

Walk Honestly, As in the Day

“And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day;”

Romans 13: 11-13a.

The apostle Paul is presenting an argument for a godly walk. He had begun the “practical” part of his epistle in chapter 12. Here at the end of chapter 13 he is, with some urgency, encouraging the newly converted Christians in the church at Rome to keep the several admonitions he has set before them. The urgency is found in the fact that “it is high time” and that “now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.”

The call to walk honestly can be heard and kept because the saints at Rome “know” the time. Paul assumes that with conversion comes a knowledge, and a part of this knowledge is that one is able to know the time. The idea is that believers have a special view of time, and therefore of history. Those to whom the Lord has not given faith do not have this knowledge. For them time is merely a succession of days, weeks, months, and years — all without apparent purpose. But those given faith are able to know time and history.

They know that history is God’s story of His work of saving unto Himself a people in Christ; and they know that all those who are not saved, and all the rest of creation, serve this central purpose. Believers know that history is determined by the sovereign counsel of God, according to which all things are worked (Eph. 1:11) and according to which every detail in the life of every believer is guided (Ps. 73:24). Believers know that time is progressing to an end al-

ready determined by our sovereign God (Is. 46:10; Acts 15:18). Believers see Jesus Christ at the very center of history and of time. There is the time before He came. Then there is the time He came. And finally there is the time He is coming back. We are living in the time when He is coming back, the time between His first coming and His return. When Jesus comes again, then time will be no more. This means that our time is the “last days” (II Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:2), “the last time” (I John 2:18), when “the ends of the world are come” (I Cor. 10:11). New dispensational believers know that they are living in the last period of earthly history.

These believers also know that the time in which they are living is characterized by “night” and “darkness.” While those without the gift of faith may speak of the age of enlightenment and of advances in enlightenment, believers know that the world of this time is in darkness (John 3:19; 8:12; Col. 3:13; I John 2:8,9). This darkness is that of spiritual ignorance, “having the

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understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph. 4:18). They are in the dark concerning God and concerning all human life and its purpose. Jesus declared, "The light of the body is the eye: ... if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matt. 6:22,23). This present world is dark because it is under the wrath of God, becoming increasingly ripe for judgment. Believers know that the recent tsunami in the Indian Ocean is a precursor of the final judgment of God.

Paul is teaching that this knowledge of time ought to inspire Christians to godliness. When believers are given to know the time, then they "are not in darkness," but are "the children of light, and the children of the day" (I Thess. 5:4,5). This makes us spiritual strangers and pilgrims in a dark world, but we are on the way to an eternity of light. We have been called out of darkness and have been brought into God's marvelous light (I Pet. 2:9). We are followers of Him who is the light of the world (John 8:12). "Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20).

Even though it is still night, we are to walk "honestly, as in the day." The word "honestly" means "in a seemly or appropriate manner." Those given faith are in the day, so their walk should be "as in the day." It would be dishonest or inappropriate for them to walk as in the night. That is why the newly converted Christians in Ephesus were admonished not to walk anymore as the other Gentiles walked (Eph. 4:17). It would be very inconsistent for those who profess to be in the day to continue living and behaving as if they were in the night. Walk honestly.

And believers know that "now

is our salvation nearer than when we believed." This reference to salvation obviously refers to complete and final salvation with glorification (confer 8:18-23; I Pet. 1:9). Salvation in this sense will be realized when Jesus comes again. He will bring glorification for His people. This is nearer than when we first believed. God frequently admonishes His people to live their lives accordingly. We do not know how much more time we have. But we do know that the end is nearer than when we first believed. So "seek those things which are above," "set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth," "mortify therefore your members which are on the earth" (Col. 3:1-5). "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure: ... for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." "Seeing ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (II Pet. 1:10,11; 3:14). "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (I John 3:3).

How dishonest for us to walk as if we are still in darkness. Christ did not come so we could live in sin! If we say that we are Christians, but we continue to live in darkness, we are liars (I John 1:5,6).

Instead, we are called to realize "that now it is high time to awake out of sleep." "High time" means that we are in an hour when we should be awake and no longer asleep! "Sleep" is a figure of speech. It refers to a condition of spiritual lethargy. The five foolish virgins were sleepy, that is, they were careless, lacking watchfulness and preparation (Matt. 25:1-13). There is an ever-present danger for

Christians, especially for those who have been raised all their life in the sphere of the church. This serious danger is that they take their faith for granted — that they are not constantly diligent in watching and praying. Peter speaks often of giving diligence. It is so easy to drift along, being influenced, rather than being an influence.

Because our salvation is nearer than when we believed, the believer must constantly rouse himself. He must shake himself out of the condition of sleepiness and lethargy. One who is given faith must exercise this faith, examining himself whether he is being governed by God's Word. We are wise to realize the terrible danger of assuming

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that we are all right simply because we are members of the church. We must spur ourselves on, to have our lives regulated by our faith.

This rousing of ourselves so that we awake out of sleep is accomplished in the way of our casting "off the works of darkness" and putting "on the armour of light." This casting off and putting on are actions that are to be done repeatedly.

The figure is that of clothing. When one casts off some clothing, then he puts on others. The works of darkness are not merely to be taken off, but they must be "cast off." Pull them off yourselves, and do so quickly. Take them off completely, not partially. And once they are off, cast them as far from you as possible.

These works of darkness are not on us simply because we are in the dark world. No, they come on us from the inside. They are a part of our human nature — natural to us. It is like a layer of skin that develops on us, and we must actively scrape it off and get rid of it as quickly and as completely as we possibly can. The apostle lists


three groups of the works of darkness in verse 13: “rioting and drunkenness,” “chambering and wantonness,” “strife and envying.” The previous lifestyle of these newly converted Christians in Rome had not been good. And it was hard for them to break from the habits of this lifestyle. Thanks be to God alone, this lifestyle was not that in which most of us were raised. Nevertheless, these works of darkness are not completely foreign to us. On the contrary, they are natural to us. “Rioting and drunkenness” refers to partying to excess, either with alcohol or with drugs, so that we do things we would never do in our “right mind.” And “chambering and wantonness” refers to sexual promiscuity and unbridled lust, which result in filthy words and stories, indecent body movements and dress and unchaste actions. We must not stick our heads in the sand and say that these works of darkness are “out there” in the world of darkness or done only by the young people. Such is most definitely not the case!!

The third group of the works

of darkness that are to be cast off is “strife and envying.” This refers to fighting and quarreling, usually because we are sure that we are right (the “stronger,” cf. the first verses of the next two chapters). “Envy” refers to backbiting, jealousies, lying one to another. Notice that here, as well as elsewhere in Scripture, this category of the works of darkness is made equal to drunkenness and sexual promiscuity. Those who would consider the first groups of sins to be utterly repulsive often jump at opportunities to gossip and criticize, causing strife in the home and/or church. But the same spirit gives rise to all of these works of darkness. And anyone who will look at the church in her history will conclude that more and greater harm is done to the church and to the cause of Christ by strife and envy than by drunkenness and sexual promiscuity! These works of darkness are to be cast off!

And we are to “put on the armour of light.” In heaven we will have the robes of righteousness. But as long as we who are in the day walk in the night, we must

wear armor. This is the primarily defensive protection of the gospel. Jesus, who is the light of the world, gives us in His salvation the perfect helmet, in His righteousness a great breastplate, in His truth a wonderful girdle, in His gospel of peace the best sandals, in the gift of faith the perfect shield, and in His Word the right sword. As believers we are soldiers in a tremendous battle. Life for us is constant warfare, and we must seek always to fight the good fight of faith.

Know the time and know that you are of the day. It is still night — though it is far spent and salvation is near. Until the day is realized, let us rouse ourselves by casting off every sin that besets us and by putting on the knowledge of the finished work of Jesus Christ. He is our strength! Let us know that when, at any moment, we are not rousing ourselves unto watching and prayer, the works of darkness are attaching themselves to us. Let us give all diligence to do everything we can to keep ourselves spiritually alert and not take our spiritual life for granted. Let us walk honestly. 

Movies — Not a Question (concl.)

In western society, if not in the world, drama is king of entertainment. In the U.S. and Canada, 99% of the homes with electricity have at least one television. Moviegoers in the U.S. spent 9.4 billion dollars at the box office in 2004 (and that does not include renting or purchasing these movies!). In England, movies took in

over eight hundred million pounds in the last year.

Drama is so appealing to us sinful people because it is fashioned after the depraved mind. Whatever is the fancy of the crowd, the moviemaker will produce it (and brazenly claim it is for culture’s sake!). The depravity of man manifests itself in a multitude of vices, and the movies can satisfy virtually all. For the violence-loving man, there are war or gangster movies awash with blood. The

movie industry satisfies the really hardcore blood-and-guts fan with such trash as a chainsaw wielding crazy chopping up bodies. For the wife secretly seeking a romantic escape from her “plain” marriage, romances may satisfy, for a while. One inclined to sexual desire can choose from a smorgasbord of movies with sexual content, from the merely suggestive to the downright perverted. If one’s chief god is mammon, he can easily find movies to tickle his fancy with

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huge displays of wealth. And the movies about sports or speedy cars, or depicting death-defying stunts, satisfy the desire for thrills in still others.

The question is, how ought the believer respond to this proffered entertainment? Acceptance is definitely the easier way. If he accepts the delightfully entertaining medium, the “theological” justification is prepared for him in advance. On the one hand, negatively, to reject all drama is Anabaptist, i.e., legalism and world flight, he will be assured. It harks back to the asceticism that led to constructing monasteries. We are, after all, called to live in the world. Positively, the justification is common grace, as has been noted previously. The way is open to enjoy drama, though the more cautious may urge discrimination at least in how you watch it.

And if the believer is yet unconvinced that he may rightly partake of the *world’s* sinful drama, there is this last “ace-in-the-hole,” namely, Make your own drama. Redeem the movie. Take it over for Christ and His kingdom. Produce drama that is God-glorifying, where sin, though portrayed, is not made glamorous, and where the cause of right always triumphs over the cause of evil.

The “theological” arguments are well established and almost universally approved, if a little faulty. The Christian who enjoys drama will have all the support in the world. His neighbors will approve. The church will probably endorse it. Even his minister’s sermon illustrations will be recognizable, drawn from the movies of the day. And his own sinful flesh will feast on the depravity on display.

But will the movie-going Christian have *God’s* approval? And will *He* be convinced by the “theological” arguments? That, in the end, is all that matters. Will the holy God of heaven and earth, too pure of eyes to behold iniquity (Hab. 1:13), sanction His children feast-

ing their eyes and filling their souls with sins acted out? The believer knows better.

