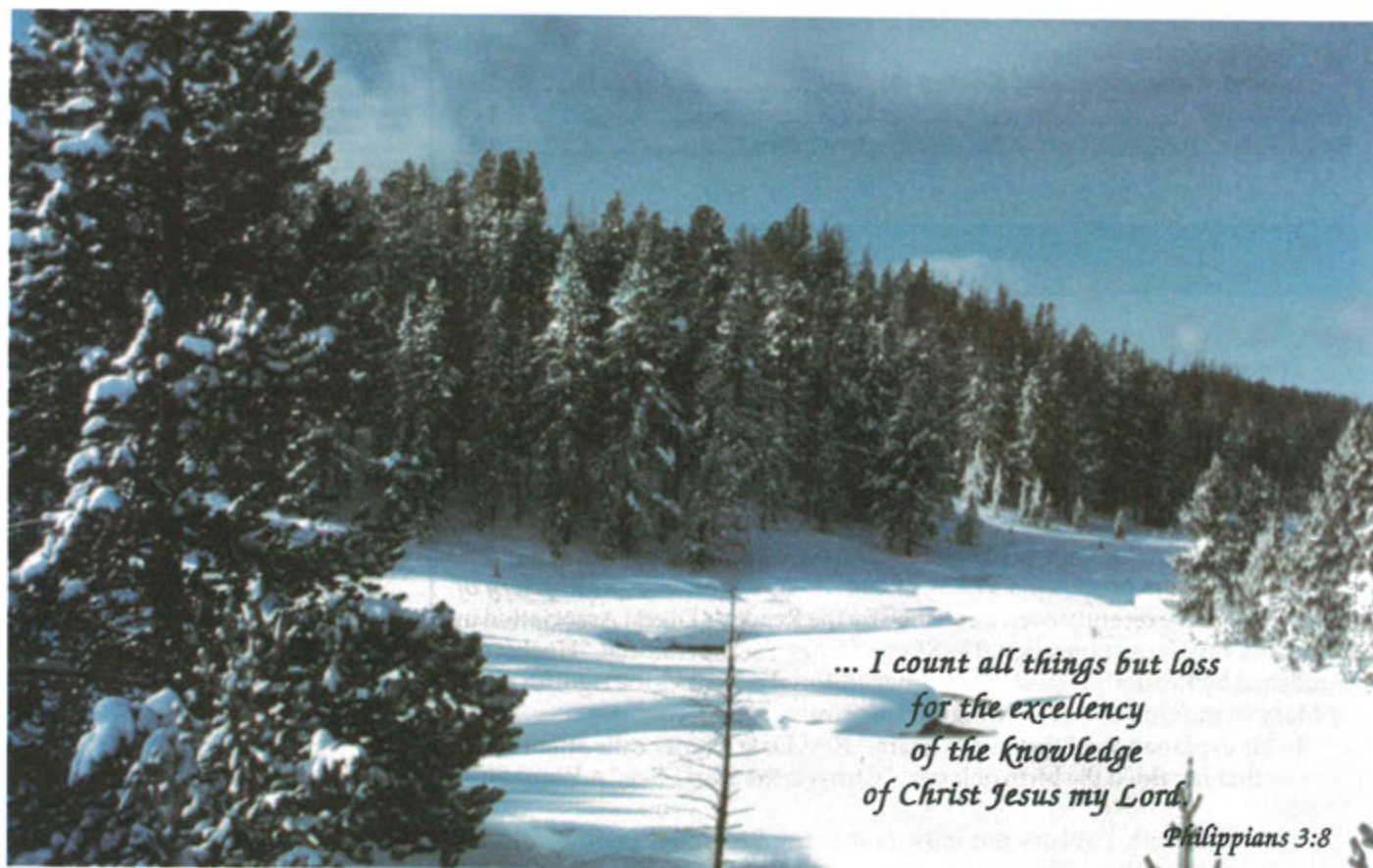




THE **STANDARD BEARER**

*A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine*



*... I count all things but loss
for the excellency
of the knowledge
of Christ Jesus my Lord,*

Philippians 3:8

*Vol. 70, No. 6
December 15, 1993*

Meditation — <i>Herman Hoeksema</i>	
The Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ	123
Editorials — <i>Prof. David J. Engelsma</i>	
The Highly Favored Virgin	125
Hoeksema Published by Reader's Digest	127
Letters	128
All Around Us — <i>Prof. Robert D. Decker</i>	128
A Word Fitly Spoken — <i>Rev. Dale Kuiper</i>	
Stars	130
When Thou Sittest in Thine House — <i>Mrs. MaryBeth Lubbers</i>	
The Reformed Family: Christmas	131
Guest Articles	
Faith or Fate — <i>Rev. Jason Kortering</i>	133
The Heavenly Song of Joy! — <i>Rev. Jaikishin Mahtani</i>	135
Special Article — <i>Prof. Herman C. Hanko</i>	
Report of the Committee for Contact with Other Churches	137
The Strength of Youth — <i>Rev. Barrett L. Gritters</i>	
Renewing the Battle:	
Drama, Television, and Movies (6)	139
Book Review	142
News From Our Churches — <i>Mr. Benjamin Wigger</i>	142

In This Issue ...

This is our special, Christmas edition of the *Standard Bearer*.

Although the meditation is not based on a "Christmas text," it is appropriate. True celebration of God's sending His Son in Jesus the Christ consists of the desire of heart to know Christ. This meditation by Herman Hoeksema is a reprint. It appeared originally in the December 15, 1933 issue of the *SB*. It will commend itself to the attentive reader as an example of the genuinely experiential teaching of the Reformed faith.

Excerpts from Hoeksema's book of Christmas devotions, *The Mystery of Bethlehem*, have recently been published by the Reader's Digest Association in its lavish Christmas publication, *The Story of Jesus*. See the editorial, "Hoeksema Published by Reader's Digest." The other editorial examines the rightful place of Mary in the church's celebration of Christmas.

In his explanation of the word, "stars," Rev. Dale Kuiper calls attention to the star that heralded the birth of Jesus. "Christ is the Star!" See "A Word Fitly Spoken."

Mrs. MaryBeth Lubbers reminds us that the Reformed family includes people from all nations. This was made known at the birth of the Christ by the worship of the wisemen. See "The Reformed Family: Christmas."

The guest article by Rev. Jaikishin Mahtani is biblical exposition of the confession of the angels at Jesus' birth in Luke 2:14: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

"Christmas Now and Eternally" is the title of a poem by Viola DeBoer, member of the PRC of Doon, IA.

The cover photo is by Mrs. Marilyn Wassink of the Holland, MI PRC.

From all of us involved with the *SB*, the desire that our readers know the joy of the first coming of the Savior and the hope of His coming again.

—DJE



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The Business Office will accept standing orders for bound copies of the current volume. Such orders are filled as soon as possible after completion of a volume year.

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

The Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ

Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.

Philippians 3:8

Rejoice in the Lord!

Serve God in the spirit, through the Spirit; glory in Christ Jesus only and trust not in the flesh.

And oppose all who would deprive you of this rejoicing in the Lord; who glory in the flesh; who put their confidence in the righteousness which is of the law; who insist upon a mere mutilation of the flesh as a ground of righteousness before the Most High.

They are dogs; call them so.

Evil workers are they; do not hesitate to consider and to treat them as such.

And be not deceived by their claim of being the circumcision; their circumcision is a meaningless cutting of the flesh, a mere mutilation, and has no other value before God.

Reject their doctrine of righteousness by works, by the law, by outward forms and rites. Even if it would seem that you might claim a certain right to confide in the flesh, do it not. Are you circumcised the eighth day? Are you a Hebrew of the Hebrews, of the generations of the people of God, blameless according to the law and according to the standard of ecclesiastical rites, zealous in defending the

doctrine that is delivered unto you from the fathers? Count it no gain as far as a basis of confidence is concerned, for all these things cannot constitute your righteousness before God.

If necessary you may lose all these things, and if it be but for Christ's sake you lose nothing.

And you may, you ought to, count them, yea, and all other things with them, but refuse, if to possess them should prove a hindrance in the gaining of Christ!

For, one thing is important and just one thing: that you gain Christ!

And one thing is above all things precious, of incomparable value — the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus!

* * * * *

My Lord!

Do not miss the personal note. Fail not to read it in that very same form in which the Spirit of Christ elicited this confession from the heart of the apostle.

And so reading it, apply it as a criterion to the condition of your own heart and soul, to the course and direction of your life in the midst of the world; apply it by repeating the words of the apostle with the question in mind and heart: Are they still true if I put my *I* instead of Paul's?

Not a dogmatic statement of the truth are these words. You cannot read instead: "Doubtless the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord is excellent, and well may one count all things but loss and dung for its possession." Then you would miss the point. For, the text is a confession, a heart-cry.

And heart-cries are matters of experience.

Profoundly personal they are.

I count all things but loss! Can you say it? Can I?

I count them loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, my Lord! Is it true when you and I speak the words?

I have suffered the loss of all things; *I* count them but dung, refuse, things undesirable to have, better to throw away; and all this, that *I* may win Christ, that *I* may be found in Him, may know Him, that *I* by any means may attain to the resurrection from the dead....

Is it true for me, for you?

Is He my Lord?

And yours?

* * * * *

Knowing Him!

Jesus Christ, my Lord!

Wholly in accord with the intensity of his feelings and the keen joy of possessing this knowledge of Christ, so incomparably excellent to him that he gladly suffers the loss of all things for it, the apostle refers to Him as He stands revealed in all the preciousness of His person through His three-fold name.

Jesus, Christ, Lord!

It is as if, now that he is speaking of the unspeakable blessedness, excellency, preciousness of the object of his knowledge, he would fain express *all* His fullness, exhibit *all* His beauty, show at once that there is *nothing* in all the earth to be desired above Him, beside Him; emphasize that it is but folly to compare ought with Him; explain why a man may lose all things for His sake and still count the loss a gain; fix the matter beyond all doubt that all things may be considered dung, no matter how precious, how

The late Herman Hoeksema was pastor of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

dear, how beautiful, how desirable they appear, when and in as far as they would be a hindrance to us in gaining Him.

The excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, my Lord!

Jesus! The realization of God's salvation!

The central, personal revelation of Jehovah as the God of our salvation, who redeems from the guilt of sin and reconciles us with Himself through the blood of the cross, blotting out the handwriting of sin against us, making peace; who delivers us from the corruption of sin, cutting the shackles of death in which we are held, opening our prison doors, leading us out into liberty; who makes us partakers of the highest good, the only good, life eternal, the fellowship of friendship with the ever Blessed; to know whom is to know the peace that passeth all understanding, the peace that is rooted in the blessed consciousness that our sins are washed away and that they witness no longer against us, and in the assurance that we are righteous before God; to know whom is to possess the only comfort in life and death, light in darkness, joy in the midst of sorrow, life while we pass through the valley of the shadow of death.

Christ! God's Anointed!

