Scripture proclaims. You can not have it both ways. To build a theology on man's pride is incompatible with the biblical idea of sin and man's depravity. To proclaim a gospel in which man saves himself by positive thinking is a different gospel completely from that which sets forth Christ as the only Redeemer and Conqueror of sin and death.

Yes indeed, we have another gospel from that unbiblical, deceptive view proclaimed on every side today. In fact, we do not hesitate to say that in the modern self-esteem movement is the fulfillment of Paul's warning to Timothy in II Timothy, chapter 3: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud.... Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away."

Come rather to Christ, in whom is all peace for the soul. The self-esteem doctrine of men does not exalt you nearly enough. The honor and excellency that characterize you as a child of God are a heavenly honor and a heavenly excellency. In Christ, God's grace is boundless, His mercy without measure. He is the Savior of sinners. Do you believe? He esteems His own highly.

Let us esteem ourselves highly only in Him, not deceiving our own selves. And let us confess with Paul in Romans 14:7, 8, "None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's." If you are in Christ, take your full salvation and triumph and prevail. □

Calvin's Ecclesiastical Advice, tr. Mary Beaty and Benjamin W. Farley. Foreword by John Haddon Leith. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. 184 pages. Paper. \$14.95. [Reviewed by the Editor.]

One of the most valuable benefits of the various conferences devoted to the study of the theology of John Calvin is the translation and publication of writings of the Reformer that have not previously appeared in English. Such is this volume. It has its origin in the Colloquium on Calvin studies held every two years at the Davidson College Presbyterian Church and Davidson College in North Carolina. The book consists of forty-six short writings of Calvin, mostly letters, newly translated into English from the original Latin and French.

The writings are Calvin's advice on matters of theology, ethics, worship, politics, economics, and church practices. In them Calvin applies his theology to concrete situations in the life of the Reformed churches and of Reformed believers of his day. The translators have distributed the writings among these categories: dogmatics and polemics; on the changes and need for changes in religion; concerning the worship of images; ecclesiastical discipline; marriage questions; judicial questions; and miscellanies.

The special value of published correspondence is that it allows the reader a glimpse of the writer when he has opened himself up more than he would when writing for the general public, as well, in this case, as indicating the application of the author's doctrine to specific, practical cases. One such instance is Calvin's advice to a local church to depose an unworthy minister, threatening that failure to do so would result in that church's being separated from the fellowship of the Reformed churches

(p. 101). Another is Calvin's judgment that "attending papist funeral services" is sinful (p. 156).

In a circular letter sent to several congregations, Calvin views dice games and cards as "small corruptions." The Reformer is not able "utterly (to) condemn games of this sort," but warns of the evils that usually bedevil these games: "blaspheming, cheating, and fiery quarrels." Therefore, Calvin concludes that "it is expedient to stay away from these games as much as possible, and it is best to abstain from them altogether" (pp. 158, 159).

A large section of the book is devoted to Calvin's advice on marriage-matters. Calvin permitted the remarriage of both the innocent and the guilty parties. On the other hand, he spoke of the "sacred and indissoluble bond" (p. 135). On the basis of Old Testament laws, he forbade marrying one's dead wife's sister and one's dead brother's widow. A man's incapability of consummating the marriage is valid ground for annulment of the marriage.

Two brief appendices are included. One is Calvin's "Essay on the Lord's Supper" from *The Form of Prayers*, 1542 and 1545. The other is entitled, "A Copy of the Inquisitor Horris's Paper, Given to Those at Lyons Who were Imprisoned for Preaching the Word, to be Transmitted to M. Jean Calvin." The latter is a denial that the ten commandments of the Old Testament are binding upon New Testament Christians in the interests of defending the Roman Catholic worship of images. Calvin answers this document in one of the writings that make up the main body of the book.

College and seminary libraries will certainly want the book. All students of Calvin will find it worthwhile and delightful reading.

It is my fervent hope that the people of the Colloquium on Calvin

Studies will be encouraged to give us more translation in English of hitherto untranslated, and largely unavailable, writings of John Calvin. ■

The Suffering Savior: Meditations on the Last Days of Christ, by F.W. Krummacker. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1992. 444pp., \$15.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. Robert D. Decker.]