The only God-approved choice is a rejection of drama, this acting out the lives of others with all the sins that necessarily accompany life in this sin-cursed world. The sanctified antithetical life demands that drama be rejected. The antithesis is the line that separates the holy from the profane. It separates all that is of God from all that opposes Him.

Living the antithesis is, first and foremost, positive. It is living in a covenant relationship with Jehovah God. His redeemed, adopted children live for God. He is their joy. In His favor is life. Gratitude draws the Christian to seek God’s face and to live in obedience.

However, there is a negative side to the antithesis. The child of God rejects all that is opposed to his God. He becomes the enemy of those who show themselves God’s enemies. Knowing the truth of James 4:4, that “whosoever will be the friend of the world is the enemy of God,” he does not invite ungodly actors into his home via the television set. Nor does he visit in their parlor, the theater. Conscious of God’s command to be holy as He is holy (I Pet. 1:15, 16), the believer refuses to be entertained with an unholy pastime.

That is the answer to the “problem” of drama.

No doubt it is a problem. Drama is a captivating and addicting form of entertainment. It has almost universal approval. Besides, who can escape it? The televised variety invades restaurants, airports, waiting rooms everywhere, and...the homes of most Christians.

The problem is not solved by a

church deciding that drama is legitimate culture, and exhorting her members to judge between good movies and bad. Some would urge the PRC to follow the path of the Reformed Church and the Christian Reformed Church. They resisted the lure of drama for a while, but capitulated to the pressure of the members who were going to the movies no matter how vehemently the church papers inveighed against them.

The correct solution for the PRC, and for any godly church and family, is not to cave in under pressure. On the other hand, it is not right either to condemn movies (officially or unofficially), and still imbibe the godless entertainment week after week. That is a glaring inconsistency, if not hypocrisy. Likewise is it incongruous for a preacher to condemn the Three Points of common grace but ignore the evidence that members of the flock tread the common-grace path to the theater regularly.

The Reformed minister is called to preach the antithesis. God commands every preacher of the gospel — “Preach the word,...reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine” (I Tim. 4:2). Such preaching lays the solid foundation of Reformed doctrine squarely upon Christ crucified and risen. It then applies that doctrine to the lives of God’s people.

The most serious danger for the Protestant Reformed Churches (and others who with us reject common grace) is not that we be labeled hypocritical — as injurious as inconsistency is to our witness. The greater danger is that while we condemn common grace at the front door, we allow it to slip quietly in the back door to guide our thinking and everyday life. For common grace is powerful and pervasive! It

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will not rest until it has perverted all areas of doctrine and life!

Might the practical outworking of common grace sap the church's strength and destroy her will to fight the battle for sovereign, particular grace? Obvious inconsistencies between walk and doctrine will reduce preacher and member alike — who once faithfully decried common grace and its bitter fruits — to an embarrassed silence. That is serious, for the truth must be proclaimed over against the lie.

There is more. A serious conflict between doctrine and walk cannot continue indefinitely. A man's walk flows out of his doctrine, out of what he believes. There must be harmony between faith and life. However, if the walk contradicts what is confessed, something has to give. And it will.

Let the ministers be aware of this great evil that threatens the spiritual lives of the sheep. Pointed instruction and admonition is the need of the hour. By means of sharp admonitions, such as I heard in the preaching in my youth, God confers grace to repent and walk

in obedience by the power of the cross (Canons III, IV, 17).


Not that television and movies ought to become the preacher's weekly or monthly hobbyhorse. But if he will not preach against drama in a right and forceful manner, then the antithetical life required in entertainment will be seriously compromised. Look at the sad spectacle — utterly sad — of churches that years ago stopped preaching proper Sabbath observance. Look at the congregations and families in the denominations where the instruction and admonition about marriage for life has not been heard for years. This lack in the preaching is devastating. The antithesis must be preached if it is to be lived.

Still more is required. Elders are duty bound to bring the word to bear on family visits. Knowing the powerful threat that drama poses to the Reformed home, surely elders will inquire into the use of the TV and VCR player if these are present in the home. Surely they will ask the youth what they do for entertainment, give pointed instruction, and, where needed, rebuke.

It also behooves parents to take a close look at the entertainment they themselves enjoy, and what they allow in the lives of their covenant children. How quickly it can become habit, unthinking, easy habit, to click on the TV. Weekly, nightly perhaps, the drama pours into the living room like so much spiritual garbage. With regular partaking, the family become hardened, not noticing the gradual spiritual decline.

Movies. They are not a difficult question really. May I go to the movie? Ought we to watch this TV show? When examined in the light of God's Word, the answer is obvious.

Yet the *doing* is hard, for the appeal is powerful. For this reason the believer seeks daily help to battle the old man of sin. "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" we cry with Paul (Rom. 8:24).

Then we add with him, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (v. 25). For the forgiveness of sins in His blood. For the power of the cross. For deliverance. 

All Around Us

Rev. Kenneth Koole

■ Post Election 'Blues' Due to All the 'Red,' Or—Now Who Is Seeing Red?

The recent national election (US) prompted quite a stir among those who backed the losing candidate and his cause, too much of one to be ignored completely in the *Standard Bearer*. I have an idea that victory by the 'other' candidate and his party would have triggered more of a reaction in our circles

and been the occasion for more analysis concerning what it portended for the immediate future. Be that as it may, we do not want to pass by the outcome in silence. Much was at stake. We realized that. Those on the other side of the fence did too.

As an aside, I realize that that last sentence you just read assumes something, namely, that I have put the *SB* and Protestant Reformed members on the Republican side of the fence in this recent election. Not necessarily in every election past or future, but in this election.

As Protestant Reformed, we are not 'party' dedicated. We are not GOP by allegiance. But I will go on record as maintaining that no Chris-

tian in good conscience should have voted for Senator Kerry and his cronies. Anyone who supports abortion, would appoint judges who are pro-abortion (read - 'pro-murder of the unborn'), would veto legislation forbidding it, and would support homosexual unions and marriages, ought not be in office. And if such a one is in office, it ought not be because the righteous helped vote him in. Such a one is openly an enemy of God and all righteousness. Such a one must not hold rule due to our support and approval. Submit to such a one someday we will have to (and by that time he may be the Republican candidate), but not because we have knowingly helped put such Nero-like rulers into office.

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I do not say Christians should have voted for President Bush. Who says one has to vote at all? But not for men like Senator Kerry, men without a moral compass. It is one thing to be numbered among the unbelieving and unrighteous. It is another thing to be 'anti-Christian' and 'anti-biblical' by conviction and record (as an increasing number in the Democratic party are these days).

But I digressed — there was much at stake in this election. Not only we knew it, so did those on the other side of the political fence. Witness the reaction of one Wendy Smith to the election results, written in a column in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (Nov. 8 issue). It came under the interesting title "Can We Save This Country From Its Leaders?"

When I woke up on Nov. 3 and switched on the radio, the realization hit me like a ton of bricks. Contrary to my predictions, we had had a relatively fair election and the American people (or something over half of them) had democratically voted for an extremist Christian regime.

Note the description of our present administration. A 'regime' is bad enough, and an extremist one at that; but, more to the point, an extremist 'Christian' regime. Christianity (that is, any form of it that actually has the courage to call certain abominations sinful and immoral) by definition is numbered with the extremist, the 'talibans' of this world. It is a cancer and a threat to all. They want to 'excise' such Christianity, don't think they don't.

But if the Bush administration is numbered with extremist Christianity, where do you think thorough going Calvinism stands!

Ms. Smith goes on. Listen to her rant.

I had the radio tuned to NPR [National Public Radio — kk]... [A] woman from Pennsylvania ... stated that she simply couldn't understand people who had voted

for Bush. "These people want to control what happens in my bedroom, in my body, but they are A-OK with us having killed 100,000 Iraqis, and mounting. I just don't get them."

That was when the bricks hit. I felt lost. I knew what I was planning to do in case of a stolen election (civil disobedience in the service of saving our democracy) [sic! — kk]. I knew what I was going to do if Kerry won.... But I had no idea what to do now.

For months, Kerry has been conspicuously going to church all over the country and shooting ducks and geese like crazy in between — all in an effort to convince the people in the red states that he "gets them."

It was all in vain. No amount of avian carcasses would have helped.

Half the people in this country believe in a god [sic!] who forbids stem cell research but seems to have forgotten his own First Commandment.

In the 'other' America, we believe that killing all those Iraqis (not to mention Afghans and indirectly, Palestinians) is not only wrong, but also terribly hazardous to our own security. We have different 'moral' values. And we don't give a ***** [vulgarity — kk] what other people do in their bedrooms.

But we, my friends, are not in the majority.

We in that other America had better learn to speak our own morality, which is a humanistic one, in an emotionally convincing fashion. More important, though, we had better take a good hard look at what is happening in the Christian extremist America, dissect it, and try to understand it from the inside out.

I say [this] because we had better get a grip on what we are facing, in order to figure out how to save our country (and the poor, suffering rest of the world) from the crusade on which America is embarked.

The above is a representative, post-election reaction by sup-

porters of liberal candidates.

Of interest, #1, is reference to 'our own morality, which is a humanistic one....' This simply acknowledges that, "As for God's divine laws, which define true morality, we hate them."

And #2, the above piece identifies Christianity as the primary reason for the Republican victory and the hated President Bush's re-election. It is a call for people in places of influence and power to focus attention on Christianity, to identify it as *the* threat to world peace and safety, to say nothing of national prestige and security, and to do whatever is necessary to see to it that this Christianity is silenced and removed from having a say-so again. The stark enmity is palpable.

When those with Ms. Smith's perspective get (back) in power, speakers of biblical truth watch out. The end of our freedom to speak and preach and teach will not be far off.

And that is really what was at stake in this recent election — the present retention of our freedom of speech, the right to express biblical convictions concerning immorality and sin. Those of the 'Blue' crowd who prate so much about 'tolerance,' are and will prove, when power is theirs, to be the most intolerant people imaginable. Their vitriolic reaction to the outcome of this recent election proves it over and over again.

Meantime, we as believers realize that this past election is not a victory for righteousness (while laws that remove every mention of God from the 'public square' are the accepted rule of the day?), but a temporary reprieve. We and others may still speak our minds. Meantime, the assault on righteousness, with legal backing, continues on every side.

The recently elected administration is not our savior. It is however a temporary restraint placed by God's good providence upon

our present wicked society for the church's sake.

For this present reprieve, we are thankful to God.

I must admit that when I hear the liberals rant over the past election results I have a hard time not thumbing my nose at them, like Luther mocking the devil. But that must not be. What we are involved in is no game. It is mortal combat.

