



THE **STANDARD BEARER**

**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**



"This Word was produced from God, and was generated by being produced, and therefore is called the Son of God, and God, from unity of substance with God.

**When a ray is projected from the sun it is a portion of the whole sun;
but the sun will be in the ray because it is a ray of the sun;
the substance is not separated but extended. So God comes from God.**

This ray of God glided down into a virgin." —Tertullian

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In This Issue ...

In observance of Christmas, several articles in this issue of the *Standard Bearer* treat of the wonderful birth of Jesus Christ the Lord.

The meditation by Herman Hoeksema probes, in a doctrinally devotional (or is it devotionally doctrinal?) way, God's revelation of Himself in the event of Jesus' birth. Hoeksema published the meditation 50 years ago in the December 15, 1945 issue of the *SB*. His Christmas and Lenten meditations brought out the very best in him. Those whose appetite is whetted by the meditation should read Hoeksema's published work of Christmas meditations, *The Mystery of Bethlehem*. This 197-page book is available from the RFFPA, P.O. Box 2006, Grand Rapids, MI 49501. Come to think of it, the book would make a fine Christmas present.

Gripping is the text of Rev. Jason Kortering's sermon to an audience in Singapore that included a number of Chinese idol-worshippers. It brought the good news of Jesus' birth into a pagan culture (read "Good Tidings for All People").

The editorial directs attention to the biblical testimony that Bethlehem's baby was, and is, God's only begotten Son. It defends the retention of this fundamental description of Jesus in the churches' English Bible in the face of the omission of it by modern versions. If "only begotten" no longer appears in the versions used by the church, it will soon disappear also from the confession of the people. Already, it is reported, some confess the Apostles' Creed with "only Son," rather than "only begotten Son."

There is even a timely poem: "Joy to the Church."

This is the will of God disclosed in the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:10).

This is also the wish of all of us involved in producing the *SB* for our readers: a joyous, blessed Christmas.

—DJE

** For the cover picture we are indebted to Mrs. Marilyn Wassink

(First PRC, Holland, MI).

Bethlehem's Hidden Revelation*

Let us go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

Luke 2:15

How near!

Let us see this thing, this Word that is come to pass!

How close He is to us, there in Bethlehem, in the manger, in the swaddling clothes, in the flesh and blood of that little babe.

Let us go now, and see this thing, this Word, Him, the God of our salvation! Let us behold Him; and, yes, let us touch Him if we may: for now He is as close to us as possible! Let us go now, and see this thing that has come to pass, for He is there of which the apostle later declared: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of life."

The God of our salvation!

Naturally, it is through Luke that this invitation to go to Bethlehem and see this thing comes to us. With him we find the narrative of the incarnation from its human aspect, the story of that which might be seen and heard and touched. In Matthew the gospel is particularly concerned

with the genesis of Jesus that is called the Christ, the son of Abraham, the Son of David, the Messiah. There He is presented as the fulfillment of the prophecy that a virgin should be with child and should bear a son and that His name should be called Immanuel. In Mark the gospel proceeds at once to picture Him as the mighty King, marvelous in power. On the wings of the profound revelation of John we are invited to soar into the mysterious heights of eternity, the "beginning," when the Word was with God and was God. But the gospel as Luke viewed it brings Him very close to us, as the Son of man, like unto His brethren in all things.

His incarnation narrative centers in the simple words of Luke 2:7, marvelous in their simplicity, amazing in their inexhaustible depth: "And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."

O, yes, marvelous things are told us as the narrative continues. Angels appear to shepherds in the hollow of the night. They preach and sing, they rejoice and give glory to the Most High. Yet, it all concentrates in that little Babe in the manger. Of Him they speak, to Him they point, toward Him they direct the way of the angels when they declare unto them: "And this shall be a sign unto you: ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."

The sign!

That which may be seen and handled of the Son of God become flesh!

Let us go now and see! Thus spoke the shepherds! And they went and saw!

Let us, too, go, and let us behold the thing that has come to pass.