God's Prophet to us; God's Priest in our behalf; God's King over us. The thrice blessed Servant of Jehovah, who speaks of God and glorifies Him, reveals the Father and makes Him known in all the riches of the counsel of salvation; who is set over the whole House of God as the perfect and eternal High Priest, sacrificing, atoning, reconciling, entering into the heavenly sanctuary to abide, interceding for the brethren, blessing them with all the riches of grace; who battled alone and had the victory over the powers of darkness and, having become obedient unto death, yea, the death of the cross, is highly exalted, seated at the right hand of God, clothed with all power in heaven and on earth to lead us on, to protect us against all the onslaughts of the enemy, to give us the victory; whose

anointing we share, so that we also know, speak about, and glorify the Father, sanctify the Lord God in our hearts, and bring the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, fight the good fight in the midst of the world even unto the end, that no one take our crown!

Jesus! Christ! Lord!

My Lord — who possesses His people because He purchased them with the price of His infinite love; who leveled to the ground the throne of the prince of this world in our hearts, that He might establish His own dominion of grace in our inmost soul; who is responsible for us, in life and in death, now and in the day of judgment; whose will is our will, because He turned them by the gracious power of His Spirit.

It is therefore the soul's keenest delight to say: my Lord!

Excellency of knowledge!

* * * * *

Knowing Him!

Not of the excellency of Christ, but of the incomparable preciousness of the knowledge of Him is the apostle speaking.

For that knowledge the apostle is ready to lose all things. That knowledge is so dear to him that, in the light of it, all things appear to lose their value and are but refuse to him.

The knowledge of Him!

How evident it is that *knowledge* here is far more than an intellectual conception, than a mere image of the mind, a cold assent to the truth concerning Him. To know all about Him is still wholly different from knowing Him! Who would surrender all things and give them up gladly, his name and position, his treasures and his pleasures, his liberty and his very life, for a mere intellectual apprehension? What virtue is there in knowledge? What glory and what joy, what excellency and what comfort is there in a head full of knowledge about the Christ, if the heart remains empty of His grace?

What soul-redeeming virtue is there in saying: Jesus Christ, *the* Lord, if I cannot say: *my* Lord?

O, the knowledge about Christ is necessary, doubtless.

How shall we know Him, if we do not know all about Him? The revelation of Him must fill our mind if He is to fill our heart. Our mind must apprehend Him if our soul is to appropriate Him. If we truly know Him we will never grow weary of learning more, and still more, always more about Him!

Yet, to know all about Him is still a far cry from knowing Him.

A learned man may know all about the ingredients of a splendid meal, so that he will be able minutely to determine the food value of every last bit of it, though a cancer of the stomach prevents him from partaking of it. Is there, then, not an ocean of difference between him and the poor beggar who knows nothing about vitamins, but whose hungry stomach relishes the food and readily digests it? Is the reading of a bit of the most beautiful poetry glorifying a mother's love at all to be compared to the joy of pressing one's own darling to the heart? Will a reading on honey cause us to taste its sweetness, or an exposition on the power of fire warm our home?

Neither will a complete knowledge about Christ satisfy our heart.

A learned theologian you may be, or a thoroughly instructed layman, so that you are able to instruct others in the knowledge about Christ, yet you may not know Him. Perhaps you wrote ably on the Incarnation and defended the two natures in unity of divine person; you published articles in the defense of the doctrine of vicarious atonement, and manifested that you were thoroughly schooled in all the questions of Christology; you explained, maybe a thousand times, the significance and power of the resurrection, the glory of His ascension and exaltation, the hope of His com-

If we truly know Him we will never grow weary of learning more, and still more, always more about Him!

ing again to establish His Kingdom forever.

But what if you cannot say: my Lord?

What if the fire of the love of God in Him is not kindled in your soul? What if you never learned to cry out: O God, be merciful to me, a sinner? What if you never despised your own righteousness? What if you never saw the guilt of sin from which He redeems, the corruption of sin from which He delivers, the power of death from which He liberates, the darkness of sin out of which He leads into the light, the profundities of misery out of which He elevates the soul into the heights of Father's glory? What if you never saw Him as the fullness that fills your emptiness, as the righteousness that justifies you, as the life that is your resurrection, as the Bread that satisfies your hunger, as the water of life that quenches the thirst of your soul, as your Redeemer and Deliverer?

Ah, then you never knew Him, even though you know all about Him! Then your soul remains dark and loves the darkness, though your intellectual eye caught the light!

Though you write expositions about the fire of His love, your soul's hearth remains cold and dark.

For, *this* is to know Him, that your soul hungers and thirsts after righteousness and flees to Him for salvation; that you see His fullness and

appropriate Him; that you eat and drink Him by a true and living faith!

Excellency of knowledge!

Knowing Him ... that I may gain Him!

Such is, then, the longing of our heart, the aspiration of our soul, the direction of our life.

For, knowing Him I realize that in Him there are pleasures forevermore, there are treasures I never counted, depths of grace I never fathomed, riches of love I never tasted, heights of glory I never climbed, a fullness of joy I never experienced. Knowing Him I feel that I have only begun, that my knowledge of Him is only in part, that I have not yet attained or apprehended that for which I am apprehended of Him.

And knowing Him in part, I long to know Him in all His fullness!

Having a taste of Him, of His knowledge and wisdom, His righteousness and holiness, His peace and joy, His love and life eternal, I cannot rest until I shall see Him face to face!

And know as I am known!

That I may gain Christ!

* * * * *

The excellency of knowledge of Christ!

Of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, my Lord!

How foolish to evaluate anything at all as precious and desirable apart from Him, beside Him, in comparison with Him, or even in opposition to Him!

Yet, do we not often manifest this folly?

How many of us are able to take the words of the apostle on our own lips: "Yea, doubtless, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ"?

Tremendous heights of faith?

Yet, so it was with the apostle. All that was connected with his own righteousness which was of the law, his privileges as a Hebrew of the Hebrews, his name and position and influence, his fellowship with the brethren according to the flesh, his ecclesiastical standing—all had been counted but dung from the moment he had begun to taste the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. And still he counted all things refuse and was willing to lose all that pertained to his earthly life, yea, that life itself, that he might gain Christ.

Awful heights of faith?

Yet, how true an evaluation! For, what shall a man profit if he gain the whole world and lose Christ? Or what would he lose if for Christ he lost all?

O, let the world take its dross, if only I may gain Christ!

Know Him more and more! Till I see Him face to face!

Jesus Christ, my Lord! □

Editorials

The Highly Favored Virgin

"No, but God's mother does."

This was the answer given recently by the coach of the renowned football team of a Roman Catholic university to the question whether he thought that God really had any interest in the outcome of the team's upcoming game. The flippant re-

sponse gave expression to Rome's exaltation of Mary, the mother of Jesus: "mother of God."

During the coming Christmas season, Mary will vie with Jesus for honor in the piety of Roman Catholics.

There are other reasons why Re-

formed Protestants should be clear as to the truth about Mary. One is that current ecumenical efforts between Rome and Protestants urge the Protestants to recognize the special status of Mary. Another is that the feminist movement among Protestants makes its appeal to Mary.

Erroneous exaltation of Mary appeared early in the history of the church. Although the description of her as "mother of God" was included in the Symbol of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) to guard against the heresy of Nestorianism, which divided the Christ into two persons, there was already then an interest in glorifying Mary herself.

In the centuries between Chalcedon and the Reformation, the cult of Mary grew so that by the time of the Reformation Mary was on the foreground and Jesus, only a dim figure in the background. This was the case as regarded religious art, personal piety, and the worship of the church.

The Roman Catholic Church has given official doctrinal expression to the erroneous exaltation of Mary. Rome holds the perpetual virginity of Mary. In 1854, that Church decreed the Immaculate Conception of Mary, that is, that she herself was conceived without original corruption. In 1950, the pope declared the dogma of the Assumption of the Virgin, that is, that at the end of her life Mary was taken up into heaven in the body.

In addition to "mother of God," Rome gives her the titles "co-redemptress" and "mediatrix." Mary cooperates with Jesus Christ in the work of redemption and shares with Him the office of mediator.

Rome requires the worship of Mary ("Mariolatry") and dependence upon her as an intercessor by praying to her.

The Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s gave full approval to all of this. In the face of the opposition by the "separated brethren," Vatican II called Mary by the most objectionable and patently false title, "mediatrix."

It is well known that the present pope is the most devoted servant of Mary, having consecrated himself and the whole world to the "blessed virgin."

Chief among the passages of Scripture appealed to by Rome in support of its exaltation of Mary is that which records the announcement to Mary that she will be the mother of

the Messiah. Gabriel greeted Mary with the words, "Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women" (Luke 1:28). Mary is "highly favored." The Latin Bible has, "full of grace." Mary has "found favor with God" (v. 30). She is blessed among women, as Elisabeth also acknowledges in verse 42. The reason is that Mary will be the mother of the Savior, who is the Son of God, by the wonder of conception by the Holy Spirit (v. 35). To this announcement, Mary responded, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (v. 38).

The explanation of Rome is that there was a certain goodness and worth in Mary herself. God found in her that she was full of grace. She will be blessed as one deserving of the blessedness. She deserved to be the mother of the Christ.

Accordingly, Mary cooperated with God to bring the Savior into the world. Mary was an active, contributing, cooperating agent with God in the Savior's birth and, thus, in the entrance into the world of salvation. God is the primary agent, to be sure, but Mary is the necessary secondary co-worker with God.

God contributed the Deity, the eternal Son. Mary contributed not only the humanity but also a pure, sinless humanity. She could do this since she herself, according to Rome's doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, was sinlessly conceived.

The Annunciation was a conditional offer to Mary. God desired to send the Savior into the world. But He was dependent upon Mary's acceptance of His offer. When Mary responded, "Be it unto me according to thy word," she fulfilled the condition that was necessary for the realizing of the divine promise.

It follows that Mary now has the exalted status given her by Rome: "Queen of Heaven"! "Mediatrix"! "Object of worship"!

For she cooperated to bring sal-

vation. In giving birth to the Savior, she herself saved the church.

Rome's exaltation of Mary is no minor matter. Rome knows this well and asserts its doctrine of Mary at every opportunity in clear and forceful language.

It is the doctrine of Mary that exposes the gospel of Rome as another gospel than the gospel of God in Scripture. By virtue of its doctrine of Mary, Rome is a false church. The main controversy of a Reformed church with Rome is Rome's doctrine of Mary.

For Mary represents man and the church. Man and the church cooperate with God in salvation. The church cooperates with God in saving sinners by the performance of the sacraments. Each sinner himself cooperates with God by the exercise of his free will in consenting to grace and by the doing of meritorious good works.

Man and the church thus displace Christ as the only Savior and seize to themselves the glory of salvation that belongs to God alone.

Look at a medieval painting of the virgin and her child. Notice how Mary is at the center, how the rays of light focus on her. Exactly so does the theology of Mary put man and the church where Jesus Christ alone belongs.

Today most of Protestantism is in full agreement with Rome's theology of Mary, even though some might still object to "Mariolatry." For the theology of Mary is the doctrine of free will, human cooperation with God in salvation, and a conditional salvation. It is the denial of grace.

It is also the denial of the truth about Mary. Mary was the object of grace. Mary was the lowly maid to whom God showed free favor. That was the address of the angel, literally: "Hail, you whom God has graced." Mary was not a woman who was good and worthy of herself, but one towards whom God had a favorable attitude. God's attitude of favor towards humans is always undeserved.

*By virtue
of its doctrine
of Mary,
Rome is
a false church.*

Men and women are unworthy because of sin — their guilt and their depravity. This is the glory of grace. Grace excludes all worth.