■ Where the 'Blue' Mentality Is Certain to Lead

The lengthy quotation that follows (lifted from an article by Chuck Colson, entitled "From a Slippery Slope to an Avalanche — Euthanizing Children") is familiar to many of our readers, I realize. It has made the rounds in the Grand Rapids area. Regardless, I feel compelled to quote it anyway. What Colson reports and comments on is another proof positive that for all the liberals' talk about having a morality too, be it a humanistic one, what they espouse is, in very fact, a diabolical one.

Liberals look at Christians and 'conservatives,' and profess they do not understand what we are afraid of. They cannot understand why we will not vote for their peace-loving candidates, so filled with compassion for the underprivileged and those out of a job. Theirs are the candidates filled with compassion for the diseased and interested in the health of future mankind. That's why they are interested in funding and promoting stem-cell research. It all has to do with love.

Though they may support abortion on demand, they are really harmless, truly compassionate human beings. Don't you see that? There is no slippery slope. You have nothing to fear.

Nothing to fear? Read on. What we have to fear, once those without principles are 'the law' of the land, is frighteningly, gruesomely plain.

For all the horror stories we've heard about euthanasia in recent years, there are still many people who think of it as "mercy killing." Those people need to take a long, hard look at what's happening in the Netherlands right now. It's very difficult to find anything merciful about what Dutch doctors are doing to children and infants.

According to Wesley J. Smith in the Daily Standard, Groningen University Hospital in the Netherlands now officially allows doctors to euthanize children under twelve, "if the doctors believe their suffering is intolerable or if they have an incurable illness." That includes non-fatal illnesses and disabilities. Whether or not the child can consent is irrelevant — what child under twelve would have a clear idea of what he or she was consenting to?

As Smith writes, "For anyone paying attention to the continuing collapse of medical ethics in the Netherlands, this isn't at all shocking.... Doctors were [already] killing approximately 8 percent of all infants who died each year in the Netherlands. That amounts to approximately eighty to ninety per year.... The study found that a shocking 45 percent of neo-natologists and 31 percent of pediatricians who responded to questionnaires had killed infants." Smith adds that at least a fifth of the killings were performed without parental consent. [sic! — kk]

Remember those gruesome statistics the next time someone tries to tell you that euthanasia doesn't hurt anyone, that it's just a way of helping people die with dignity. That argument is flawed in itself because killing destroys a human life created in God's image. No matter how 'humanitarian' the reason, killing is by definition harmful....


Wesley Smith puts it this way: "Why does accepting euthanasia as a remedy for suffering in very limited circumstances inevitably lead to never-ending expansion of the killing license? Blame the radically altered mindset that results when killing is redefined from a moral wrong into a beneficent and legal act. If killing

is right for, say, the adult cancer patient, why shouldn't it be just as right for the disabled quadriplegic, the suicidal mother whose children have been killed in an accident, or the infant born with profound mental retardation?"

There can be little doubt anymore that the "slippery slope" of euthanasia has turned into an avalanche. As I've said before, once this kind of attitude starts to spread, as it did in Germany in the 1930's, to the world's horror, and as it is spreading in America as well as Europe today — no one is truly safe. It can be only a matter of time before lawmakers and doctors determine that none of us needs to have any say in whether we or our loved ones live or die.

That what Colson reports on is happening in the Netherlands, what we of Dutch descent once called the 'mother' country, makes it all the more shocking and evil. The Dutch pride themselves in being the most civilized and tolerant of nations. They have deliberately legalized every evil in the name of broad-mindedness. Permit it, let it go, it will do no harm.

No harm? What you have just read above is where this promoting of immorality in the name of toleration leads, namely, those in places of authority killing, without a qualm, in the name of mercy. Going about it like robots, like cold-blooded serpents, with scarcely a blink. This is the end of the liberal road — a conscience seared and gone. Cold-blooded killers, but by their own definition and propaganda, the very lovers of humanity and angels of mercy. What does the apostle Paul say in II Corinthians 11:14? Look it up. But Satan remains the angel of darkness for all that.

This is all part of the agenda of the liberal university instructors and their political protégés. And they wonder why we live in mortal dread of their 'mercies' and being 'the law of the land'! 

The Types of Scripture

The Garden of Eden (2)

One of the institutions of Paradise, so it was pointed out, was the tree of life. This tree was good for food, and it nourished man's frame at its fountainhead. It was capable of maintaining in man the powers of an endless life. However, man soon forfeited his privilege of eating of the fruit of this tree. He did so when he ate of the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, whereupon disobedient man was expelled from the garden of Eden. And the way of the tree of life was kept by the cherubim with the flaming sword, which turned every way. But there was also the promise of a seed that would gain the ascendancy over the malice of the devil. It was declared to fallen man that life eternal would again be his portion. But he was made to look for the promised good from new quarters, for the way of the tree was kept. Thus the tree of life became the symbol of grace and the schoolmaster training the believers to Christ. These are the matters upon which we dwell in our previous essay.

With respect to the tree of life, there are still other matters to which we should attend. We will now retrace our steps and inquire into the full meaning of this tree, and attempt to lay hold on its sig-

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nificance in its relation to man, both as an inhabitant of the garden and as an exile from it.

Life-giving properties of the tree of life

The garden of Eden was a garden of life. Everything radiated vitality. Every tree there was laden with food. The productions of the garden were nourished by streams of water flowing through it and keeping it in perpetual healthfulness. Numerous animals roamed amidst its bowers.

Eden was the garden of a life of delight. The glories of God were upon every creature. And there was peace. The wolf and the lamb dwelt together, and the leopard lay down with the kid and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together. The inhabitants of the garden were not made to tremble by the voice of God thundering marvelously. Instead, there was the cool of the day in which the voice of God walked in the garden. To live there was a joy.

Also the tree of life, which stood in the midst of the garden, was a tree of *life*, and that in a very unique sense. It did what no other tree could do: it nourished man's frame in such a way as to maintain in him the powers of an endless life. Its fruit was very invigorating. It nourished and stimulated man and gladdened his heart as no other tree did.

The tree of life was a life source. To be sure, its life-giving properties had been created and were being maintained by God, who is the ultimate fountain of all

life. Yet, in a creaturely sense, this tree was a life source. There are, among things creaturely, fountains. Scripture even compares regenerated man to a fountain of living water. Said Jesus to the woman of Samaria: "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life" (John 4:14). So this tree. It was a life source, and as such served as a sign or symbol of God, the ultimate source of all life — the Lord God, by whose word man liveth. This tree was eminently capable of rendering this service, since it maintained in man his powers perpetually.

This tree, then, as do all things creaturely, showed man knowledge of God and uttered speech day by day. And the speech that it uttered was that God is the true bread of life. For this reason the trees of life constituted the inner sanctuary of the garden, which means that they were very closely associated with God. In this grove it was, that He communicated with man. To dwell in the grove of the trees of life meant to dwell before God's face. To eat of these trees was expressive of the desire to be nourished by Him.

The tree of life, then, was a symbol of God. All things creaturely are that, in a greater or lesser degree, for the reason that upon every creature God impressed something of His own image. Thereupon the poet could sing, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth

his handiwork.” So the tree of life. It was made to appear for the purpose of exhibiting unto man that he lives by the word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Almighty.

Yet it would lead to confusion to apply the term sacrament to this particular tree, for the word sacrament is used to signify those signs the institution of which was necessitated by sin.

Man’s awareness of the significance of the tree of life

We may be sure that Adam, in the state of righteousness, understood the speech of creation, and in particular the speech of the tree. To maintain the contrary is equal to maintaining that holy man regarded the tree as an independent source of life and, hence, as a second God. In that case Adam would have been an idolater. But idolatry and sinlessness of life and conduct do not go well together. We conclude that the ears of holy man were attuned to the speech of the tree of life.

But what was there that compelled man to conclude that the tree of life was but a channel or vehicle of power and vitality and that the ultimate fountain of life was God? The knowledge that this tree, as well as every other tree of the garden, was a creation of the Almighty, and that the ultimate source of power is God. The tree pointed to its Maker, as all things creatural do, and aided man in contemplating God as the true bread of life.

Further, this sign was accompanied by the spoken word. There was that other tree — the tree of knowledge of good and evil, concerning which the Lord God had said, “The day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” Hence, eating from the tree of life, man lived. Yielding to the temptation of eating from this other tree, man died. Add to this that man was aware of the fact that these two trees were the handiwork of the Almighty. Armed with this

knowledge, he could not escape the conviction that, of life, God’s will is the *creative* cause, and, of death, the *necessary* cause. Having been brought in contact with the two trees and having heard God speak, man knew now that he lived by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

Not by bread alone

Let us attend to this last assertion. It is found in Deuteronomy 8:3 and reads, “And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.” This utterance of God, and the event that it signifies, is a divine protest. All the thoughts of the wicked are that there is no God. He refuses to admit that God is the efficient cause of the appearance, existence, and subsistence of things creatural, and in particular of the bread that he eats. In other words, depraved man declines to acknowledge that every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of lights. Bread, the wicked substitutes for God and worships as God.

To counteract this lie, the Lord God fed His people, while they were in the desert, with manna. Its appearance means that God had departed from His usual way of providing His people with food. For we do not read that the manna was a product of the soil of the desert. That is to say, all indications that this food was of the herb yielding seed after its kind are lacking. It is asserted, on the other hand, that the Lord rained this food from heaven. “Then said the Lord God unto Moses, Behold, I will rain

bread from heaven for you” (Ex. 16:4).

The rationalist sets aside this Scripture and insists that this food was a product of the wilderness. He identifies the manna with the sap of the Tamarisk and other trees, still collected in the desert of Arabia.

He who is bent on honoring the sacred record will reject this view. The manna was rained from heaven, and for this reason its appearance could serve to demonstrate that man lives because God speaks or so wills. For in providing His people with this food, He did not avail Himself of the husbandmen among Israel. He did not set them to work tilling the soil, for there was no soil to be tilled. To the contrary, this food was rained from heaven. It was clearly demonstrated to the people that bread, this bread, together with its nourishing properties, is a creation of the Almighty.

Having been made to see that bread is God’s handiwork, the children of Israel knew that if it nourished them, it did so because God so wills, because the Almighty speaks. Thus it was exhibited unto them that bread is but a vehicle of strength, a means, and that the *source and sustainer* of life is God. In a word, they were made to see that man lives by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

This does not mean that God is not the author of food that is the

product of the soil. For the soil and its tiller, together with rain and sunshine, are His creations as well. The soil, too, produces only when God speaks. “And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may


chance of wheat, or of some other grain: but *God giveth* it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body” (I Cor. 15:37, 38).