Yes, and let us follow the shepherds, that we may behold what they saw. To the first witnesses of the fulfillment of the promise they belong, and through their eyes, by faith, we would behold the Word that is come to pass. Yet, as today we turn to Bethlehem, let us not be satisfied with the company of the shepherds, to follow them alone. Other witnesses have come, and seen, and heard, and handled. They heard and testified that He has the words of eternal life; that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God; that He is the One who is in the bosom of the Father, the Word become flesh, the Way, the Truth, the Life, and the Resurrection. They heard Him speak, they saw His mighty works, they witnessed His awful death, they beheld the reality and the glory of His resurrection, and they looked up into heaven as He was received into the heavenly glory.

Let us go now unto Bethlehem — not as if we had no more than the beginning of this revelation of the God of our salvation, but with all these witnesses, that in the light of their light we may see, and by their testimony we may believingly

Herman Hoeksema was the first editor of the Standard Bearer.

* *Standard Bearer*, December 15, 1945.

contemplate this thing that has come to pass!

Then we know: that Child is the God of our salvation!

The Wonder of wonders: God come near, extremely near us!

Yes, even in that Christmas night, Mary knew, through her own amazing experience as interpreted by the words of the angel beforehand: That holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God!

Joseph knew, for in a dream it had been revealed to him that Mary was with child of the Holy Ghost, that her child should be called Immanuel, and Jesus, for He would save His people from their sins.

And the shepherds knew, for the angels in the fields of Ephratah had preached the gospel unto them.

Yet, as they went and saw, they could not behold Him, as we do by faith, in the light of His terrible death and glorious resurrection!

Let us go, then, and see! No, indeed, not to fathom the mystery of the Babe in the manger; not to comprehend the Wonder of all wonders; for the oftener we go and see, and the more earnestly we contemplate this thing that has come to pass, the more profound and amazing the Mystery becomes. Yet, as we now go to Bethlehem and look upon that Babe in the manger in the light of His own Word which He spoke concerning Himself, in the light of His deep humiliation and glorious exaltation at the right hand of God, in the light, too, of the Spirit He has given us — we know and understand the riches of the gospel that there, in the manger, in that frail little Baby, is very God come down to us!

How near He is!

Near He is, not in the providential sense, according to which in Him we live and move and have our being. For, mark you well, we must go to Bethlehem, to a manger, to swaddling clothes, to a little Child, this time, to behold our God. No, this time the message is not: "Lift up your eyes on high, and see who hath made all these things; your

mighty God calleth them all by name!" Your attention is not now called to the fact that "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handiwork." On the contrary, you must now, for the moment at least, turn your eyes away from these witnesses of God's eternal power and Godhead, and you must look for your God close by, very near, where you may even touch Him; to Bethlehem you must direct your steps, into a stable you must enter, and there the sign and symbol of your God shall be a Babe, a manger, swaddling clothes!

How near, how dreadfully near!

Yet, though you approach with fear and trembling because of this nearness of your God, how blessed is this proximity! For He is become like unto us! He tabernacles with us! Uniting Himself with us in personal union He has fellowship with us!

There in the manger of Bethlehem is the central realization of the tabernacle of God with men, the eternal covenant of God's friendship in its highest possible fulfillment!

In the first Paradise God, too, was near to man. Yet, Adam's knowledge of the living God, and his fellowship with Him, were always mediate: though near, God was always far.

But in the manger we see the thing come to pass that God is become man!

He that is eternally in the form of God, even while we behold that Babe in the manger, assumed the likeness of man, the likeness of sinful flesh!

The eternal One has come within the limitation of time; the infinitely Immense lies wrapped in swaddling clothes!

God lives our life, thinks our thoughts, is moved by our desires, is come into our sin-cursed world!

In this Child the fellowship of God with man is immediate!

How amazingly near!

Yet, how far away!

This, too, must be confessed as we go to Bethlehem to see the thing that has come to pass!

For, as we stand there at the manger and contemplate this amazing revelation of the living God, we cannot but be struck by the astounding fact that now He is completely hid!

In His highest revelation it is wholly concealed!

In His closest approach to us He has wholly receded from within the range of our vision!