This was true of the grace of God to Mary too. The specific reference of His grace was her privilege to be the mother of the Savior. There was nothing in Mary to deserve this. There was nothing in her herself to distinguish her from other women. She was a sinner by nature, prone to hate God and the neighbor. Grace gave her her unique, blessed position. Grace chose her. Grace accomplished her being in the line of David. Grace addressed her in the Annunciation. Grace accomplished the wonder of the Incarnation in her womb.

Mary was an instrument, a servant, a handmaid, of the wonder-working, saving God. Through her, He brought into the world the person of the eternal Son united with the human nature derived from Mary. This was the necessary Mediator.

Mary did not cooperate with God. This contradicts the basic idea of the virgin-birth: man is excluded. Mary did not help plan the coming of the Christ. On the contrary, she was astonished at the thought. She was not an active contributor. On the contrary, she was passive, helpless, impotent: How can a virgin have a child? The power of the Highest must come upon her and overshadow her. She herself beautifully expressed her passivity: "Be it unto me."

Yes, she assented to the word of God, as does the church and as does every believer. She assented in faith. But this too was God's gracious work upon her. God came with a promise, a sovereign declaration of His will. He never said, "If you will agree, accept, or fulfill the condition, then I will proceed to the 'in-fleshing' of the eternal Son in your womb." But He said, "Behold, thou shalt!" The word of promise created Mary's faith and its response, even as it realized the

Incarnation.

Indeed, Mary was blessed. Graciously, God privileged her to be the mother of the Messiah. She was not the "mother of God." God has no mother. She was the mother of Him who was and is God as to His (one) person. But she was not the mother of His Godhead. Rather, He had His manhood from her. Scripture does not call Mary the "mother of God." Filled with the Spirit, Elisabeth called Mary, "the mother of my Lord" (Luke 1:43).

Her honor, she derived from her son by mere grace.

To God alone is the glory of salvation.

For God alone brought salvation in Jesus Christ.

This Jesus Christ is the only Savior and Mediator.

This is the message of Christmas.

This is the message of the gospel.

— DJE

Hoeksema Published by Reader's Digest

In time for Christmas, the Reader's Digest Association has published *The Story of Jesus*. This lavishly illustrated book is divided into seven chapters: "The Messiah"; "The Nativity"; "The Hidden Years"; "His Ministry on Earth"; "The Final Days"; "Savior and Redeemer"; and "Jesus Among Us."

The text combines the telling of the story of Jesus by the editors, appropriate quotations of Scripture, and articles drawn from a wide range of writers. Interspersed are poems, religious paintings, and informative pieces on various people, places, and particulars that come up in the history of Jesus.

Herman Hoeksema is one of the writers included in the volume. Identified

as "a Protestant theologian," Hoeksema is quoted at some length in two different places in the book from his devotional work, *The Mystery of Bethlehem*. One excerpt has to do with the announcement to Zacharias of the birth of John and with Zacharias' dumbness. The other treats of the naming of John.

It is ironic that, whereas the Reformed community for the most part has determined to ignore this gifted exegete, poetic devotionalist, and orthodox theologian, Reader's Digest publishes him to the world's end.

"H.H." keeps strange company in *The Story of Jesus*. He appears with the likes of Pearl S. Buck, Albert Schweitzer, Mahatma Gandhi, and Bishop Fulton J. Sheen. Hoeksema

would have been amused. The important thing is that he, being dead, continues to bear witness to the truth. The sphere of his witness widens. If the world lasts, Hoeksema will increasingly demand and receive attention, I am convinced, in spite of the efforts of the Reformed community to silence him.

The Story of Jesus includes no other Reformed writer.

Those interested in buying the book must order from Reader's Digest, Pleasantville, NY 10570, or call 1-800-934-0977. The price is \$34.96.

Better yet, read, or re-read, Hoeksema's *The Mystery of Bethlehem* itself during this Christmas season. □

— DJE

■ Anti-law Mentality?

I was saddened by two letters of reaction (*SB*, 11/1/93) to the excellent articles by Rev. Ronald Cammenga on the sin/crime of sodomy (the more biblical and legal term). It seems that the anti-law mentality that characterizes most churches today has even found a home in our beloved Protestant Reformed Churches.

One of your respondents was so bold as to impugn the good name of the "Rushdoony crowd." While Dr. Rushdoony may have taken some positions that not all of us can agree with in his thousands and thousands of pages of theological writing, it certainly behooves those who love the law of the Lord to at least show honor to whom honor is due, especially to a man who has courageously expounded the law of God and challenged the deadly antinomianism in church and state. He has alerted thousands of serious Bible scholars to a heresy that has gutted the modern evangelical churches.

To take umbrage at the simple biblical truth that the state is to punish evildoers, and in the case of sodomites to put them to death, as Rev. Cammenga correctly stated in passing, indicates that more serious study and preaching on the moral law

should be done by your good ministers.

Is the civil magistrate free to invent his own laws of justice, or is he bound by the sovereign Law-Giver of heaven and earth? Professor Engelsma's excellent editorial of September 1, 1993 ("A Holy Nation") correctly assumes that the civil government is held accountable by God to obey His laws, not trample them under foot as is presently the case in our apostate nation.

Hebrews 2:2 tells us that under the Mosaic Law "every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense." Further, these moral laws were "steadfast" ("unalterable"). See also Hebrews 10:28. One of the laws of God had to do with the "recompense" (punishment) to be meted out to those convicted of sodomy (after a proper court trial, of course). That punishment was death: Leviticus 20:13. Now who would suggest that God's law in this matter was not wise, not just, too severe (cf. Deut. 4:4-6)? Does God have two different ethical systems in the Bible? Doesn't 2 Timothy 3:16 teach us that *all* Scripture is profitable for training in righteousness (justice), a statement that refers to the Old Testament primarily? Should not present-day legislatures pass laws that are in conformity with

the perfect justice of God's laws? Why should any God-fearing Christian be embarrassed by the perfect laws of God?

Thank you, Rev. Cammenga, for sticking to your guns! "Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, and I shall observe it to the end" (Ps. 119:33).

(Rev.) Norman L. Jones
Pierre, SD

RESPONSE:

Denial by some members of the Protestant Reformed Churches that God today mandates the civil state to execute homosexuals is not a manifestation of an "anti-law mentality." All members of the PRC maintain that both homosexual desire and deed are sinful and that the impenitent homosexual must be excommunicated from the church. All ministers in the PRC teach this. All PR churches practice this.

A denomination of churches that sharply preaches the ten commandments as the rule of the thankful life of the redeemed and that firmly disciplines (excommunicates) impenitent sinners in their midst with the spiritual discipline of the "keys" is a denomination that plainly honors the law of God. □

— Ed.

All Around Us

Prof. Robert Decker

■ Whatever Happened to Marriage in the U.S.?

Six of ten new marriages fail, victims of divorce or separation, according to the National Survey of Families and Households of the University of Wisconsin. Divorces reached an all-

time high of 1,215,000 in 1992. After a decade in which the number of divorces remained flat, they rose 2% last year. This can only be the beginning of a new surge of divorce, as children of divorce now marry and follow the model of their parents who knew only how *not* to stay together.

Do the statistics given above shock you? They ought to! But, read on. Cohabitation, called by some "the invisible cancer of marriage," has soared sixfold since 1960 in the United

States. This substitute for matrimony precedes the majority of all American marriages. Most will end in divorce or separation. "Marriages that are preceded by living together have 50% higher disruption (divorce or separation) rates than marriages without premarital cohabitation," reports the National Survey of Families and Households. More and more adults in this country never marry, another result of millions living together unmarried. In 1992, 42 million adults

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had never married, twice the 21 million of 1970. Of 100 unmarried couples who cohabit, 40 break up before they marry. Of the 60 who marry, 45 divorce, leaving only 15 of 100 with a lasting marriage. Thus cohabitation has two negative effects: it sharply reduces the number who marry, and dramatically increases the divorce rate of those who do.

Those who suffer the most are the children. Each year one million youngsters see their parents divorce. Sixty percent of children will lose a parent to divorce before they reach the age of 18. Another million children are born out of wedlock each year, most of them into lives of neglect and poverty. Wrote Karl Zinsmeister for *The American Enterprise*, "We talk about the drug crisis, the education crisis, and problems of teen pregnancy and juvenile crime. But all of these ills trace back predominantly to one source — broken families."

The churches in America are not helping much, according to the National Survey. Many pastors sidestep tough topics like chastity, cohabitation, and divorce, even though secular evidence supports a biblical position on these issues.

It is no secret that in our own churches pastors and elders are frequently called upon to counsel those with marriage (sin!) problems. Nowhere is the biblical truth concerning marriage, divorce, and the sin against the seventh commandment more beautifully summed than in the *Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord's Day 41, Q. 108. "What doth the seventh commandment teach us? A. That all uncleanness is accursed of God: and that therefore we must with all our hearts detest the same, and live chastely and temperately, whether in holy wedlock, or in single life. Q. 109. Doth God forbid in this commandment, only adultery, and such like gross sins? A. Since both our body and soul are temples of the Holy Ghost, he commands us to preserve them pure and holy: therefore he forbids all unchaste actions, gestures, words, thoughts, desires, and whatever can entice men thereto." These great

truths must be preached in the churches, taught in the catechism classes, and brought to our members who experience difficulties in their marriages. Consistories must exercise discipline in the love of Christ where this commandment is transgressed. Our fathers and mothers must teach their children these precious truths. And in our marriages we must provide our children with examples of what marriage in the Lord is all about. Husbands will love their wives as Christ loved the church, and wives will submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ. Only then will our marriages reflect the great mystery of Christ and His bride, the church. God commands His blessing there! In congregations, in covenant homes! Of that we may be certain. Disobedience to the seventh commandment brings a world of woe!

National & International Religion Report

■ Together on the way

Such is the name (*Samen op Weg*) of a unification process involving three Dutch denominations. Meeting in early October, delegates from the Netherlands Reformed Church (the state church in the Netherlands), the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*), and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Netherlands decided by a 75% majority to call the new denomination, the United Protestant Church in the Netherlands (*De Verenigde Protestantse Kerk in Nederland*).

This name replaced the previous proposal to call the church the United Reformational Church in the Netherlands. There was strong support to call it the Evangelical Church, but there was also some strong opposition to this.

The combined synod also worked on the proposed church order for the new denomination. There was an attempt to get more confessional elements into the church order, but delegates could not reach agreement on

this. The Lutherans' proposal that they have some special status in the new church was also rejected by the delegates. Because the Lutherans are much smaller than the other two churches, they fear they will be lost in the union. In the end, only six of the nineteen articles of the church order were approved. The others will be debated at the next meeting in November.

REC News Exchange

■ Another Union of Churches in the Works

Since 1962 theologians from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (5.7 million members), the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the Reformed Church in America (the combined membership of the latter three churches is 5.2 million members) have been meeting in an effort to achieve theological consensus on issues that have divided the Lutheran and Reformed faith traditions since the Reformation.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has taken a major step toward closer relationships with the Reformed bodies. On August 30 the denomination's Assembly voted to work toward a 1997 deadline for achieving full communion with the three denominations. Full communion means that the members of the four denominations could receive Communion in one another's churches, and their pastors could preach and serve in each other's congregations.