Thus it was exhibited unto them that bread is but a vehicle of strength, a means, and that the source and sustainer of life is God.

In fine, depraved man hates God and sets Him aside, and deifies the means and instruments of God, including himself. The wicked one then says in his heart, "My power and the might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth." In respect to the manna, however, there were no known means to be deified. This corn was made to rain from heaven. Hence we read, "And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know" (Deut. 8:3).

But Adam, in the state of righteousness, cannot be charged with the sins described above. He assigned creation, and in particular the tree of life, to its proper place. He heard its speech, uttered day by day, and glorified God.

Now the garden of Eden, and in particular the trees of life, constituted the sanctuary of Paradise. There God dwelt. Hence, if man would live, he must abide in the garden. He must dwell in the presence of God, for to live apart from God is death. Man must eat of the

fruit of the garden, and in particular of the fruit of the trees of life. Eating of these trees was at once an act of faith. The act indicated that man recognized and desired God as the true bread of life. As often as man entered the garden, so often did he enter the sanctuary of the Lord God, where the beauties of the Lord were exhibited to him. And, pressing on to the center of the garden, he stood in the presence of his God. As often as he ate of the fruit of its trees he said, "Thou art my God." 

"Still Musing on New Year News"

A little late, I realize, for "New Year" reflections. Especially for you Grace Life readers who read this some time in February. By now we might have broken fifty-three resolutions. And maybe we are thinking already of spring. Bear with me....

Imagine you are with me as I write this, and it is New Year's Eve, and you are not particularly interested that some ball is going to drop, but you might be a bit concerned that some bomb will soon drop, and you are looking ahead and wondering if this next year will be more of the same, and how you will be the same or different, and if this will be the year you meet Mr. or Miss Right, and your ship will come in....

Or maybe even, besides thinking of losing weight, you are thinking of how this year you will lay

aside the weight that does so easily hinder your running a particularly grueling but blessed race....

Hear now....

The News...

At the beginning of a new year we think of things, well, *new*. New, first ever, will be January 1, 2005. Every day this next year as new as a filly, and new sonnets, new joy, new life, new tidal waves, new sadness, new deaths....

The prospect of things new is grist for the grumpy thoughts of the pessimist. Bad knees this year. Two thousand and five will be a backache. Tsunami today. Volcano tomorrow. Right in my backyard.

Optimists, however, relish the new, and the new year too. Sweetheart shipped a dozen roses in January 2004. Two thousand and five my ship will come in. War today. Peace tomorrow. All over the world.

Believers think of the new in light of God's Word. The result is an outlook surely not sourly

pessimistic, nor pie-in-the-sky-optimistic. Could it be something like *optipessimism*? Call it *realism*.

For, on the one hand, Scripture itself speaks of hopeless and ugly things—all sorts of them. Things which have always been. Things which are. And things which, no doubt, will dance disgracefully into this new year, and leave a peculiar odor of hellfire in whatever theatre, museum, laboratory, university, or church they wiggle and jiggle and giggle and finagle.

For the Bible speaks of sin. It speaks of a whole world that lies in wickedness. Yes, it really does! And therefore vanity of vanities, all is vanity, says the Book. And earthlings building towers making a name for themselves. And Athenians spending all their time with new philosophies. And men doing with men that which is unseemly.

And so it shall be! 2005? More vanities. Bigger towers. Wiggling theologians and theologies of jelly. Giggling parishioners with itching

ears. Democrats. Throw it on the wall and call it art. Funny laws for wicked marriages. Broken home after broken home. And earthquakes and waves which are *condemnation*.

On the other hand, many are the beautiful and lovely things of which Scripture speaks. God our Savior. Wonderful. Counselor. The Mighty God. The Everlasting Father. The Prince of Peace. The fairest of ten thousand. The Sun of Righteousness. Predestination. Creation. Providence. Israel. Bethlehem. The Cross. Blessings in heavenly places. Forgiveness of sins. Fruit of the Spirit. Though thou passest through the waters I will be with you. Church. Mission. Heaven. God shaking the earth *to save*. And wave upon wave of grace....

Many, too, such is the written revelation, are the *new* and lovely and hopeful things. Things like these: the new covenant of God with us in Jesus; a new creature by virtue of the new birth; a new man; a new heart; a new spirit; a new commandment of love; a new name given in heaven; a new heaven and earth and Jerusalem of glory; and God will do a new thing.

These good news things, revelation from heaven, the old and the new news of God and salvation in Jesus, we have *now*. And truly they shall be *coming* in this next year!

Hear Now...

Well then, in 2005 the prospects are equally dismal for those who wish they all could be California girls, for those whose gospel is tolerance, and for all cultured despisers of God and His Truth. Two thousand five will be, for all such, a year of further and hastening judgment. It will be one year nearer the time when men and women and societies and especially apostate churches and Calvinian colleges and seminaries, all of whom either began with God and

chose for Man, or who have never ceased from Man, will cast their idols of silver and of gold and of theology to the moles and to the bats to go into the clefts of the rocks...for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty, when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth (Is. 2: 20-22).

But what a great year ahead of us, God's people! He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things (Rom. 8:32)?! Come what may in this year, *shall not our Lord be coming, and that, right quickly?* When we sin in 2005, when we show our-

selves unworthy of the least bit of divine favor in 2005, shall not God lead us to repentance, and enable us to overcome our pride, our tempers, our lusts, our bad habits, and our own disgraceful dancing with death? In whatever we may experience, whatever trial or disease or distress, and though we be persecuted for righteousness' sake, will not the Lord our Lord be making us more than conquerors, and ever keeping us in His love, and continually guiding us...*to glory* (Rom. 8:31ff.; Ps. 73:24)?

That is the news, dear reader! Do we hear it now? If we hear it, we shall be...

Listening. Listening and Reflecting. Listening and more meditative. Putting down cell phones more. Picking up Bibles more. Thinking, not just doing. Comfortable with quiet. Not worried that the rats or cancer or both are winning. Renewed by the power of the True and truly Good news. Not needing to know what internet junkies know. And then...

Believing. When there is a hearing of the news of God, *a hearing that bends the ear, a hearing that loves to hear*, this is the hearing of faith. And for faith. And for, therefore, a keen interest and de-

light, even in this our idolatrous and sensuous age, in the things not seen, the joys of spiritual blessings, the music from heaven. And therefore...

Singing. Oh yes, Grace Life! Two thousand and five! Let it find us...*singing!*

For with the news *from God our Father for Jesus' sake* has come a new song. Hear it? Heaven's inhabitants sing it—its Elders (Rev. 5:9), and its tabernacle choir of the

144,000 (Rev. 14).

Jesus sang it when He came to do the will of His Father (Ps. 40:3,7,8). Composed it with the Father from everlasting did He. Came cooing it

in Bethlehem's manger did He. Soloed on the cross, did He. Preaches it in the great congregation, does He. And has written the score of the gospel on our heart, has He!

So we. The new song. Of worthy is the Lamb! Of God with us and grace now and forever! God's news. For the new song put in our hearts and on our lips. And for our life, a song of praise. For the new year, and every day in it, beloved in Christ! Such a song!

Sing it! So you can hear it, *and do live it*. Yes, so that your life is a song and, yes, a dance, a lovely dance.

For the better song and gladness and godliness of your fellow tenors and second sopranos.

So that others still stuck singing a song to Self hear you, see you, and behold your God in you, and are saved to sing and to join the choir.

So God and angels and just men made perfect hear it. And clap.

Grace Life—for *singing in the new year!*

Happy, song-full great glad news year!

See you there. Sing you there!



Treasures of the Snow

With winter weather about us, God leads our thoughts to consider again His handiwork in the snow. We must marvel at this aspect of creation and stop to consider the wondrous works of God. We see that God brings a particular freshness, beauty, and joy to our world when He sends snow. Many of us have awakened to a world transformed overnight. Dead leaves and dirt are covered in a blanket of pure white snow. Frost and snow lie upon the branches of the trees, and the thick snowy blanket upon the ground makes the home especially cozy. The blanket of snow absorbs much of the sound waves and hushes the hustle and bustle of our world. Snow-piles invite our children to jump, wrestle, and tunnel among them. And for those who are privileged to experience a crisp and cold winter, there is the “crunch” of the snow underfoot as you briskly make your way. Unfortunately, our childlike love for snow is often dampened by the extra work associated with it — shoveling, working in deep snow, getting stuck, bundling up, less than ideal driving conditions, and the like. Yet, snow ought to have an enjoyable place in our lives, and we are to learn to appreciate it as a gift from God. In particular, we see it as a gift from God, in that we recognize snow as another means by which we might know Him. While snow has many facets, it is the purpose of this article to focus on only

one — how snow crystals are formed — and what this teaches us about our God.

Snow Without God?

This article was prompted by my discovering a new book entitled: *The Snowflake: Winter's Secret Beauty*. I quickly read it, finding much of it exciting and fascinating. Yet, even after only a few paragraphs, it was clear that something was missing. Where was God? Throughout the entire book there was no reference to God, only to nature. How disappointing! Unbelievable effort must have been exerted to leave the Creator totally out of His creation! Yet, the facts that were presented about snow, and the clear, powerful writing, vivid pictures, and diagrams are fascinating when read with the proper perspective. So I kept the book and hope to share some of its findings with my students. What is so interesting about snow is all the variety of snow crystals that can exist and the fascinating ways in which God forms them. What is greatly disappointing, however, is the world's denial of the hand of God in this work. An entire book, dedicated to explaining how snow crystals form and the beauty and diversity in these snow crystals, sadly begins and ends without mention of God.

The publisher (Voyageur Press) writes on the inside cover of the book that “The snowflake is a fleeting, mysterious work of *nature's* [emphasis mine] art that has long fascinated humans.” They, herein, show no recognition of God in the work of forming the snow. The writers also show their unbelief as they deny the Creator and show honor to the creation rather than

to God. “So where is the creative genius, capable of designing snow crystals in an endless variety of beautiful patterns? It lives in the ever-changing wind” (p. 47). They credit an *ever-changing* wind, rather than the *changeless God*, for the creation of snow. “The symmetrical patterns demonstrate the spontaneous generation of complex structures in the physical world” (p. 104). “All crystals demonstrate an amazing organizational ability — they assemble themselves” (p. 38). The writers claim that the beautiful symmetry observed in snowflakes arises spontaneously and that the crystals assemble themselves into the orderly arrangement that they are observed to have. How true and plainly obvious is God's word in Romans 1, when we see the unbelief of the world in these quotations. God teaches us that the world recognizes that God exists and that He must be served as God alone, but “they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened” (Rom 1: 21).