Friedrich Wilhelm Krummacker (1796-1868) was a preacher in the Reformed Church in Germany. The denomination then already was shot through with Rationalism. Krummacker was a Calvinist. He believed in the sinfulness of man and in the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ for the sins of the elect. He held firmly to the belief that the Bible is the inspired, infallible Word of God and, therefore, the absolute rule for the faith and life of the Christian.

Krummacker preached these truths for his entire ministry. One of the more famous churches he served was Trinity Church in Berlin, long the scene of Schleiermacher's ministry. In 1853 he was appointed court preacher at Potsdam, a position he held until his death in 1868.

The book contains fifty-three printed sermons on the suffering of our Lord. Here is, for the most part, good stuff. Pastors will find insightful exegesis that will enrich their preaching. All of God's people will find these sermons to be good devotional material.

No Reformed person will agree with Krummacker's exegesis of the first Word spoken by Jesus from the cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (pp. 351-358).

Nevertheless, books like this belong in our church and home libraries and ought to be read by us. □

Mission Activities

If members of the Hudsonville, MI PRC congregation felt like entering a contest this winter, they needed to look no further than a letter from the pastor, Rev. G. VanBaren. In this letter Rev. VanBaren encouraged his entire congregation, with a special emphasis on children aged 8 through 12, to try their hand at translating a short account of a typical day for the VanBarens in Northern Ireland.

This letter, although written in English, was full of words and phrases that are not at all in common use here in the U.S.

Admittedly it's difficult at best to give you an idea of what this letter was like without giving you the entire letter. However, a few of the words and phrases included were treacle, free range eggs, zebra crossings, Pelicans, nappies, minced beef, biscuits, chips, crips, and 13 stones.

Those who sent back to the VanBarens the most correct and neatest translation were promised a prize from Northern Ireland.

The point of all this was summed up nicely in the last two lines of the letter, where Rev. VanBaren wrote, "So life goes in Northern Ireland. It can be interesting — provided one knows what others are saying."

In our last installment of the News, we also reported that a home had been purchased for the Hanco family in Northern Ireland. This house is in the country about seven miles from Ballymena. It is a very scenic area. The house itself has four bedrooms but also three "reception rooms," a family room, a formal dining room, and a living room. One of these could also be used as a study.

Rev. VanBaren also writes that in Northern Ireland Christmas is cel-

ebrated much as it is in the States. The same toys are in the stores, the same songs are played, the same decorations are seen, and there are the same family get-togethers on Christmas Day.

Evangelism Activities

In a past issue of this back-page News column we made mention of an ongoing project of the Men's Society of the Hudsonville PRC simply entitled "Bibles for Ghana." We are happy to report that requests from Ghana keep coming in — so many, in fact, that the Men's Society, along with the help of approximately 30 adults and several children, met on December 23 to package each Bible individually, and then address and mail all 422 of them to Ghana.

The project doesn't end there. The Men's Society has also received 15 requests back from young people who have received their Bibles and have "questions." The society is now looking for families or young people who would desire to correspond with some of these young people.

This could prove to be a great way to get personally involved with these young people who are struggling with the Word of God. The requests for Bibles generally come from young people ages 13-18 who have nothing, sometimes not even enough money for postage to send their request. Often two or three young people "pool" their money to purchase one air mail letter.

Congregational Activities

The Helping Hands Committee, along with the deacons of the Hudsonville PRC, sponsored a food drive. This request for gifts of canned or dry goods, money, or gift certificates to area grocery stores was made to give the Hudsonville congregation an opportunity to help those in need in their own congregation, especially during the Christmas season. The deacons were able to deliver over 50

bags of groceries and over \$900.00 worth of gift certificates to needy families in their church.

The Christmas season just completed was also filled with many different church functions. Many of our churches, including Faith PRC in Jenison, MI; Hope PRC in Walker, MI; and the Hudsonville, MI PRC, were also hosts to choir programs.

Personally being able to attend a couple of these programs made me thankful for the opportunities to hear just how wide and varied the talents of our choir members can be. I hope that you also had an opportunity to hear some of these excellent programs.