It will be interesting to see what kind of consensus is reached on the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Will the Lutherans give up their view of Consubstantiation? Or will the Reformed bodies adopt the Lutheran view of the Holy Supper? Or will all four agree to disagree? □

The Church Herald

Stars

The stars were created by God's Word of power on the fourth day of the creation week, along with the sun and moon (Gen. 1:16). We ought not accept the view of scientists that the sun is simply the closest star, and a rather small one at that; God created the sun specifically to rule the day, and the moon and stars to rule the night. The seed promised to Abraham is compared to the stars of the heavens for multitude (Gen. 15:5, etc.), but God is able to count the stars (Ps. 147:4). The stars form one of Sabaoth's hosts, fighting in behalf of Israel (Jud. 5:20). Stars cause wonder and humility when the believer contemplates them (Ps. 8:3); are reminders of God's mercies (Ps. 136:9); praise their Maker (Ps. 148:3); are useful for navigation (Acts 27:20); and differ in glory from the sun and moon, and even from other stars (I Cor. 15:41).

The Holy Spirit uses stars in the Scriptures as a figure for various spiritual entities. They stand for the large number of angels that Satan drew down with himself in his rebellion against God (Rev. 12:4). False teachers are compared to wandering stars, probably comets, which do not keep to God-ordained pathways but wander at will (Jude 13). Strikingly, stars also stand for the angels, or gospel ministers, of the seven churches of Asia Minor (Rev. 1:20). The church of the old dispensation is described in Revelation 12:1 as a woman with child (Christ), clothed with the sun, having the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars on her head. The church of God is altogether glorious, and her crowning glory of twelve stars represents the glory of God in electing her, saving her, all by His wonderful grace. The day star (II Pet. 1:19), the morning star (Rev. 2:28), and the bright and morning star (Rev. 22:16) are references to Jesus Christ, and are promised to them who hold fast to the Scriptures, faithfully overcome in battle, and wait for Christ's coming. Christ is the truth of Scripture, the One in whom

we can do all things, and whose salvation is our reward.

Since there will be no sun or moon in the new heavens and new earth, neither will there be any night (Rev. 21:23, 25), we may say that there will be no stars in the new creation either; for the glory of God and the Lamb shall be the light of it. At the end of the world, when the need for symbols and figures is past, God will roll up the heavens as a scroll (Is. 38:4; Rev. 6:12-14), the stars shall fall from heaven (Matt. 24:29) and shall be destroyed.

At this time of year, Christians everywhere love to think on *the Star*. We remember that wicked Balaam could not but bless the Israel of God, saying, "There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel" (Num. 24:17). Accordingly, God announced the birth of the Christ to the wise men in the East with a star. Having seen "his star" (Matt. 2:2ff.), they came to worship the "born King of the Jews." After they failed to find the King in Jerusalem, the star reappeared and led them to Bethlehem and the exact house where Jesus lived. This star was not the conjunction of two planets, or a brilliant comet, or a nova, but a specially created star—a wonder of God! What a fitting sign of the true Light that came into the world (John 1:7-9), who lightens the Gentiles, is the glory of God's people Israel (Luke 2:32), and gives light to them that sat in darkness (Is. 9:2; Luke 1:79).

What a perversion to call actors, actresses, athletes, and such like, *stars*! Call them what they are: *idols*. Christ is the Star! His glory differs from, and is infinitely greater than, the glory of all others. When Christ arises in our hearts, the darkness of death is driven out, and we have the light of life which shineth unto the perfect day. Then the glory of God in Christ will radiate everywhere, even through us! With the wisemen, bow before His scepter, and offer Him royal gifts of thanksgiving. □

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The Reformed Family: Christmas

The desire of all nations shall come....
Haggai 2:7

We of Dutch descent have often been accused of being ethnically-oriented Christians—to the exclusion of almost all other groups. “If you’re not Dutch, you’re not much” is more than just a pithy saying for many of us. We’re partial to names which end in “sma” or begin with “Vander.” We encourage our young people to date and marry a “wooden shoe.” We’re suspect of those who don’t salivate over green soup, or who do not enjoy the mid-day Sunday meal of pot roast, mashed potatoes, green beans, and applesauce.

Darker skin tones, different dress, peculiar eating habits, unusual surnames, are more than a little frightening to us. Detractors have claimed that this culture bias has put a crimp on our mission emphasis. We’ve been characterized as preferring our mission work far, far away—and keeping it there—as if we really don’t want these different peoples to be a part of our church or community. And if some do become members or sister-church related, do we actually have to interact with them? To preach to those of different cultures and ethnic backgrounds is tolerated. Intellectually, we know this is the right thing to do. The Great Commission is difficult to dismiss summarily. “Go

ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” is the calling of the church until Christ returns. We know this. But if, and after, other creatures have embraced the gospel, what is my responsibility towards such converted Christians?

Sometimes, like the apostle Peter, we need a divine nudge to be reminded that that which God hath cleansed may not be called common (Acts 10:15).

How sympathetic we should be towards the New Testament Jewish Christian who nearly 2,000 years ago bristled at the thought of *Gentile Christians*. Surely, this had to be a contradiction in terms! One could be a Gentile. Or one could be a Christian. One simply could not be both. Parthians, Medes, Cretes, Arabians, Egyptians, dwellers in Mesopotamia, Libyans—truly, these could not be elect children of God; for God would not so “water down” His covenant.

We can be more understanding, too, of the apostle Peter, a Jew to the very core of his being, who had to receive a vision from God to bring him to his spiritual senses concerning Gentile believers. At the conversion of Cornelius, Peter is compelled to make this beautiful and timeless confession, “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:34, 35).

And if such a one is accepted with God, then, indeed, he is accepted with me.

We must never hoodwink ourselves into believing that we, and only those exactly like us, are the true

children of God. Nor must our children be led to believe this.

I remember a little schoolboy looking at a picture of many different children from many diverse foreign lands, each in his colorful native dress: Eskimo, Mexican, Indian, Chinese, Swiss, Scots, Japanese, Russian. He blurted out, “Look at all these wicked people!”

Different faces, different colored skin, different dress, different hair styles, all added up to one conclusion for this young chap: these people are not like I am; therefore, they must be wicked.

There is a little children’s ditty which goes like this:

Jesus loves the little children,
All the children of the world;
Black and yellow, red and white,
They are precious in His sight;
Jesus loves the little children of
the world.

This is a silly song. Never teach it to your child. Explicitly, it denies particular atonement. Implicitly, it teaches that Jesus just happens to have a fondness for children because they’re young and “innocent.” But, on the other hand, we must somehow instill within our youngsters, and ourselves, the universal scope of God’s electing mercies. He chooses his people from every nation. In our zeal to uphold the biblical decree of election, we must be on guard lest we narrow and confine God’s decree more than He does. We and our children must be impressed with the truth that God has elected to Himself a multitude that no man can number.

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Abraham was taught this by God Himself at the sacrifice of Isaac: "...I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore..." (Gen. 22:17). Who of us can count the grains of a mere handful of sand? Which of us can number the myriad stars?

In Revelation 7:9 the apostle John says: "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb...."

How necessary for all of us, adult believers and children, to be reminded at this Christmas season of God's

*In our zeal
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electing mercies to every nation, even to the remotest islands of the sea.

God announced the birth of His own dear Son first to the Jews, those humble shepherds of lowly birth watching over their flocks on that lonely Judean hillside so many years ago. But looking beyond the shepherds, far away toward the East, how thrilling to see the magi, Gentiles all, wearing curiously-wrought clothing, embracing odd habits, and speaking a different idiom, traveling hundreds of miles over hostile terrain through foul weather for this one compelling purpose — to worship the

Babe in Bethlehem. And, filling up the horizon behind the Wise Men comes a host of believers *without number* from every race, and tribe, and nation, all wending their way to that manger in the stall. Each in his own tongue chants the blessed words: "Emmanuel, God with us." With Simeon and Anna we take up the child in our arms and embrace God's Salvation. With the Eastern travelers we kneel and worship the Desire of all Nations.

How thankful I am that God did not limit His Christmas blessing to one nation — just the Jews. What despair that would be for all of us in the Dutch enclaves of Grand Rapids, and Zeeland, and South Holland, and Northwest Iowa, and....

Oh, blessed Christmas! □

Christmas Now and Eternally

Christmas has come as it does every year,
And once again there are wishes of joy and good
cheer.

Lest we be blinded by the world's glitter and glean-
ings,
We pause now to ponder Christmas' real meanings.

For in that manger — the incarnation —
Lies the hope of God's people in every nation.
Fulfilled here is the lamb's blood of the old dispensa-
tion.

Here lies the hope of glory — Israel's consolation.
Born in a stable — O what a lowly station,
God in our flesh in the state of humiliation.

Let's sing with the angels, "Glory to God on High!"
As we see our blessed Savior in lowly manger lie.
No glory in that cattle stall — to the human eye,
Yet angelic choirs sing His praises from the sky.
So with the shepherds let us worship and bow down,
For here has come the Christ, forsaking heavenly
crown.

Mere shepherds — unworthy — yet they heard
From the heavenly chorus such a glorious Word.
Wonderful gospel to them was revealed;
The blessed message they kept not concealed.
Let us give our gifts as the wisemen of old,
As they later came the Christ child to behold.

But let us look beyond the manger bed,
And see the Cross that lies ahead.
Born to die, the King of kings;
Born to give us heavenly things.
And then beyond the cross we see
That death did not have the victory.
But this lowly Babe in manger bed
Has gone on to heaven, as the church's Head,
Where in human nature at God's right hand
Our King, triumphant, waiting stands;
Where before our Father He intercedes
For our forgiveness and all our needs,
Waiting to gather His ransomed bride home,
There to commemorate Christmas around God's
throne.

God of glory, God of might,
Grant us favor in this night,
That we may celebrate Thy Gift aright.
That at Christmas, too, we may grow in knowledge
and grace
Until we finally are brought to see Jesus face to face.
That each in his station may glorify Thee
And prepare even now for Christmas eternally.

Viola DeBoer
Doon, Iowa

Faith or Fate

Rev. Jason Kortering

A few words that have come to mean more to me while working in Singapore are these taken from the Form for the Lord's Supper: "... all those who invoke deceased saints, angels, or other creatures, all those who worship images, all enchanters, diviners, charmers, and those who confide in such enchantments." Such sinners are forbidden the use of the sacrament.

Amazing, isn't it, that in one breath our Reformed forefathers put apostate Rome in the same category as the heathen. They both pray to the wrong sources for life and hope. It is noteworthy that, in the area of missions, Rome's approach to the heathen was less "offensive." (See Romans 9:33 — Jesus is the rock of offense.) By their "natural theology" Roman Catholic missionaries could approach the heathen idol worshiper as if he were one who was "reaching for the true God." In contrast, the Holy Spirit describes him in Romans 1:21-25 as committing an act of rebellion against the true God. Rome's converts could substitute "saints" for ancestors and thus avoid disruption in their religious activity. The same was true for the use of images in worship. Add to that the "accursed idolatry" of the mass, and we sorrow that in the Name of Jesus, Rome leads people from one form of idolatry into another. This explains why the Roman Catholic church represents "Christianity" in so many countries. Here in Singapore, the Christian "fes-

tivals," Christmas, Good Friday, Easter are all presented to the public as Rome observes them. This is understandable considering their ecumenical spirit, their willingness to find a common bond of fellowship among all major religions, and even their close religious identity with the heathen.