We must humble ourselves, because if it were not for the grace of God that changed our hard heart into a heart of flesh, that opened our blind eyes to see God, we would, because of our depraved nature, do the same foolish things as the world. Without God's grace we would believe the evolutionary teachings of the world. Thanks be to God that He gave us eyes to see and ears to hear the truth of the gospel. Thanks be to God that He has turned us from being wise in our own minds and made us to be the babes who have received the revelation of God. “At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of

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heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes” (Matt. 11: 25).

Formation of Snow Crystals

The book’s publisher takes note of the fact that “even today at the beginning of the twenty-first century, we cannot fully explain how snowflakes are created. The mystery remains unsolved.” This reminds us of God’s speech to Job, when God showed His might by asking Job questions such as, “Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? ...Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? ...Canst thou send lightnings, that they may go, and say unto thee, Here we are?” (Job 38: 4, 22, 35). Man is feeble and nothing in the sight of God apart from Christ, and, for all his technology and developments, knows nothing about the creation if he does not know God who created it and upholds it each day. We know not a bit more than what God allows us to know, in what our puny, finite minds can hold. So much remains and will remain a mystery to us.

Yet, through a careful study, we observe the characteristics of snow crystals and categorize them into two basic types of crystals: multi-branched snow stars, and long columnar or needle-like crystals. Although physicists and snow-watchers have classified snow crystals into 80 categories, we can consider all of these categories to be summarized into those two basic crystal-line types. Snow star crystals, sometimes called stellar crystals, usually have six primary branches, with each of the branches having its own side-branches. Many times the side-branching on each original branch is symmetrical, although not necessarily. This is the kind of snow crystal most people picture when they think of snow — intricately

branched snow crystals. The other type of snow crystal is the column-type or needle-like crystals. These are hexagonal prisms of ice. Imagine the typical wooden pencil that has six sides. Columnar crystals are thin columns of ice, usually in this hexagonal form, as pictured by the wooden pencil.

Snow crystals form in the upper atmosphere when water in the vapor form turns into water in the solid form. If the water vapor first turns into liquid water (rain) and then into the solid form, the precipitation formed is called “sleet.” Snow crystals, on the other hand, are formed when water vapor, under the correct temperature and atmospheric pressure, forms into solid water crystals. Any time a gas or liquid is cooled the molecules move slowly enough

Thanks be to God that He has turned us from being wise in our own minds and made us to be the babes who have received the revelation of God.

that they begin to crowd each other and make bonds with each other, forming a solid. As more water vapor lands on the ice crystal, the ice crystal slowly enlarges, and, in the case of stellar snow star crystals, more branches and side-branches appear on the ice crystal.

The complexity of the snow crystal depends on two main factors: temperature and humidity. These are the means God uses to form each snowflake into the particular, unique snowflake that is formed. Certain types of snow crystals form under certain atmospheric temperatures. At 28°F and below, just below the freezing point of water, thin plate-like crystals form. At 23°F through 6°F, long thin needles form. At 5°F through -12°F, thin plate-like crystals form again, and at -13°F, thick plate columnar crystals form. The level of moisture in the atmosphere also contributes to the shape of the snow crystal formed. More moisture in the atmosphere (high humidity) results in complex patterns of snow crystalli-

zation because more water vapor is available to join the already forming crystal. Low humidity results in more simple patterns forming.

The authors of *The Snowflake: Winter’s Secret Beauty*, explained snowflake formation this way: “The precise morphology of each falling crystal is determined by its random and erratic motions through the atmosphere. A complex path yields a complex snowflake. And since no two crystals follow exactly the same path to the ground, no two crystals will be identical in appearance” (p. 47). “With dozens or hundreds of distinct features, each in a particular location, it soon becomes extremely unlikely that two crystals will ever have all the same features in all the same places” (p. 103).

By contrast, we maintain that the snow crystals do not fall by some random erratic movement, but that God, in His providence, guides and directs the path of every single snowflake that is formed. We also believe that every snowflake is unique, not because of the improbability of any two snowflakes falling the same path with the same humidities and temperatures, but because the sovereign God is almighty, powerful, infinite, and incomprehensible, and He chooses a particular path for each snowflake. In His power He forms every detail of each snowflake as He causes each to move in the path He has willed for it. Confessing Belgic Confession Article 12, which states that God gave to every creature its being, shape, form, and several offices, we maintain that God forms each snow crystal. As God has formed everything else in the creation with such intricacy and detail, so He creates snow. And our God, whose ways are so far above our ways, always works and operates in an orderly way and, as in the case of snow formation, uses very simple techniques and variables (humidity, temperature, and time in the air) as means to form the snow. We do not deny what the scientist has observed,

namely, that humidity and temperature are factors that make the snowflake have the appearance that it does. But we emphatically maintain that the sovereign God has ordained the snowflake formation to occur in this way, and each time He sends snow, He is immanently active in the formation of each particular snowflake. Thus, God's power is clearly seen as we observe the detail in the snowflakes. We marvel at the minute details of snow crystal formation and confess, as Job had to, that we have not entered into the treasures of the snow.

Clear as Crystal

Although much could be written about snow and what it teaches about God, we limit ourselves to only one aspect here — its crystal formation. Certainly we know that the Bible talks about snow, as relating to its “whiteness,” as a picture of the washing away of our sins. But since this and other important spiritual truths have been dealt with already in other articles in the *Beacon Lights* and the *Standard Bearer*, we mention the purity of snow only in passing.*

As mentioned previously, God's providence is clearly observed in the study of snow crystal formation. These snow crystals do not form at the “whim” of the wind, or by mere chance, spontaneously generating and assembling themselves. Each crystal is perfectly formed and fashioned according to the infinite wisdom of God. Each crystal is uniquely formed so that God reveals to us His majesty and power. In that, God is glorified. In His wisdom, He forms each crystal in the particular way He does with the goal that that particular formation show magnificently His glory.


Although the Bible does not specifically mention snowflakes as crystals, it does speak of other crystalline substances. Think, for example, of Revelation 21, which pictures the church as a temple made up of many different and beautiful stones, or crystals.

And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal ... and the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst. (Rev. 21: 10-11, 19-20).

Each precious stone, each gem, each crystal (snowflake or otherwise) has a beauty of its own because of the wonder of its marvelous creation. Each gem is intricately designed and sculpted on the molecular level to give it its own beauty of color and shape — for the purpose of the splendor of the whole. A glorious figure it is — of a glorious church. Every member of the body of Christ is fitted perfectly in that temple, each in his own place, each made beautiful by the blood of Christ, each equipped by the Creator with gifts and abilities to be used for the benefit of the body. Yes, in their beauty and diversity, and with their multitude of shapes and forms, snow crystals, too, testify of the marvelous diversity in the body of Christ. May we be reminded of that glorious reality when we contemplate the treasures of the snow.

Snow crystals, particularly their formation, teach us one more thing about the church and its members. Just as God carries each snowflake through a particular path to the earth — a path necessary to bring about its beauty and intricacy (as it passes through different humidities of air and different temperatures of air, it forms into its own unique structure), so too God carries us through our particular path here on the earth.

Each of us is formed and made into a particular member of the body of Christ, each with special abilities, characteristics, and beauty, by God's shaping hand as He directs our pathway here below. We are brought through many diverse afflictions for the express purpose of God forming and trying us to make us “perfect,” lacking nothing, so that we are equipped for our particular place in heaven (James 1:2-4; I Pet. 1: 6-7). All of us are born into the family we have, into the church community of which we are a part, into the schools we attend, so that we are molded and shaped for our place in the kingdom of heaven. All of our experiences are planned and directed by God as *best* for us in order that we be formed for our eternal place in glory.

This brings us unspeakable comfort and joy. Herein lies, at least in part, the answer for *why* we receive what befalls us in this life. Sometimes we cry out with the Psalmist, “Hath God forgotten to be gracious?” (Ps. 77: 9). The answer is a resounding, “NO!” God remembers and loves us. In His love for us He makes and molds us for our particular, unique place in heaven. Whatever way He has chosen for us, we go on in faith, knowing it is the best and only way to make us into the unique members of His body that He wants us to be in order to glorify His good and gracious name to the fullest. *Rejoice*, then! Rejoice in the Lord *always!* — For we see the providential hand of God, that directs all events in our lives so that we are shaped and formed into exactly the beautiful members of the body of Christ that we are and ever shall be. Thanks be to God for the treasures of the snow that so vividly picture this reality! 

* For more reading on the spiritual significance of snow read:

Huizenga, John. *Beacon Lights: Ice Crystals Through the Spectacles of Scripture*. Jan. 1999, Vol. 58, No. 1, pp. 13-14.

Lubbers, Mary Beth. *Standard Bearer: Standing Before His Cold*. Vol. 75, No. 11, pp. 250-1.

More on Working Moms

In our last article on the subject of working mothers (December 15, 2004) we included a letter written by a sister in our Edmonton Protestant Reformed Church. We included that letter because, first of all, it expressed in a very positive way the desire of a godly mother to be a “keeper of the home.” The glorious task of caring for a family is all but forgotten in our society! It is refreshing to hear that mothers in the church see their labor in the church not as degrading and ignoble, but as lofty and challenging.

But we also included this letter in our last article because it raises a matter that needs further clarification. It seems that the sister (and I am sure that she is not alone) struggles with the question: Is it a sin for a mother to earn money by working outside of the home. She asks this question in her letter: “The last question is: do you place this in the realm of Christian liberty? Or is it commanded?” Although different matters are brought to the foreground in her letter, they in essence center in this one question.

Before considering this question, we would do well to reread the article I wrote that is being questioned. This article appeared some time ago, in the April 1, 2004 issue of the *Standard Bearer*, entitled “Working Mothers.” In that article I called attention to the attitude expressed by some who wish to lay down a law to govern this matter:

“There is that eleventh commandment, you know, that we must abide by in every instance, ‘Mothers, thou shalt not work outside the home.’”

To this statement our sister takes exception. She writes in her letter, “This statement came off sounding rather sarcastic, leaving me with the impression you were about to embark in a whole different direction than your previous article” (cf. *Standard Bearer*, March 1, 2004, “God’s Command to Mothers”). She also took exception to this statement I made in the article “Working Mothers”: “There are conceivably times when a mother will work outside the home and family.” All this indicates that the basic question she is grappling with is: Does God’s Word lay down a law according to which we can conclusively say it is sin for any mother to work outside of the home? Or, may a mother at times, when necessity dictates it, find work to supplement the income of the family?