School Activities

Not only were our church choirs busy in the month of December, but it also appears that several of our Christian schools used the time for all-school programs. The Free Christian School in Edgerton, MN; the Loveland Christian School, Loveland, CO; and the South Holland PR School in South Holland, IL all developed themes related to the Christmas season and no doubt led many to reflect on God's greatest gift to us, Jesus.

In the developing story of the Randolph, WI PR Christian School, we can report that in mid-December the society completed a transaction and became owners of property for their school. This property is located behind their church in Randolph. Behind the scene much work has been done and is being done. Committees have been appointed to tackle the many and varied tasks involved in planning: building, finance, and education. And there is no doubt a great deal of work to be done before a school will be established in Randolph. But we also confess that the instruction of our covenant children is a responsibility that belongs to us all.

Food For Thought

"To have many children about us is better than to have much wealth about us. We know the worth of dead, or rather lifeless treasures, but who knows the worth of living treasures?" J. Caryl

Mr. Wigger is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands wishes to express Christian sympathy to fellow members and their families in the death of their mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother,

MRS. SUSAN GAASTRA.

May they find comfort in the words of Psalm 116:15, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

Pastor A. denHartog, President
Rick Span, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of the Hope Protestant Reformed Church (G.R.) express their sympathy to fellow member, Mr. John N. Dykstra and family, at the death of John's mother,

MRS. MINNIE DYKSTRA,

whom the Lord took to her eternal home on December 19, 1992. "I will praise thee for ever, because thou hast done it: and I will wait on thy name; for it is good before thy saints" (Psalm 52:9).

Pete Petroelje, President
Leon Garvelink, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Martha Society of the Doon Protestant Reformed Church extends sincere sympathy to Grace VanDenTop and family in the death of her mother,

MRS. HATTIE BLOEMENDAAL.

May they find their comfort in the words of the inspired apostle, that through our Lord Jesus Christ "death is swallowed up in victory" (I Corinthians 15:54).

Rev. R. Dykstra, President
Mrs. Gert VanDenTop,
Vice-Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's and Ladies' Society of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church express their Christian sympathy to their members, Mr. and Mrs. Rex Clawson, in the recent death of Mrs. Clawson's mother, an aged member of the congregation of Southwest,

MRS. MINNIE DYKSTRA.

May the family take comfort from the words of Christ: "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).

Phil Lotterman, President
Judi Doezeema, Secretary

NOTICE!!

Covenant Christian High School will be adding one full-time faculty member to the staff for the 1993-1994 school year. We are seeking candidates who can fill our need in the area of science, mathematics, and certain business-related courses. Applicants for this position are asked to apply by writing or calling Covenant Christian School, Agatha Lubbers, Administrator, 1401 Ferndale Ave. S.W., Grand Rapids, MI 49504; phone: 616-453-5048. Covenant will also accept applications for the position of band and choir director.

NOTICE!!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in South Holland, IL, on Wednesday, March 4, 1993, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All material for the Agenda is to be in the hands of the stated Clerk, 30 days before Classis convenes. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the Clerk of South Holland's Consistory using the forms provided for that purpose.

Rev. R. Hanko,
Stated Clerk

CLASSIS WEST OFFICEBEARERS' CONFERENCE

When:

Tuesday, March 2, 1993
beginning at 9:00 a.m.

Where:

South Holland Protestant Reformed
Church
16511 South Park Ave.
South Holland, IL 60473

Theme:

Shepherding God's Flock

Keynote Address:

A Pastor's Heart
Prof. Herman Hanko

Sectionals:

*Counseling Those
with Marital Problems*

Rev. Arie denHartog

Counseling Those

with Problems of Assurance

Prof. Robert Decker

Counseling the Grieving

Rev. Charles Terpstra

*The Use of the Scriptures
in Counseling*

Rev. Steven Houck

*Pastoring Those Who have Gone
Through Suicide*

Mr. Joel Sugg

*The Role of the Elders and Deacons
in Pastoral Counseling*

Mr. Robert Brands

All past and present officebearers, as well as anyone who is interested, are invited to attend.

Hope to see you there!