This is an offense not only for the true believer, but most of all for the Lord whom we serve.

In this article we want to focus a bit more on divination. The words of the form for the Lord's Supper now literally jump off the page as we read them six times a year: enchanters, diviners, charmers, and those who confide in such enchantments. The stern and biblical warning that such people are not in the kingdom of heaven arouses within us a burden for our neighbors. We have had opportunity to visit several Chinese temples where this divination takes place on a daily basis. How sad it is to see an aged Chinese woman with one foot in the grave shake the can of divination lots and thereby try to learn her future. Impressed on my mind is the sight of a young boy doing the same. He brings his stick to the "interpreter" to learn, in all likelihood, whether he will do well in his upcoming examinations. We have a small temple about a hundred feet from our apartment; it has a chair for the "medium" to commune with the spirits of ancestors. One cannot walk down Serangoon Avenue in "Little India" and not take note of the parrots with their fortune cards, and the palm readers. They all seem to be doing a brisk business.

My inquisitiveness prompted me to ask, What really takes place? What

kind of people turn to divination. Do they really believe in it? Through visits to various temples, obtaining some literature that was on display in these temples, and reading a rather detailed article that appeared in the paper recently, we found some answers to these questions.

Divination lots are wooden sticks, much like chopsticks, which devotees believe can tell their fortunes. They are placed in a brass can. The number of lots can vary from 50 to 100 in each can. One obtains the lot by shaking the can containing the sticks (the sticks are about 12 inches in length and the can about 10 inches), and, while shaking the can, repeating silently the subject being questioned. If one seeks an answer about examinations in school, he says "exams." If he is inquiring about selling the flat (house), he repeats that. If the question is a proposed marriage, then he repeats "marriage." The person should also tell the god his name and place of residence.

When the lot falls from the can, it is verified by the throwing of two wooden shells. If one of the shells lands upright and the other upside down, then the lot is confirmed. If both shells land alike, the process must be repeated. After the lot is confirmed, the person acts to obtain the lot's answer to his question. Each divination stick has a number. On the counter toward the side of the temple is a rack with holes. Each hole has a number, and inserted in the hole is a rolled up slip of paper. This paper explains the "lot," whether the answer is good or bad. It is written in Chinese and in poetic form. Thus, the reading of the lot may leave the person in a bit of a quandary whether it

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is good or bad. But there are "interpreters" around the temple who can be consulted for a small fee. They will explain the meaning of the lot and give direct advice as to whether it is good or bad and how to improve their lot if it is bad.

Most recently some of the local temples have included English translations of the Chinese lots. This has caused quite a stir, since it allows those who are not proficient in their native language to read it in English. They have it black on white, so they can ponder it for themselves. As a result, more school children are becoming involved in this divination, and professional people are stopping by the temples, as well as the usual elderly Chinese men and women.

An example of such a translation follows. It is of lot number 68. "A good home where peace and happiness abound. By deeds of merits will they achieve peace. The time is right for marrying. The farm produces a good crop of silk and harvest. A remedy to cure all illness." The interpretation of this lot is rated as "Good."

Lying in the heart of every human being is the desire to know the future. It is especially desirable to know whether our present actions will be favorable for the future or not. The use of divination in this form is directly related to the degree of sincerity of the devotee. How much a person believes in the "gods" will affect how much he trusts the lot. As is true in most cultures, the elderly seem more in the grip of such divination than the youth. According to the newspaper article, one young woman interviewed had "decided to draw a lot out of curiosity, but said that she might do it again as the lot seems to reflect her state of mind and offers advice." Another man said, "I come to the temple once a month to draw a lot. It only acts as a guide; I will not be too depressed if I draw a bad one."

If the lot is bad, it is an indication that the gods are displeased with the person. Connected with the worship of the Chinese gods (and they abound in numbers) is the basic notion that the gods show themselves as aveng-

ing deities if a person does not live properly. Such religion is that of works. One must do right if he is to be accepted, and if he does not live right, his life will go bad, and his lot will indicate such disfavor of the gods. Hence, the interpreter will help a person who has drawn a bad lot. He will "counsel" him in areas of improvement. He will tell him that he can turn around bad luck by going to the temple to pray, doing charitable deeds, meeting the needs of departed ancestors, and such like.

What does this say to us?

We know that "enchanters, diviners, charmers, and those who confide in such enchantments" are not limited to Singapore. It may come to expression in a more open and dramatic way in the Chinese temple. But we must ask ourselves, How is this expressed where I live? Satan is certainly very active in this area of human life. We do well to become aware of the "familiar spirits" which abound around us. Some of this takes on the form of "psychic power." Fortune tellers abound in many forms. Divination can even come in the form of fun and games, such as tarot cards and Ouija boards.

The saints here are delivered from this horrible superstition. In varying degrees they may have been involved in such temple worship in their youth. Some of them come from homes where temple worship was part of their youth. Others come from homes where such activity was laughed at as superstition. Generally these homes were more secular than religious.

Probably of a greater threat to the security of faith than the attraction of divination itself is the ingrained idea that if you live well the gods will reward you. Even for young Christians it is very difficult to throw this off. By believing in Jesus, they come to know the true God. It is the duty of every Christian to serve God in all areas of life. If this is done and a young Christian still has difficulty in life, hardships on the job, family conflicts, sicknesses, the question arises, How can God allow this to happen? What have I done wrong? It may even

be asked, What good is it to me if I am a Christian and God treats me this way? The old ingrained idea is still present, namely, that if I live right God will reward me with outward good.

We thank God that the gospel is the answer for all of us. Faith is not simply a matter of choosing a personal god; it is to believe in the *only* true God. We have come to appreciate even more that the first commandment is the doorway to the entire law. Unless we have settled the question about the true God, the rest of the commandments will remain unsettled. Once that is settled, the rest follows. If we know and trust the one only true God, we can worship Him properly, we do not need dumb images. We have the lively preaching of the gospel. We have the privilege to use His Name aright and to keep His Day, the Lord's Day, holy. He is not an avenging deity for us; He is our Father who is in heaven.

Our Lord Jesus Christ makes all the difference. In this season of the year in which we reflect upon His coming into our flesh, may the Holy Spirit make Him dear to our hearts. The manger led to the cross, which in turn led to the crown. At the Father's right hand, He is now gathering His church from all nations under heaven. Soon we will be part of that great throng that no man can number (Rev. 7:9).

Faith or fate, that is the question we face.

May God strengthen each of us in the bond of true faith. ■

*The Staff
takes this opportunity
to extend to our readers
their wish for a
most blessed Christmas
as together we celebrate
the wondrous event
of the Incarnation.*

The Heavenly Song of Joy!

Rev. Jaikishin Mahtani

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

Luke 2:14

Christmas draws near. The church of Jesus Christ celebrates the birth of her beloved Savior, Jesus Christ, the Lord!

The season is usually filled with visits among families and friends, exchange of gifts, and words of cheer. Tables are laden with food and drink to make the festive season memorable. Often the poor are especially remembered, and even the non-Christian seems moved to generosity. It is a time when carols are heard, and the Christmas message is proclaimed to the world. Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the first carol of praise, recorded in Luke 2:14, revealed that there was great joy also in heaven. Although we are not exactly told that the message of the angels was in the form of a song, we do read that there was heard "a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men!" Surely if the angels in heaven rejoiced at the wonderful event of the birth of Christ, it does us well to mark Christmas on our calendars as a day of joyful worship and praise.

It is to be feared that in the busy activity and the oftentimes worldly celebration of Christmas, the message of the gospel itself is forgotten or misrepresented. Why do we celebrate

Christmas? Why did the angels in heaven rejoice? Do we know? Do our children know? Do our neighbors and friends know?

The Scriptures clearly point to other times when great joy was found in heaven. At the creation of this world the morning stars sang for joy. When one sinner repents, the angels in heaven rejoice. Surely not only at Christ's birth, but especially also at His resurrection and ascension to heaven the angels must have sung for joy. And the day is coming when the heavenly host shall burst into a thunderous anthem when Jesus returns for His saints in the clouds of glory!

But what was the reason for this particular song: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men"? We can read of the joyful occasion in Luke 2, beginning at verse 8. The simple-minded and lowly shepherds were keeping watch of their flock by night, when suddenly the angel of the Lord came upon them and the glory of the Lord Himself shone round about them! They were sore afraid! Who wouldn't be? "Has the Holy Lord come to punish us? Is it judgment day?" The shepherds trembled. But the angel of the Lord immediately assuages their terror: "Fear not!" The shepherds need not be afraid! The angel had not come to announce judgment. Rather, it was a day of peace and joy! "For behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people!" (Luke 2:10).

What good news did the angel of the Lord announce first to the shepherds in Bethlehem? Here it is: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in

swaddling clothes, lying in a manger" (Luke 2:11, 12). That which was promised of old is now being fulfilled for you this day. The Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One is here! This day, the day for which you have long waited by faith with all the saints, is now come! Christ, your Lord, is here. He comes as Savior. He comes not to destroy you nor judge you in your sins. If He were, this message would be horror to you. But rejoice because Christ the Lord comes to save you. The same angel of the Lord had announced earlier to Joseph in a dream: "Thou shalt call his name Jesus (Jehovah is Saviour): for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

Let us note two accompanying details in this announcement. They are closely related to each other. Both are important details with much significance. Understanding them will help us understand the meaning of the heavenly song of joy. The first is the announcement of the place of Christ's birth, "...in the city of David." The shepherds were abiding in that same country of Bethlehem. It is here that Christ must be born, according to divine prophecy. Without doubt the reference to the city of David points to the promise of God to His own people. "Unto you is born this day ... Christ the Lord." God is fulfilling His promise to His people. But there is more. O yes, Christ may be born in the lowly town of Bethlehem. But still, let us remember, it is the city of David! Christ must be born in the house of David the king! In the royal line He comes, for He comes as Christ, the Lord! It is the King of the Jews who is born. It will be as the King of the Jews that He will later die.

Now notice immediately in the next verse: "And this shall be a sign

Rev. Mahtani is pastor of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Houston, Texas.

unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger!" The Lord comes to you, but He comes as a babe lying in a manger! The significance of this detail is clear. This shall be a sign unto you. It will signify to you immediately that Christ, "though He was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). The poverty of His lowly birth points to His sacrifice and death as Savior! The iniquity of His brethren who are poor, filthy sinners must be laid upon the suffering servant. On the one hand, it is Christ the Lord who is born in the city of David. But on the other hand, He is lying in a manger! Behold your King-Servant! What an amazing gospel! No wonder the angels burst out with praise!

We are told it was at this point in the announcement that suddenly a multitude of the heavenly host joined the angel of the Lord in that heavenly song of joy (Luke 2:13). Is there rejoicing in our hearts this Christmas season? Do we with our children desire to celebrate Christmas in a manner that is God-glorifying? Do we desire that our rejoicing and celebration be different from the sinful pleasures and worldly merry-making of the multitudes about us? Then let us note that the angelic song of joy was sung in response to this announcement of the gospel! Not until we begin to understand the gospel declared by the angel (and, yes, by the apostles and prophets) can we truly join to sing this heavenly song of joy ourselves. Yes, to take upon our lips the holy song of the angels we need first to hear and believe the holy gospel. Only then will we begin to sing as the angels did.