Before answering this question, I want to make it clear that in the article “Working Mothers” I did not approve of career women who neglect their families in order to pursue their own goals in the work force. I stated that the Bible does not give its approval of those women who find little or no satisfaction in the home and family raising children but can find “fulfillment” only outside of the home pursuing a career. That was clear enough in the article. The issue in question here then is that of women who, together with their husbands, have considered finding some work that will help supplement family income, without jeopardiz-

ing time spent with children. This is the matter in question.

In these instances the question is raised: Is a mother’s working outside of the home expressly forbidden by the Scriptures or is it a matter of Christian liberty? The answer is: It is a matter of Christian liberty.

There seems, however, to be a misunderstanding of the concept of Christian liberty. The idea seems almost to be that placing something in the realm of Christian liberty gives license to people to live the way they want to live, with no regard for the way that God wills for them to live. This misunderstanding reveals itself in the letter of the sister. If something is not a command of Scripture, if it is not a black and white issue, then it is “fraught with indecision and no clear direction from God.” If I indeed insist that the matter of working mothers be placed in the area of Christian liberty, she asks, “will not there be mothers who now feel they have just cause to pursue work outside the home since Rev. Bruinsma has given them the ok?”

Placing a matter in the area of Christian liberty does not leave us without clear direction from God. And God forbid that placing a matter in the area of Christian liberty gives anyone a right to follow what a mere man says, rather than what the Scriptures clearly point out. The matter of a mother working outside of the home is indeed governed by Scripture! The Bible very clearly sets forth the principles by which we ought to live in this area of daily living. We made a point of setting forth those principles in the article, “God’s Command to Mothers.” The Bible draws the pic-

ture of a mother in the home in Psalm 128:3. She is a vine by the sides of the house. Paul commands younger widows in I Timothy 5:14 to “marry, bear children, guide the house.” The Word of God in Titus 2:4, 5 instructs older women in the church to teach the younger women to be “keepers at home.” It is obvious from the Word of God that the principle that a mother ought to follow is to be a keeper of the home.

Yet, in none of these passages is a law set forth: “It is sin for a mother to work outside of the home.” We do not read that anywhere in the Word of God. Neither can this be inferred from any of the commandments that are given us in the Decalogue. This can be done, of course, in other instances, where the Bible clearly ties an exhortation together with a commandment. For example, we believe that unlawful divorce is a sin because the Bible expressly teaches that it is a violation of the seventh commandment. The same is true of remarriage when one’s spouse is still alive. It violates the seventh commandment. The Bible is clear in these instances. But there are other times when the Bible sets forth the principles of godly living and gives them over into the hands of God’s people to live them out, by the grace that dwells in them.

The Bible is equally clear concerning the idea of Christian liberty. In Philippians 2:12, 13 the apostle gives us important instruction in this area. As God’s people we must be deeply aware that it is God that works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. On that basis we are called to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. We are called to take the principles of Scripture and, without a law dictating exactly what we must do, live out of that new life of Christ that God has worked in

our hearts. The apostle gives similar instruction in Titus 3:8, 9, “This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men. But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and *strivings about the law* [emphasis

mine — WGB]; for they are unprofitable and vain.” The idea that the Word of God sets forth here is clear. We are called to walk in all good works by applying unto ourselves the principles of God’s

Word. But at the same time we must do this without enslaving ourselves to a law that the Scriptures do not give.

When the apostle Paul exhorted the Galatian church with these words in Galatians 5:1, “Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage,” he did not mean that we were free from law. He did not mean that God’s law and commandments serve no more function in the life of a child of God. They do! We are not lawless. But what Paul meant here is: do not entangle yourselves with all kinds of laws that the Bible does not make. Live in your liberty. Take the principles of God’s Word and apply them diligently to your life so that you walk in a way that pleases God and not self.

It is not true that the way of Christian liberty is “fraught with indecision and no clear direction.” Neither does the way of Christian liberty destroy the antithetical life. But the way of Christian liberty allows each child of God to take the principles of God’s Word and work

them out prayerfully in his own life in a way he believes is in keeping with God’s Word. When the Bible teaches us the principle that a mother ought to be a keeper of the home, it allows freedom to a husband and wife, in whom God has worked to will and to do of His good pleasure, to work that out in their lives. That will indeed vary somewhat from one home to another. But that is okay too. There ought not to be “strivings about the law” in this matter.

The problem that arises in connection with this area of Christian liberty is that our sinful flesh so often wishes to control it. When this happens, two extremes can show their ugly faces. On the one hand, there are those who will use their liberty in order to satisfy their flesh. Such mothers will indeed take the attitude: “Well, Rev. Bruinsma has given us permission to go out and work, so we can do this.” These do not take into consideration the principles of God’s Word. They are not concerned about the effect that their working

might have on their children. They have their eye on money and will stretch their liberty to satisfy their covetousness. To these, Paul writes in Galatians 5:13, “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh....” Or again, in verse 16,

“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.”


But there is another extreme that all too often shows itself. It is equally ugly and sinful. Instead of living that life of liberty in those areas of godly living, there are those who wish to make a law in every area of life (sounds like the Pharisees, does it not?) and force everyone to live by that law. Here, they contend, is the hard and fast

But the way of Christian liberty allows each child of God to take the principles of God’s Word and work them out prayerfully in his own life in a way he believes is in keeping with God’s Word.

rule: all women who work outside the home sin! It is wrong! Such is the position they take. I believe that the only difference between this and the opposite extreme is that this extreme sounds so much more pious. These seem to base their position on what they glean from the principles of Scripture. The Word of God says that a woman must be a keeper of the home, therefore all those mothers who work outside of the home sin. It does not take much to see the sin involved here too. This binds heavy burdens and grievous to be borne on men's shoulders (Matt. 23:4) and it boxes the child of God in so that he no longer is given the freedom to live out of the life of Christ that dwells in his heart. Let my husband earn the living for my family. Even if it requires of him two jobs, maybe three, to keep us above water financially. But then, is not my husband shirking his responsibility to be in the home too? (See *Standard Bearer*, January 1, 2003, "God's Command to Fathers.") What becomes of the principle that a wife is a help to her husband in all things? It does not

apply in this instance? By whose law does it not apply? Who is going to determine whether one hour of work for which I am paid is wrong, or three hours? Who is going to determine whether working for free (volunteer labor) outside of the home is permissible but working for money is wrong? Who is going to determine what is actually working outside the home and what is not?

When we go to this extreme, then everyone becomes suspicious of the other. That person is not living as godly a life as I am. I abide more closely to the rule than she does. When we make a law, then we begin to determine whether we are a better mother than someone else because "I abide by that law more faithfully than that other mother does." We set ourselves up as judges in the church and we become highly critical of other people's lives without even giving thought to the struggles and burdens that perhaps that other family is bearing but which are not evident to the eyes of others. This extreme too is wrong.

In summary, we have been given the Word of God. It teaches us about godly living in the home and family. As believers we must apply our hearts to that Word of God. We must study it and know how it applies to our lives. As believing mothers and fathers who have within us the Spirit of our risen Lord, we must be deeply conscious of the need to be with our children in order to nurture them in the things of God. We desire that, do we not? We are not those who are governed by the evil society in which we live — a society that has no idea how to raise children properly. Then as believers we must prayerfully take God's Word in hand and follow after its instruction to us. Each of us as married couples must determine for ourselves our calling before God and live out our salvation in the home and family with fear and trembling. Then we will not use our liberty to satisfy the lusts of our flesh. But neither will we bind each other so that every home and family must conform to a standard not required in the Bible. God grant us to live in our freedom! 

Charles Darwin and Evolutionism (2)

Introduction

Charles Darwin, after his five-year long journey on the HMS Beagle, developed his ideas of biological evolution, ideas that form the basis for all subsequent evolutionistic theory. His

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Previous article in this series: January 15, 2005, p. 175

work *On the Origin of Species* had more influence on subsequent thought than any other book of human writing, even though all the influence was bad. It was an extraordinarily clever tool in the determination of wicked men to drive God, the Creator of all, out of His own world. No longer was a Creator needed: evolutionism could explain how all things come into being without God.

Evolutionism has spread

through the whole world and has been accepted by almost everyone who thinks about these things at all. In fact, so all-pervasive has evolutionary thought become that the church, called to defend the scriptural doctrine of creation, lives in an extremely hostile environment, an environment in which it is fiercely threatened.

Evolutionism has developed far beyond Darwin's description of it. All things that exist, not only

living creatures, are due to evolutionary processes, it is said. The whole universe, blown apart by one “big bang,” has developed into its present form through evolution. Planet Earth, in all its rich diversity, has come from one infinitesimally small speck; and life itself was brewed by some natural processes when the first one-celled creature emerged from the soup of a primordial swamp. Powerful are the forces of darkness; small in number are those who still stand for God’s truth.

Theistic Evolutionists

Many in the church, and their numbers are legion, are convinced that evolution is perfectly compatible with the Christian faith. Such thinking goes back a long way. Even during Darwin’s lifetime, some thought that Darwin’s views constituted no threat to the church.

The Presbyterian tradition in this country, even in its days of strong Calvinism, was open to evolution. Even J. Gresham Machen would not commit himself on the question, arguing that the matter was one of science, not theology.

In Reformed circles the same has been true. The result is that today very few denominations can be found where evolutionism has not made its inroads. Some Synods and General Assemblies have openly gone on record as favoring some sort of evolution. One must go hunting with a strong flashlight to find Creationists in today’s churches.

In Eerdmans’ *Encyclopedia of Christianity* several conclusions are drawn from a discussion of the subject.

Contrary to some opinions, Christian theology has been engaged with evolutionary ideas for two centuries, although that engagement has in many instances been implicit, rather than explicit. In the 20th century that engagement has reached a high level of explicitness and sophistication.

...Most important, even though there is a staggering variety of

style and disposition among the thinkers in this survey, there is also one pervading concern and theme: that evolutionary ideas not be restricted to the materialist and reductionist interpretation that proponents of scientism tend to propound. Theologians in the main are convinced both that Christian theology can take the measure of evolution and that the idea of evolution is congenial to interpretations that bring ultimacy, transcendence, purpose, and moral earnestness into play. Scientific humanists deny this proposal, joined, ironically, by creationist thinkers; both groups insist that evolution is nothing but a materialist interpretation of the world. Interestingly, the theologians who offer a broad interpretation of evolution are joined by humanists and others of a naturalist bent who will not settle for a narrow, one-dimensional interpretation of evolution (II, 235).

In another paragraph such a synthesis of creationism and evolutionism is explained more in detail when the views of Teilhard de Chardin, the French Roman Catholic paleontologist, are discussed.