"Glory to God in the highest!" Or, as we read it literally, "Glory in the highest to God!" Do we hear this angelic song of joy? Do we in our own

hearts sing this kind of song at Christmas, and always, at the contemplation of Christ's incarnation? Notice, it is a carol of praise! First and foremost it is a song sung in adoration of the Almighty God! Glory, that is, praise, be to God. God is to be commended, blessed, adored in all His works! The angels on high sing, ascribing to Him the glory. They acknowledge God. They say that highest praise and glory must be ascribed to God alone! They sing not to man first of all. No, not at all. They sing to the One who is God, the sovereign Lord who has revealed Himself. But could it be that as they sing up to God they are also looking

down on the earth? For is not the Almighty God now come down in His Son, born of a woman, lying in a manger? Bowing before Him they sing, "Glory to God!" And so must we who would properly celebrate Christmas. Our Savior cannot be our Savior except He be Christ, the Lord, the Son of the living God! This is the Rock upon which the church is built (Matt. 16:16-18).

We can learn from this heavenly song the proper celebration of Christmas. It will do us well to remember that the true joy of the angels at the birth of Christ centered upon the glory of God Himself! The angels incessantly praise and adore the thrice Holy One, but here the song is sung for us to hear. These ministering angels have something to teach us. We must be careful during Christmas not to focus our attention on anything less. The lesson is: "In all your singing, ye redeemed saints of God, sing: 'Glory in the highest be to God alone!'"

This is a heavenly song. It is sung by the heavenly host. Can the redeemed saints find any reason to join in this song? Could it be that the heavenly hosts here included not only the angels but all the saints gone up to heaven who rejoiced greatly at the

birth of the Savior? We are not told. But surely we can join to sing this song, for it is sung in reference to the mercy and salvation of God towards man.

"And on earth peace, good will toward men!" What is this peace of which the angels sing? And what is this "good pleasure of God towards men," as we read in the original text? Surely the godly shepherds could tell. Was not this the fulfillment of the promise in Isaiah 9:6? "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, ... and he shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace!" There He lay in Bethlehem! Prince! The Lord Himself! He is Christ, the Lord!

But He is especially Prince of Peace. In the deep way of suffering and death He would procure peace for His people. By the stripes which He would bear on the Cross, He would take away the wrath of God against the sins of His brethren. Reconciling His people to God He would give them true peace. Yes, He is the revelation of the God of Peace. He, being the express image of the Father, comes to reveal God's peace to His people. There He lay — Peace on earth!

And how could the angels sing of peace on this dark night in Bethlehem? Because Christ is also the revelation of God's good grace. It is the grace of God toward men about which the angels sing. How can sinners be at peace with God? Can they climb the ladder to heaven? Can they find grace in the sight of God by their works of righteousness? No, in the presence of God they can only stand in terror on account of their sins. Besides, if it be of works, it cannot be of grace. No, it is God's good pleasure of which the angels sing. God is pleased to show favor to His people. On earth peace toward men of God's good pleasure. Yes, the angels sing of God's good pleasure towards His own! To them He sends good news, the gospel of peace!

When this song of glory and peace and grace is sung, it is sung with great joy! Does Christmas particularly re-

It is to be feared that in the busy activity and the oftentimes worldly celebration of Christmas, the message of the gospel itself is forgotten or misrepresented.

mind us of God's gracious salvation in Christ? Does it bring to mind again the peace of God in Christ Jesus which passeth all understanding? Does it evoke greater worship and adoration? It must above all be sung with blessed joy! Rejoice in the Lord, O ye saints! Ye people who confess Jehovah, be happy! In your singing, think upon this heavenly song! O, we may not have voices like the angels, but redeemed hearts know how to sing with joy! If angels in heaven rejoiced at the birth of Christ, ought not we for whom Christ came? The question we ask ourselves, our children, and our neighbors is this: "Does our Christmas joy reflect that heavenly song of joy?"

Let us respond like the happy hearers who were abiding in the field. O, how they rejoiced! For the angel of the Lord came not to the rich but to these lowly shepherds. The announcement was given not to the rich and mighty. The angels sang to God in the hearing of lowly shepherds. Is not this characteristic of the gospel itself? Did not Christ, the Lord Himself, come as a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes? Did He not teach us that He comes not for the mighty and great and righteous, but for the weak and for the despised and for sinners?

Yes, this heavenly song of joy is to be sung only by God's people who know their sins and find peace with God only in Christ. Such were the shepherds, the happy hearers. And surely this is the gospel of Christmas.

One may ask, as he hears of the angelic song of joy, "May I sing that song? Is it for me, the announcement that was made?" The answer is given in the passage before us. Christ came for His own. He came to the city of David as the promised Messiah of His people. Like the shepherds who first heard this song, the true people of God are those who continue to rejoice in God and in His gracious salvation.

Let all the saints of God who hear this heavenly song of joy join in the praises of our great God! And how? Let us note the response of the first joyful hearers. When the angels finish their song and depart from the shepherds, they speak to each other: "Let us go even to Bethlehem and see this thing" (Luke 2:15). In their joy they encourage each other to go witness the Lord's promise. Surely when they find the babe lying in the manger they bow with great joy and thanksgiving! We read in verse 20 that, "with great rejoicing the shepherds returned, glo-

rifying and praising God." But also, "they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child" (Luke 2:17). While we, like Mary, must surely ponder these things in our hearts (Luke 2:19), let us like the shepherds speak to each other, bow in joyful thanksgiving, and tell it abroad. Christmas is a time for mutual encouragement amongst the saints, for united worship and thanksgiving in His house, but also for zealous evangelism.

May the song of the angelic choir be heard in joyful strains this Christmas, so our friends and neighbors know why we mark this occasion on our calendars. As we go up to the house of God with our children to worship, may our praise and adoration be filled with great joy.

And yes, when we realize that our great joy cannot be perfectly expressed here on earth, let us take heart. We are waiting eagerly for the day when we shall join the angels to sing the high praises of God with the humble shepherds, and all the elect of God. Then shall be accomplished the purpose for which we were made, that is, joyfully to sing: "Glory in the highest be to God, and on earth peace to men of God's good pleasure!" □

Special Article

Prof. Herman Hanko

Report of the Committee for Contact With Other Churches

The work of the Contact Committee continues to be busy and important.

Perhaps the most interesting part of the work since the Synod of 1993 was the trip the Contact Committee made to Ontario, Canada. This trip

was at the invitation of the Consistory of the Sheffield Independent Reformed Church, of which Rev. Jerome Julien is pastor. The Consistory of the Sheffield Church had made plans for a conference of officebearers from independent Reformed churches in

Prof. Hanko is secretary of the Committee for Contact with other Churches.

the area. We were invited to speak at this conference. Our entire Contact Committee was able to attend.

The conference was held on Saturday, October 25. Its purpose was to give the independent churches in the area an opportunity to become better acquainted with our churches. To accomplish this goal, Prof. Hanko spoke on the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches, and Prof. Decker spoke on the distinctive doctrines of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Through these speeches we made an effort to show that our churches stand historically in the line of the Calvin Reformation, the Afscheiding of 1834, and the Doleantie of 1886; and that the doctrines which form the heart of our life as churches are the doctrines of sovereign grace and an unconditional promise of the covenant. We attempted to do this by contrasting what we believe with common grace, the free offer of the gospel, and a conditional and general promise of the covenant. Interesting and spirited discussions followed the speeches.

Arrangements had been made by the Consistory of the Sheffield Independent Reformed Church for the ministers of the Contact Committee to preach in several of the churches on the following Lord's Day. This gave both the ministers and the people of these congregations an opportunity for some closer fellowship.

The excursion was enjoyable and profitable. Most of the people in these churches are first and second generation immigrants from the Netherlands, predominantly from the Gereformeerde Kerken (GKN). It was interesting to learn in the course of the discussions that the people had very little, if any, differences with our churches on the questions of common grace and the free offer of the gospel. Most of the discussion centered in the doctrine of the covenant as believed and maintained in our circles. Many expressed the desire to discuss this doctrine in more detail at a later meeting.

The preaching of our ministers was well received; the fellowship was

good. The price the people had to pay for secession from the Christian Reformed Church was great; their sense of relief and well-being was strong. We were received cordially and with open hospitality. May God bless these labors for the future.

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Our contacts with other organizations continue. Although Synod authorized the Contact Committee to send an observer to NAPARC (North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council) the week of November 7, and although an observer was appointed, unforeseen circumstances made it impossible for us to accomplish this mandate of Synod. Synod also authorized the Contact Committee to send observers to the Alliance of Reformed Churches. The Alliance is holding its meetings as this report is being prepared; we will inform our readers of this activity in a future article.

* * * * *

Our contacts with other denominations also continue. Because the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia has sent two of its students to our Seminary for study, and because Pastors Philip Burley and Chris Coleborn were therefore in this country the latter part of August and the early part of September to visit their students, the Contact Committee had opportunity to meet with these two pastors. This meeting proved to be worthwhile, and it was agreed that we would spend some time prior to the next Synod exploring ways in which our two denominations could have "less than sister-church relations," something for which the Constitution of the Contact Committee provides.

* * * * *

We have been in close touch with our sister church in Wellington, New Zealand for the past couple of months. We take this opportunity to remind our people that our churches are committed to help this sister church financially. Our commitment comes to over \$10,000 per year, money which is to be collected via special collections in the churches. Our funds are

at present depleted. We still owe nearly \$900.00 for the fiscal year of September 1992 — August 1993, and we shall have to collect the necessary \$10,000 in the coming year. While this may seem like a huge sum of money, a little figuring will show that actually it is only between \$8.00 and \$9.00 per year per family. We urge our people to give to this cause, that Rev. and Mrs. Miersma may be supported along with the work of the church there.

* * * * *

Our relationships with our sister church in Singapore have also been very active. This is due in part to the fact that Rev. Kortering is laboring there as minister-on-loan from Hope Protestant Reformed Church and under the auspices of the Contact Committee; and this activity is due, secondly, to the fact that we have in our fellowship Mr. and Mrs. Cheah Fook Meng, who are under the care of the Southwest Protestant Reformed Church. Brother Fook Meng is a student in our Seminary. The Cheahs are a delightful couple and our Seminary is enriched by the presence of this brother.

We need not report on Rev. Kortering's busy activities, for newsletters are regularly distributed in the churches. Suffice it to say that, reading the reports which are submitted to the Committee, one wonders how Rev. Kortering is able to do all that is asked of him. But he and his wife (an active participant in the work) would be the first to say that they are strengthened daily by the hand of God.

* * * * *

This is also the opportunity to remind our people that we are responsible for part of the financial support of the Cheahs. Synod has decided that this money too is to be raised by special collections. Already such support is needed, for the Cheahs have been here for over three months. Again, if the amount needed is broken down, it is not all that much. If every family in the denomination would contribute \$15.00, this would be more than sufficient for this year

and all of 1994. We might add that we commend these causes also to our readers who are not of the Protestant Reformed Churches. The money ought to be sent to our Synodical Treasurer,

Mr. Joel Zandstra
5052 36th Ave.

Hudsonville, MI 49426.

We have recently received a letter from the Treasurer of First Evan-

gelical Reformed Church of Singapore which we quote in full.

PRC in America

Dear Brethren in the Lord,

We received with joy and thanksgiving unto God your love gifts of US\$2,804.74 for our Church's building fund. We thank you for the gift that you have extended to support our church in this area of God's work.

Our church building is almost ready, and we are now applying for a Temporary Occupancy Permit to make use of the church from December, 1993 onwards.

We pray that you would continue to support us in prayer and would like to take this opportunity to share with you our joy in the building of the Lord's house.

Yours faithfully,

Gabriel Choo

(Treasurer) for the Session of FERC

The Strength of Youth

Rev. Barrett Gritters

RENEWING THE BATTLE

Drama, Television, and Movies

(6)

When Joshua and the Israelites first came into the land of Canaan, they obeyed God's command to expel the inhabitants of the lands. Mostly. When they came to the city of Jerusalem, they faced a problem. It was inhabited by the Jebusites and strongly fortified, surrounded by walls, on a high, strategically located hill. After attempting to take it, Joshua and the Israelites were convinced that the city was invincible. They went on to other battles, leaving the Jebusites in their safe haven.

When David became king of Israel, many generations later, the city was still not in possession of God's Israel. Because David saw the importance of the city for the Kingdom of God, he gave command to take the city, and promised leadership in the army to the first man who led his soldiers in accomplishing that conquest. Ambitious Joab, son of Zeruiah, climbed up through the water shaft (KJV has "gutter"), leading the soldiers into the otherwise impregnable city, and defeated it for the Lord's people. Jerusalem is now the city of David.

The visible church of Jesus Christ is like that city. Well situated, strongly fortified, she stands by God's grace against the attacks of the wicked world. Her history is a story of warfare. Her biography is a monument to continuous struggle against assaults. Without letup her walls are fired upon.

The visible church sometimes lets

down her guard, allowing the attackers in the "water shafts." Or she allows the walls to be scaled or breached. Then, instead of church, she becomes the possession of the enemy.

At issue in the church's battle against television, movies, and (as I have contended) also drama is the church's defense against the enemy. The enemy wants to enter the city, to plunder, rape, and overtake her. The church must defend herself. She must be strong. She must be alert. She must not allow the enemy to find

ingenious ways to enter her unexpectedly.

Today, sadly, most of the visible church is wholly overrun by the enemy. And once within the walls, the enemy takes charge.

Now Christian magazines recommend movies to the people, the same movies the secular magazines warn against. Way back when the original M*A*S*H came out, *Time* magazine of January 26, 1970, warned, "An audience should approach this film as it would a field of live mines." The *Reformed Journal's* May-June, 1970,

Rev. Gritters is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Byron Center, Michigan.

review praised it, calling it "two of the funniest hours ever put on film."¹ Already then the church seemed to be falling over herself to make openings in the walls of defense. By now, movies and television shows are watched with regularity by most Christians, so that an article like this one will be met with incredulity by many.

But the church must be undeterred by how far many have departed from holiness. Christ promises to preserve His own. The people of God must never stop calling each other to holiness. To surrender now is unfaithfulness to Jesus, regardless of how hopeless the battle seems. We have the victory in Jesus Christ.

At issue here is not whether Christians ought to have televisions or VCRs. At issue here is not whether Christian families ought to rent a video on Friday night for their children. The heart of the issue is not even ultimately *what* Christians and Christian families are watching and renting (although it is directly connected to what they watch). *At issue here is the holiness of the church.*

This is my motive for writing. The church must be alert, active, militant, in her effort to maintain her holiness.

The question is, "Where is your heart?"

THE ANTITHESIS

The enemy has not entered by a watergate. The enemy has entered over the crumbled walls that the church herself has allowed to fall into disrepair, or herself has willingly broken down.

¹ See Rev. Gise VanBaren's important and controversial speech entitled "Ted and Alice and Groppi ... and Grace, or, Common Grace — an Encouragement to Worldliness" in *The Standard Bearer*, May 15, 1971, 47:363.

In this, her renewed battle against the enemy, the church must repair her walls. The church must *rebuild* the walls. She may never let them fall.

The walls are the antithesis.

An essential part of the church's defense against her enemy is her *separation* from her enemy. Between His holy church and the wicked world God has built a wall of separation.

We call that wall the antithesis.

Antithesis is not a word found in the Bible. But it's a word that has come to stand for a non-negotiable biblical truth found from Genesis to Revelation. The antithesis is the spiritual separation and opposition

that God put between His holy church and the ungodly world, between His sanctified children and the children of the devil. God made this separation already in Genesis 3:15 when He put "enmity" between the children of Eve and the children of the devil. That is, God put a positive, active, mutual, hatred between the wicked world and the church.

This explains the separate existence God gave to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 33:28 says that "Israel shall dwell in safety alone." Literally, the passage reads, "Israel shall dwell in safety in *separation*." All through the old covenant, the people were commanded to be a separate people, remaining unmixed with the heathen peoples that surrounded them.

Israel's enemies knew this well. Where King Balak of the Moabites and his mercenary prophet, Balaam, couldn't succeed in cursing Israel, prophesying against her (Num. 22-24), they did succeed by integrating Israel with the Moabite women (Num. 25). For this, the anger of God was kindled against Israel, and a plague destroyed twenty-four thousand of them, before righteous Phinehas atoned for the people by spearing a fornicating Israelite and Moabite.

The call to be separate is not only for Old Testament Israel. Strikingly,

the same language is used when Paul teaches the New Testament church, "...come out from among them, and be ye *separate*, saith the Lord..." (II Cor. 6:17). Likewise, the church at Ephesus is taught, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph. 5:11). And James, with his characteristic bluntness, says, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4).

As circumcision showed the separate character of the old covenant people, baptism is the mark of separation for the new covenant people. The Reformed *Belgic Confession* teaches that by baptism "we are received into the Church of God, and *separated* from all other people and strange religions, that we may wholly belong to him, whose ensign and banner we bear" (Art. 34).

For Christians today, although the separation has a physical aspect to it, the separation is spiritual. God's people may not try to escape the wicked world, physically. Paul warns against that in I Corinthians 5, pointing out that if you were to try to do that, you would have to live on another planet ("for then ye must needs go out of the world"). But Christians must avoid all evil associations with unbelieving *persons*, and avoid all fellowship with "unfruitful works of darkness."

I called the truth of the antithesis non-negotiable. There may be no compromises here. As soon as the church believes she can give and take with regard to her spiritual separation, she not only disobeys God, she is threatened with a loss of her very identity. In the way of her separation, she is safe. In that way, God says to her, "I will be your God; you will be my people" (II Cor. 6:17ff.).

OUR HOLINESS

Our call to be separated from unholiness is the real reason for concern with regard to drama, television, and movies. From the outset I have

An essential part of the church's defense against her enemy is her separation from her enemy.

made that clear. In the first article I said, "What is at stake? At stake is holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." Regarding the content, I urged: "Every Christian who loves holiness ought to be horrified at what jumps out at him...." Regarding the effects: "To sum up, the effect of most television programs is simply a loss of holiness. Spurgeon was right. If theatre-going (read: 'movie watching') becomes general among professing Christians, it will soon prove the death of piety (read: 'holiness')." As to drama itself, I began, "Acting out either the holy life or sinful deeds of others is sinful and must violate the sanctified conscience of every Christian."

But this was not only *my* concern. We saw that holiness, sanctification, antithetical living was the concern of every church father whose judgment was against drama and theater.

HOLINESS MUST BE UNDERSTOOD

There are two errors that we can make when we speak of holiness. One is that we think holiness is simply outward, putting away *things*.

The story is told (apocryphal?) of one man who became so disgusted with what was on television that, in a fit of anger, he put the butt of a gun through the picture tube. We're tempted to be impressed by that. But what of the righteous anger that we should have with *ourselves*? The problem is not the television. The problem is our own heart. Our own desire for holiness. Our own love for God. Our own hatred of the sin that we find in ourselves. Holiness is mortification. Holiness is controlling our own spirits. Living the antithesis begins in our own hearts. Paul teaches the Galatian church, "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." And if that doesn't sound painful enough, he says to the Romans, "If ye through the Spirit do mortify (put to death) the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (8:13). And to the Colossians, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon earth..." (3:5). The Heidelberg Catechism says

that true conversion is "mortification of the old, and the quickening of the new man" (Q.83).

So, first of all, holiness with respect to drama and television begins in the heart.

Second, holiness is not just a response to evil. Living the antithesis is not just saying "No" to worldly living. On the contrary, holiness is consecration to God, and the antithesis is saying "Yes" to godliness. In fact, rejecting the evil is done in order that we may embrace the good; saying "no" to worldliness opens the way to saying "yes" to godliness. The negative is meaningless without the positive.

It's even safe to say that an attempt at holiness without the positive so smacks of legalism as to make it detestable. To be legalists with regard to holiness is as deadly as being lawless. "Don't do this and don't do that; and if you comply with our list of don'ts, you must be a Christian, you are living a holy life." To put it in terms of the parable we've been using, the church's defense against the enemy and her maintenance of her walls is meaningless if she has no thoughts for her life within the walls. The church separates herself from the wicked world in order that she may dedicate herself wholly to Jehovah God. She is an enemy of the world so that she may be a "friend of God."

Consecration to our good God, our Savior, who has given us all things in Jesus Christ. That's holiness. Love for God with all our being.

Is this where we fail? We love God. We love God's people. We love God's Word. We love the life of purity, for the honor of God. Is this where we fail? Is this why there is not the desire for separation from the world as there ought to be?

Here is the last line of defense. Let the enemy come all the way to the city. But let him not breach the wall. The call of God to give ourselves to Him body and soul is too important, the witness to the world of holy people

is too significant, the life we live with God is too precious, to allow unholiness in. We love God.

CONCLUSION

We may be tempted at this point again to instruct all of God's people, "throw out your televisions." Again, that may be necessary for some, maybe many. But that would be treating God's people as children, instead of as the mature, Spirit-possessed people of God that they are.

Instead, the call we give, the challenge we issue, is this: Let us examine our lives in the light of God's Word. Let us not say, "I think my television and video watching is no problem." What *we* have problems with is not the issue. Truth is, we often deceive ourselves. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). "Who can understand his errors?" (Ps. 19:12a). Let's let God be the judge. Christians are concerned with what their gracious God thinks.

So let the Christian pray, with regard to television, movies, and drama,

*To be legalists
with regard
to holiness
is as deadly
as being lawless.*

Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall

be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer (Ps. 19:12b-14).

Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (Ps. 139:23, 24).

Lord, let my love for Thee be without hypocrisy; work in me abhorrence of that which is evil, and a cleaving to that which is good (see Rom. 12:9).

Doing this, the people of God are safe.

The safety is in the way of battle. All our lives. In our own hearts. □

Book Review

An Inquiry into the Spiritual Character of The Revival of 1859, by Rev. William Hamilton (Hudsonville, MI: Reformed Book Outlet, 1993) 297 pp., \$7.00 (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. Herman Hanko.]

A few explanations are probably in order before we briefly review this important book.

While Rev. Gise VanBaren was working in the Covenant Reformed Fellowship during the latter part of 1992 and the first part of 1993, this old book, difficult to obtain, came to his attention. It impressed him as an important book both because it spoke to current problems in Northern Ireland and Great Britain at large, and because it struck a note which is almost impossible to find in any other book. The Covenant Reformed Fellowship agreed and thought it worth printing. After much discussion, the Reformed Book Outlet in Hudsonville, MI agreed to reprint the book and underwrite its costs, while the Covenant Reformed Fellowship would be chief distributor. We commend the Reformed Book Outlet for their willingness to engage in this work.