Teilhard comes as close as any thinker to a Trinitarian synthesis: the origins of the cosmos lie in God, who has set evolution into motion, giving it direction and meaning in Christ; the evolutionary process is in itself the providential working of God, who brings all reality, including what we call evil, to a divine consummation that is coincident with what is revealed in Christ. Teilhard invoked the “cosmic Christ” tradition, which is epitomized in Col. 1:17 according to which Christ himself “is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” No other Christian thinker has used evolutionary ideas more powerfully and fashioned so full a Christian synthesis on the basis of evolution. Although his architectonic proposals are at points hardly more than a sketch and sometimes highly ambiguous and controversial, they rise as a monumental achievement

of constructive Christian theological engagement with the idea of evolution (II, 233).

As Del Ratzsch points out in his book, *Battle of Beginnings: Why Neither Side is Winning the Creation-Evolution Debate*, while “creationist and naturalistic evolutionists agree on very few things, [they] do seem to agree that theistic evolution is woefully — even perniciously — confused. Surprisingly enough, their reasons sometimes overlap” (p. 180).

In short, theistic evolutionists try to “have their cake and eat it too.” They cave in completely to modern evolutionary thought, while still trying desperately to hold on to the biblical doctrine of creation. They persuade themselves that they succeed in doing so by teaching that, while evolution is an adequate and correct view of the origin of the universe, God controlled evolutionary processes.

Theistic Evolutionists and Scripture

Especially in conservative Reformed and Presbyterian circles such a theistic evolutionism has to be justified with Scripture. In spite of the fact that Darwin himself considered this absolutely impossible, today’s theologians, one after another, take their turn at attempting this hermeneutical legerdemain or sleight of hand.

Some scientists simply separate their scientific activity from their religion. They claim to be evolutionists in the laboratory or observatory as they study the stars, but they are believers in Jesus Christ and in His Word while in church on Sunday. This was the position of Howard VanTill in his book *The Fourth Day*. If scientific theory and religion conflict, it is of no consequence because science and religion need not harmonize, and life can, apparently, be easily compartmentalized. It is something like the “Sunday-go-to-church” Christianity practice of so many.


Theistic evolutionists claim that it is necessary to believe in evolution because science has conclusively proved its validity. They point to the fact that this present creation is created by the Word of God and is, therefore, itself a Word of God. God's Word appears in two places: Scripture and creation. Because God is one, His Word is one, and, therefore, His Word in creation cannot contradict His Word in Scripture. Since His Word in creation speaks of a very old world (somewhere in the neighborhood of 10 billion years old), and since the creation tells us in every nook and cranny of it that things came into existence by development from lower and simpler forms of existence to higher and more complex forms of existence, therefore our understanding of Scripture must be wrong. Scripture must, obviously, be reinterpreted.

It is something like a case of an honest God-fearing grocery store owner being robbed at gunpoint by a murderous crook. Investigating the incident, the police

are told by the crook that the owner of the store gave him everything he now has in his possession from that store; while the owner speaks of the threatening of his life and the bold robbery of the criminal. The police, content to adopt the version of the crook, tell the storeowner that his description of the robbery cannot be taken literally. The owner, they say, really meant that his gift to the robber can be construed as robbery because his conscience so smote him when he saw the poverty of the crook that he felt compelled to give him some of the store's contents. So theistic evolutionists are ready to sell out Scripture for evolution — and they do it by explaining that the scriptural narrative of creation cannot possibly be taken literally.

The numerous ways in which the scriptural narrative of creation in Genesis 1-3 is misinterpreted are more than we can describe here in this article. It seems that every few years a new idea comes along by means of which Genesis 1-3 can be explained away. My first experi-

ence with this sort of thing was via the gap theory, i.e., that a gap of millions of years existed between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. Then came the period theory, in which the "days" of Genesis 1 were interpreted as long periods of time. This was during my college years. Following the period theory came various theories that explained Genesis 1 as a doxology of praise to God for His participation in the work of creation. Genesis 1 was not the recitation of actual history; it was a symbolic hymn. Then we were told that the first chapters of Genesis were an attempt to give a Christian construction to ancient pagan myths concerning the origin of things. Ralph Janssen taught something like this before he was expelled from the Calvin Theological Seminary. Howard VanTill introduced us to the packaging theory of Genesis 1. And now along comes the Framework Hypothesis.

I am sure that some fertile mind will propound yet another theory before we are very much older. 

Book Reviews



Light for the City: Calvin's Preaching, Source of Life and Liberty by Lester DeKoster. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004. 139pp. (paper). \$20.00. [Reviewed by Prof. Barrett L. Gritters.]

Calvin scholar Lester De Koster has produced a small work whose thesis, apparent in the title, comes out more clearly in his "Forewarning," as he puts it. First he lets Calvin speak: "It certainly is the part of the Christian man to ascend higher than merely to seek and secure the salvation of his own soul." Then De Koster, rhetorically:

"Merely" the soul? Yes, so he said. And "higher" than soul-salvation? His word, too. *Higher!* To build, say, community called "city"?!

Preached from off the pulpits for which the Church is divinely made and sustained, God's biblical Word takes incarnation in human selves and behavior, creating the community long known in the West as the City. Calvinist pulpits implanted the Word even now flourishing in the great democratic achievements of the Western world [emphasis is De Koster's].

Lester De Koster contends that Calvin's goal was not church building, but City building. He speaks of "Calvin's courageous determination to preaching into a faction-ridden chaos the lineaments of the City" (p. 21). He bemoans the "absence of adequate, on-going pulpit nourishment." And he asks,

Doesn't the citizenry—while its presumed 'leadership' looks

busily some other way—seem to wait well-nigh breathless upon the appearance of another 'Calvin' borne upon a tide of divine circumstance? (p. 22).

No one writes quite like DeKoster, professor emeritus of speech at Calvin College, and former editor of the Christian Reformed Church periodical, the *Banner*. Using the English language in ways that delight, stretching the rules of grammar like few others would be permitted by editors to do, DeKoster will keep you reading. Also because it's about Calvin. And preaching. And history.

De Koster quotes Marx, let's Cromwell speak via Carlyle, reaches back to St. Benedict in the sixth century, and reflects on the opinions of obscure historians of

the early 1900s, all of which gives color and flavor to this new study of the man God mastered for the preservation of His church.

Reading lines like:

Oh yes, he was up to it—
Erasmus, move over!

and then,

Calvin remembered vividly every page he ever read, Beza says. And once, in the boot camp he thought his first Geneva experience, he totally humiliated a reckless ex-monk named Bolsec by quoting perfectly from memory, to his purposes, Church Fathers his critic had tried to use against him. Bolsec never forgot, nor forgave, and fathered a school of Calvin-vituperation, which has to this day its own history (p. 27)

made me put up my feet and settle in for the short 130 pages.

De Koster got his thesis half right: The power of God to create what He designed is the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. No other instrument has the power that the preached Word has. Nothing is like preaching as the dynamo to produce what God wills to form. This is Calvin. It's also Scripture.

The critical other half of De Koster's thesis is unconvincing, although it is popular these days.

The thinking runs like this: God's ultimate goal in the world *in human history* is not the gathering of His church but the reformation of the world. The cities of the world will become the "city of God." Politically, culturally, socially, they must (and will) be transformed. (Favorite text among those who reason this way is Jeremiah 29:7, where Jeremiah calls the people of God to "seek the peace [shalom] of the city," that is, of Babylon.) The instrument by which this transformation will take place is the church. Through her preaching and diaconal ministries (thus, the emphasis on diaconal ministries in mission theory today; although

DeKoster's emphasis is on preaching), communities will be made new and be the pleasure of God.

His argument is neither Calvin nor Scripture.

First, the alternative of "merely to seek and secure the salvation of his own soul" is not "to build community called 'city.'" The "highest aspiration of wisdom, old and new and divine," according to DeKoster, is the *City!* (p. xv). But Calvin did not believe that the "City of God" Augustine described was Geneva Christianized, or Los Angeles Christianized (p. xv). It's a simple logical fallacy to claim that one either preaches a "crusader 'gospel'" or a "word of sermon and city" and that the alternative to offering Jesus as "savior" is preaching him as Lord who creates earthly cities (see pp. 44,45).

Worse, De Koster denigrates (we hope inadvertently) the church, beloved body of Christ, by elevating the "city" to the status of the goal of the church's work. "...for John Calvin the Church is in the world to create the social structure long called *City*" (p. 66). Jesus is not as interested in His bride as He is in the City. This is commonly done in Reformed circles today, where the church is considered merely (!) a "sign" of the kingdom. So the church of the nineteenth century, in the face of Marxism, should have promoted social justice "in lieu of 'Are you saved, brother?'" (p. 56). And

For John Calvin, Jesus came to live, to die, and to rise again to take rule in human history as King, for the creation through the Word declared by the pulpits, of "a model community" we've been calling "City" and the "Kingdom," which is illustrated in the world of the West.

That Calvin taught extensively regarding civil life, and intended Geneva to be a city where the Word of God was honored and King Jesus acknowledged cannot be denied. To go from there, however,

to making the *City* the goal of Jesus' coming, death and resurrection, and that according to Calvin, is a different matter altogether. ■

The Pastor in Prayer, C.H. Spurgeon. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2004 (Based on the second edition, London, 1893). 184 pp. (cloth). \$15.99. [Reviewed by Prof. Barrett L. Gritters.]

My first acquaintance with Spurgeon's *The Pastor in Prayer* was in the early years of my ministry when I was first looking for books on pastoral prayer. Pilgrim Publications of Pasadena, Texas was re-issuing all of the sermons and works of Spurgeon, this "choice selection of C.H. Spurgeon's Sunday Morning Prayers" included (1971). One copy made its way to the used book shelf at Bakers, where I snatched it up and read a prayer a week, late each Saturday evening, taking notes as I went, to avoid the pitfalls of repetition or stale clichés in the congregational prayers.

Banner of Truth brings out a new edition, re-typeset, and with a new appendix from Spurgeon's *Lectures to My Students*.

The Reformed pastor will be enriched by Spurgeon's gift of prayer. The elder who will be required to lead the worship in the pastor's absence will be helped here. This man who, at the youthful age of twenty-one, was able to communicate his early sermons in a stunning and colorful way, was also a master at using biblical language and bringing out biblical figures of speech in his (these transcribed) prayers. The reader who is uncomfortable with addressing God in the vernacular "you" and "your" will be put at ease with Spurgeon's King James English. The reader who is not will have no problem with the old English.