The book has to do, as the title says, with revivals, particularly with the revival in Northern Ireland in 1859. It is written by a man who was a minister in the Irish Presbyterian Church from 1836 to 1874, i.e., during the years when revivals were in full force. He was a witness to them. He did not, however, participate in them.

The revival began in Kells, Co.

Antrim, the very village near which Rev. Ronald Hanko, missionary to Ireland, now lives. It swept Ulster and surrounding areas and was hailed by all as a mighty work of God. It has since been counted among those blessed works of the Spirit that came to England, Wales, and America in the 19th century.

Rev. Hamilton was, however, not impressed with the revival. Nor was he impressed with the joy and approbation with which it was greeted. He was not impressed by it because, as he says in his Preface, "No one, so far as I know, has brought it to the test of Scripture. This, from the beginning, I regarded as absolutely necessary...."

When Rev. Hamilton put the revival to the test of Scripture, he found it wanting in all respects. He could find no good things about it by Scripture's standard; he could recommend no part of it after every part was tested by the only rule of faith and life. This revival stands condemned.

The book is important. It is important, in the first place, because all the revivals of the 18th and 19th centuries were similar, if not identical, to the 1859 revival in Ulster. If that revival in Ulster is to be condemned on biblical grounds, the same is true of all similar revivals.

The book is important, in the second place, because many both in Reformed and Presbyterian churches look for the only possible salvation of the church today in some revival yet to come for which they earnestly pray. While this hope of revival may be stronger in the British Isles than in America, it can also be found here. Just recently I have seen in an official publication of a Reformed church an

earnest call to God's people to pray for revival. Perhaps those who now long and pray for revival will understand the wrong of it if they read Hamilton's penetrating analysis.

Hamilton's analysis is complete. He deals with the idea of revival as such, but also treats related issues such as a lay ministry, women teaching in the church, revival meetings, testimonies at public meetings, ecumenical cooperation in revivals, religious excitement as found in revival circles, and visions which those under the power of the revival claim to have had.

Yet these practical issues are weighed in the light of more profound doctrinal issues: the doctrines of the church and the ministry of the Word, of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, of conversion and Christian assurance, of the law and its place in the Christian life.

Hamilton's conclusion, after weighing all the evidence in the light of Scripture and the historic Westminster Creeds, is that the revival was not the work of the Spirit at all, that it was in fact a movement destructive of the Christian faith and church, and that it is, therefore, to be condemned.

These things badly need saying, and we are grateful that a book which says them is now available.

The book can be obtained in America from the

Reformed Book Outlet
3505 Kelly, Hudsonville, MI 49426;
or in the United Kingdom from
The Covenant Reformed Fellowship
7 Lislunna Rd.

Kells, Ballymena, Co. Antrim
BT42 3NR, Northern Ireland. □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

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

Congregational Activities

In late October the village of Lansing, IL approved a request from our Peace PRC to run the village water line to the south end of their property rather than the north end. With this approval Peace can now proceed with

annexation, and obtain the final blueprints. Peace also hoped to begin some of the preparatory work on the site this fall.

The building committee of Peace also asked for some help from their congregation in a rather unusual way. They placed, in the back of church, copies of a drawing of the sign they planned to put up on the property.

They asked for congregational help in determining the color scheme of that sign. Members were asked to color the drawing as they liked, and give it back to a member of the building committee.

The Council of the Hudsonville, MI PRC received a formal request in late October from the members of their daughter group, commonly referred to as the "Georgetown Area" PR group, who have been meeting in the Bauer Elementary School in Bauer, MI since September, for formal organization. Accompanying this letter of request were the signatures of 33 families and one individual. Twenty-seven of these families plus the one individual are from our Hudsonville congregation. Three families are from the Grandville PRC, two from Faith, and one from Southeast.

Indications from both the bulletins and personal notes I receive from the Trinity PRC of Houston, TX point to a busy congregation. Recently the congregation was busy with the distribution of flyers inviting the community to their Thanksgiving Day Service, something that is not at all common in the Houston area. Trinity has also prepared a short note of welcome, which they distribute to all their visitors.

Since the arrival of Pastor Mahtani and his family in July, Trinity has had some 25 visitors to their services, an indication that some of Trinity's new initiatives are having their desired effect. What this all means for Trinity in the future, only God knows the answer to that.

Seminarian Doug Kuiper was in the Randolph, WI PRC recently, filling the pulpit for Randolph's pastor, Rev. S. Key. While there for that Sunday he was also asked to lead the worship service at Continental Manor (I assume a rest home) in Randolph.

From our Pella, IA PRC we learn that this past summer's Sunday School collections were designated for Pella's new church steeple.

Our Byron Center, MI PRC recently held their first children's activities night for the year. All in grades 4-8 were invited to attend a hayride

followed by a hot-dog roast.

On almost the same night the fathers and children of Sunday School age were invited to what has become an annual father and S.S. children's hayride, sponsored by members of the Grandville, MI PRC.

After a recent Sunday morning church service in which public confession of faith was made by two young adults of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC, the congregation was invited to stay for a few moments to extend congratulations to the two new confessing members and to enjoy refreshments provided by Kalamazoo's Young Adult Group.

School Activities

In answer to the question, "Which comes first, a PR Christian School, or a Mothers' Club to support it?" the answer, at least for the members of our own PR School Society in Randolph, WI, is, "a Mothers' Club." One was recently organized there not only for mothers of school-age children, but for all women of Randolph's congregation. Plans call for the doors of this Christian school to open, D.V., in the fall of 1994.

Prof. D. Engelsma was the featured speaker at a recently concluded Christian School Open House and Dedication program for our South Holland, IL PR Christian School. The program began at 7:30 at South Holland PR Church and was followed by

an open house and refreshments at the school.

The students, under the direction of Covenant Christian High's Student Council, recently took part in a Thanksgiving Food Drive. The entire student body of Covenant was divided into six groups and requested to bring in items depending on what group they were in. Plans called for the items to be separated, boxed, and delivered to needy families in the Grand Rapids, MI area.

Ministerial Activities

Rev. W. Bruinsma, presently serving our churches as pastor of the First PRC in Holland, MI, has declined the call he received from the Loveland, CO PRC.

Young People's Activities

On Sunday afternoon, November 21, the Young People's Societies of the PR churches in West Michigan met at our Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI for their annual Thanksgiving Mass Meeting. Rev. R. Cammenga, pastor of Southwest, addressed the young people on a Thanksgiving theme based on Hosea 2:8, 9. □

Food for Thought

"It pleases the Father that all fullness should be in Christ; therefore there is nothing but emptiness anywhere else."

W. Gadsby

ANNOUNCEMENTS

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council of Bethel Protestant Reformed Church mourns the loss of a dear member of its congregation,

MR. BILL MEERSE,

and extends its sympathy to his widow, Mrs. Gertie Meerse.

In light of his many infirmities we take comfort that part of the glory of heaven is that "God shall wipe all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

Rev. Ronald VanOverloop, Pres.

Mr. Michael Jankovic, Clerk

NOTICE!!!

Each issue of the *Standard Bearer* is available on cassette tape for those who are blind, or who prefer hearing the *SB* to reading it. This is an excellent ministry of the Evangelism Society of the Southeast Protestant Reformed Church. The reader is Ken Rietema of Southeast Church. Anyone desiring this service regularly should write:

Southeast PRC
1535 Cambridge Ave. S.E.
Grand Rapids, MI 49506

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On November 17, 1993, our parents and grandparents,

MR. and MRS. MENNO SMITS,
celebrated their 55th wedding anniversary. We rejoice with them and thank God for their faithfulness and loving Christian upbringing.

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children: to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them" (Psalm 103:17, 18).

- * Richard and Frieda Smits
Mark and Laura Moes
Jack and Valerie Krygsheld
Rick and fiancé Mary Terpstra
- * Carl and Trudy Smits
Ross and Sue Rispens
Blake, Jared, Brittany, Clark
Dan and Julie Lyzenga
Benjamin, Danae, Luke, Mark
Mike and Lisa VanDrunen
Michelle, Katie, Jonathan
Carl and Debbie Smits
Joel and Debbie Smits
- * Clyde and Beth Rinsema
Sarah, Nathan, Rebecca

Lansing, IL

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church expresses its sincerest Christian sympathy to our members, Mr. and Mrs. Ken Vink and family, in the loss of Mrs. Vink's father,

MR. GERRITT VANDERLEE,
and to Mr. and Mrs. John VanderWoude and family on the passing of Mrs. VanderWoude's step-father,

MR. HENRY WEEMHOF.
May our gracious God comfort them by His Word, "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Revelation 14:13).

Rev. A. Spriensma, President
Mr. David Harbach, Clerk

SALE

Better to Marry by David J. Engelsma, 120 pages, paper, \$9.95.

Better to Marry is available at an introductory sale price of 25% off through January. Book club members will receive a 40% discount through January.

To order, send \$7.50 plus \$1.50 postage (foreign, \$2.50) to

RFP
P.O. Box 2006
Grand Rapids, MI 49501

Book club members will receive their copies automatically and may order additional copies at \$6.00 each plus \$1.50 postage (foreign, \$2.50).

The Farbers by Gertrude Hoeksema, illustrated by Terri Gleason VandeVegte, 203 pages, cloth, \$14.95.

A collection of 101 entertaining and instructional stories about a Christian family's everyday experiences, **The Farbers** has been published by Heritage Christian School Fundraisers and is available at \$14.95 plus \$2.00 postage (foreign, \$3.00) by sending payment to

Heritage Christian School Fundraisers
3316 104th Ave.
Holland, MI 49424.

NOTICE!!!

Celebration of the

Protestant Reformation

We are happy to have available the tapes of two outstanding lectures by Prof. David Engelsma on "Luther, Reformer of the Church," held in Redlands PR Church. Titles of the two lectures were: "Luther, Man of Conviction," and "Luther, Theologian of the Glory of God." The two 90-minute tapes may be obtained, for \$2.50 each, from:

Hope PR Church of Redlands
1307 E. Brockton Ave.
Redlands, CA 92374

NEW BOOK!

An Important Book Reprinted!
**An Inquiry into the Scriptural Character
of the Revival of 1859**

by
the Rev. William Hamilton
published by
The Reformed Book Outlet
3505 Kelly
Hudsonville, MI 49426
(616) 669-6730

Cost: \$7.00 plus 10% postage, 4% sales tax (MI residents only)

distributed by
The Covenant Reformed Fellowship
7 Lislunna Road
Kells, Ballymena
Northern Ireland
BT42 3NR
(0266) 891851

Cost: £5.00 (includes postage)

NOTICE!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 12, 1994, at the Southeast Protestant Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, MI.

Jon J. Huiskens
Stated Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Doon Men's Society wishes to express sincerest sympathy to fellow member, Edwin VanGinkel and his family in the passing of his mother,

MRS. MARY VAN GINKEL.

May they find comfort in these words: "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: Wait, I say, on the Lord" (Psalm 27:14).

Chester Hunter, Jr., President
David Wiersma, Secretary