The twenty-six prayers, each about five or six pages, are rich in devotional piety; in expressions of God's sovereignty; in hearty con-

fessions of sin—so rare in prayers today (“we are not willing to confess our own sinfulness until Thou dost show it to us...”); in petitions that make the believer eager for heaven (“our spirit triumphs in the anticipation of the time when all thine enemies shall be destroyed, and death and hell shall be cast into the lake of fire, and God shall be all in all”), and in obvious sympathetic unity with the people under his care (“Grant to Thy dear children who are by any means depressed because they feel the serpent at their heel, that they may bless the dear name of Him whose heel was bruised before, but who in the very bruising broke the serpent’s head”). The pastor could do worse than read Spurgeon’s congregational prayers.

Regularly, Pastor Spurgeon would pray for their “College,” the pastor-training school.

Let every brother sent out be clothed with power, and may the man sons of this church that have been brought up at her side, preach with power today. It is sweet to think of hundreds of


voices of our sons this day declaring the name of Christ. Blessed is the church that hath her quiver full of them, she shall speak with her adversaries in the gate....

Often, Spurgeon asked for blessings on the Orphanage, for the colporteurs “going from house to house,” for missions in foreign lands and “missions in the heathendom at home” (remember mid-nineteenth century London), for “plenteous prosperity to all the hosts of His Israel,” and that the Lord would graciously “gather in the unconverted”:

And, Lord, gather in the unconverted: our prayers can never conclude without pleading for the dead in sin. Oh, quicken them, Savior! and if any one here has a little daughter that lieth dead in sin, like Jairus may they plead with Jesus to come and lay His hand upon her that she may live.

My estimation is that Spurgeon was at his best when he was bringing the minds of the people before the glorious throne of God, and when he was leading them to a godly confession of sin.

We have looked upon every act of our lives and desired that in all things we might be conformed to Thy will, and Thou knowest this makes us walk very tenderly at times, and with much brokenness of spirit before Thee, because the more we look into our lives, the more we see to lament; and in proportion as Thou dost make us holy, in that very proportion do we spy our unholiness, and find nests of sin where we never dreamt that the loathsome things had been. Father, cleanse us from secret faults. Purge us! Thou hast purged us with hyssop once, and we are clean; now wash us with water, even as Thou, blessed Jesus, didst wash Thy disciples’ feet, and make us clean every whit, that we may be Thy priests and kings, sanctified wholly; and make us a people zealous of good works.

His “Our Public Prayer” (appendix 2 from his *Lectures to my Students*) is a fine read about congregational prayer, as well as (almost incidentally) a beautiful defense of *preaching* as the heart of the church’s worship. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Young People’s Activities

Saturday, December 11, the young people of the South Holland, IL PRC enjoyed an afternoon of ice-skating at Millennium Park in downtown Chicago. Skating started in mid-afternoon, after which the young people went to a nearby restaurant for dinner and then back to church and home.

The members of the Young People’s Society of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL were able to take part in and enjoy a progressive dinner

on December 21. After stops at two homes for appetizers and the main meal, the young diners ended the evening back at Peace for Christmas carols, games, and dessert.

December 29 the young people from the Hull, Iowa PRC enjoyed an afternoon of tubing down snow-covered slopes. Afterwards they enjoyed an evening of pizza.

The Young People’s Society of the Edgerton, MN PRC invited their congregation, as well as congregations from nearby Iowa PRCs, to join them for their Christmas/New Year’s Singspiration on Sunday evening, December 26. A collection was taken for the 2005 Convention.

School Activities

The students of the PR Christian Grade School in South Holland, IL presented their annual Christmas program to family and friends on December 16 at Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, Indiana. The students developed the theme, “Jesus Our Shepherd.”

The Loveland, CO PR Christian School program was scheduled for December 14. Students at Loveland told the Christmas story using Scripture from Isaiah 11:10 and taking for their theme, “Jesus Christ: Jesse’s Root and Branch.”

Students from Covenant Christian High School in Walker, MI presented a combined choir and band

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

concert of Christmas music on Sunday evening, December 19, in the auditorium of Grandville High School.

Each year several of our Christian schools select a school or a mission need in our denomination and give an opportunity to teachers and students to contribute toward that cause. This past Christmas season two of our grade schools, Hope Christian in Redlands, CA and Heritage Christian in Hudsonville, MI took collections to assist needy families with whom Rev. A. Spriensma is working in the Philippine mission. Money raised was intended to purchase spiritual books and study material.

Mission Activities

In mission news from the Covenant of Grace PR Fellowship in Spokane, WA, we read recently that the month of December marked the tenth anniversary of the ordination of Rev. T. Miersma as Western Home Missionary. We, along with the members of the Spokane mission, give thanks to God for supplying this faithful servant for the cause of missions over these past years. There have been many joys and sorrows in the work, but the Lord has sustained him and his family. Let us pray that God will continue to bless the work of Rev. Miersma and his family as our denomination's missionary to Spokane.

Rev. J. Mahtani, along with his wife, visited the saints in the PR

Fellowship in Fayetteville, NC the week of January 3. Rev. and Mrs. Mahtani hoped to visit with the saints there, as well as to pursue some new contacts. They planned to follow up on some old contacts made earlier. Rev. Mahtani also planned to preach for the Fellowship on January 9.

Congregation Activities

In early December the congregation of our Peace PRC in Lansing, IL received an early Christmas present. They began to sing in their worship services using a newly purchased organ. Not only did our congregation at Peace enjoy singing using a new organ, they also had the added pleasure of hearing members of their Choral Society present a Christmas program and singspiration for them, using that same organ, on December 26.

The Choral Society at Peace was not the only one of our church choirs to present programs this past Christmas season. The Choral Society of Faith PRC in Jenison, MI presented a program of thanksgiving and Christmas songs for their congregation on December 5. The combined choirs of the Doon and Hull, Iowa PRCs gave their concert on December 5 at the Doon PRC. The Choral Society of the South Holland, IL PRC gave their Christmas Program Singspiration on Sunday, December 12. On December 12 the congregation of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI was invited to stay after the evening ser-


vice and hear a program given by their Women's Choir and Men Singers. That same night, about a mile south of Trinity, the Choral Society of the Hudsonville, MI PRC gave their annual Christmas program entitled, "Come and Worship," for the spiritual enjoyment of their congregation. And on Sunday, December 19, members of the Georgetown PRC Choir in Hudsonville, MI presented their Christmas program.

Young Adult Activities

The Young Adults' Retreat Committee of the Loveland, CO PRC hosted a singspiration Sunday evening, December 19. There was a collection for this year's Spring Retreat scheduled for March 14-17 at the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, CO.

The Young Adults of Hope PRC in Redlands, CA also hosted a Christmas Singspiration on Sunday evening, December 19. This singspiration served as a fundraiser for their anticipated Young Adults' Retreat in July.

Minister Activities

Rev. Doug Kuiper, pastor of the Randolph, WI PRC, received the call to serve as pastor of the Doon, Iowa PRC. Rev. Overway declined the call from First PRC of Edmonton, AB Canada. Hudsonville's new trio is Rev. Allen Brummel, Rev. Arie denHartog, and Prof. David Engelsma. Bethel has extended a call to Rev. denHartog. 

Announcements

TEACHER NEEDED

Eastside Christian School, Grand Rapids, MI is seeking applicants for 2005-2006 for a teaching position in a multi-grade classroom (Grades 1-3). Those applying should be members of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. Send applications and a resume to Agatha Lubbers at Eastside Christian School, 2792 Michigan St. NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49506. Telephone: (616) 942-2939.

NOTICE!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will be hosted by Bethel PRC in Roselle, Illinois on Wednesday, March 2, 2005 at 8:30 A.M. All material for the agenda should be in the hands of the stated clerk by Monday, January 31, 2005. An office-bearers' conference is planned for Tuesday, March 1, the Lord willing, on the subject of "Reformed Evangelism."

Rev. Daniel Kleyn
Stated Clerk, Classis West

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Hull PRC express their sincere Christian sympathy to the Mr. Lee Vink family on the passing away of Lee's father,

MR. ALBERT VINK.

May they find their comfort from God's Word in Psalm 23:6, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

Rev. Steven Key, President
Brian Kroese, Asst. Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Lord willing, on February 11, 2005, **GORDON and MARILYN WASSINK** will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. We, their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, rejoice with them and give God thanks for their covenant instruction, parental care, and godly walk of life.

It is our prayer that God will supply all their needs in the future as He has in the past, and grant them many more years together with us. "For thou, O God, hast heard my vows: thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy name" (Psalm 61:5).

- * Deane and Donna Wassink
- * Darle and Colleen Wassink
- * Tim and Linda Mowery
- * David (in glory)
- * Doug and Kathy Wassink
- * Ryan and Karla Feenstra
26 grandchildren
10 great grandchildren

Holland, Michigan

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Kalamazoo PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mr. & Mrs. Mel VanDyk on the passing away of his mother, and also to Mr. & Mrs. Jon VanDyk on the passing away of his grandmother,

MRS. DONNA VAN DYK.

May they find their comfort from the words of our Savior in Matthew 5: 7&8, "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, President
Mr. Tom Kiel, Clerk

NOTICE!!

All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee secretary, Mr. Jeff Kalsbeek (Phone: (616) 453-6455). This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, February 28, 2005, D.V., at Southwest PRC, 7:30 P.M.

Student Aid Committee
Jeff Kalsbeek, Secretary

OFFICEBEARERS' CONFERENCE

CLASSIS WEST OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCHES

Bethel PRC, Roselle, IL — Tuesday, March 1, 2005

Reformed Evangelism

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations..." Matthew 28:19

KEY NOTE

9:00 A.M.

The Church's Duty to Preach the Gospel Indiscriminately

Rev. Douglas Kuiper

Pastor of the Randolph PRC, Randolph, WI

SECTIONALS

10:30 A.M.

Equipping Our People for Personal Evangelism

Rev. Jaikishin Mahtani

Eastern US Missionary in the Protestant Reformed Churches

1:00 P.M.

Keeping Busy in Congregational Evangelism

Rev. Mitchell Dick

Pastor of the Grace PRC, Grand Rapids, MI

2:45 P.M.

Remembering That The Work and Fruit is of the Lord

Rev. Ronald VanOverloop

Pastor of the Byron Center PRC, Byron Center, MI

All past and present officebearers, as well as all interested people, are invited to attend. Lunch will be provided, and a free-will offering will be taken to defray expenses.

Reformed Witness Hour

Topics for February

Date	Topic	Text
February 6	"Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit"	Matthew 5:3
February 13	"Blessed Are They That Mourn"	Matthew 5:4
February 20	"Blessed Are the Meek"	Matthew 5:5
February 27	"Blessed Are They Who Hunger and Thirst After Righteousness"	Matthew 5:6