O, indeed, always there is an element of concealment in the revelation of God. Does not the revelation of the Eternal necessarily imply that He speaks to us in time? When the Infinite makes Himself known to us, does He not come down to the level of the finite? When His Word goes forth to the understanding of man, does it not assume the form of human speech? And is there, then, in that limitation of time no concealment of the Eternal? Does not always the measure of the finite hide the Infinite? And is not human speech incapable of representing completely the fullness of the divine Word? And would it not lead us to idolatry if we should forget this element of concealment and anthropomorphism, and identify the glory of the sun and of the moon, and of all the starry heavens and all the wide creation, with the glory of the Creator Himself?

Yet, in the works of creation the glory of God shines through!

The heavens do declare the glory of God, and the firmament does show His handiwork. Day unto day does utter speech concerning God; and night unto night does shew knowledge of Him. In and through the things that are made, the invisible things of Him are clearly seen, even His eternal power and divinity. For even the concealment is revelation! We know Him as the One that calleth the things that are not as if they were! Though He reveals Himself in time, recognizing clearly the element of concealment, we



know that He is eternal; though His revelation takes place within the limits of the finite, we know that He is the Infinite.

But as we go to Bethlehem to see this thing that is come to pass, what do we see?

A Babe!

A Child like unto our children!

A manger! Swaddling clothes!

And as you enter you quickly shut the door of the stable, lest the chill of the night strike that frail little body; and you are careful not to remove those swaddling clothes. The little Child might get a chill. It might get sick. It might even ... die! For you see Him there in the likeness of sinful flesh, weak, mortal, subject to death.

No, He will not die until His hour is come, we know! He has power to lay down His life and to take it again. He is the life and the resurrection, the mighty God!

But in Bethlehem you cannot see this: it is completely hid!

Where now is the glory of the Eternal? It is concealed in the temporal, and the eternal glory is not even suggested here in Bethlehem. Where is the incomprehensible glory of the Infinite? It is wholly hid in the finite, wrapped up in human flesh and blood, in swaddling clothes! Where is the majesty of the Lord of heaven and earth? O, it still shines in the heavens; but here in Bethlehem, the central and highest revelation of the God of our salvation, it is quite covered by the form of a servant!

If in Bethlehem we must behold our God, where is His omnipotence? It has assumed the form of a frail human body, mortal flesh!

Where is the I AM, the Immutable, the Self-existent, the Independent, the Creator? He is wrapped up in the swaddling clothes of a weak, changeable, dependent creature!

How far away is our God in Bethlehem, though He is so near!

For, indeed, He is the Word that is God, the effulgence of the Father's glory, the express image of His sub-

stance; yet now, here in Bethlehem, the Word cannot speak. He must learn our language.

If you worship Him there, and kneel down at the manger, He will pay no attention to your devotion.

If you pray, He will not answer.

In His central revelation God is lost in concealment; in His closest approach to us He is far away!

O, how far!



Marvelous beginning!

The paradox of the incarnation!

The union of God and man, of the Creator and the creature, of the Eternal and the temporal, God revealed completely hid, very near yet far away!

The living God in the midst of death!

But we must not be lost in the paradox of Bethlehem. We dare not forget, as we stand by the manger and contemplate that Babe, and marvel at the mystery of godliness, and worship and give glory to God in the highest, that here we behold only the beginning of the revelation of Jesus Christ, of the Anointed of God, who came to save His people from their sin. In the greater, the clear light of His complete revelation, through the faithful and inspired testimony of those that heard and saw and handled the Word of life and declared Him unto us, we know that this beginning of God revealing Himself in the likeness of sinful flesh was indeed necessary unto our salvation.

His glory must be hid before it can shine forth in greater glory.

Nay, it must be hid in order that it may be revealed in all its riches and beauty of divine power and virtue.

Yes, as this Child grows up, increases in stature and understanding as any other child, the Wonder of the incarnation, of His being Immanuel, God with us, will become known to those that believe. For He will speak with authority, words of grace as no man ever spoke, words

of eternal life; and He will perform mighty works such as no mere man ever did: He will heal the sick, open the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf, cast out devils, bid the tempest be still, and raise the dead.

Yet, His glory must be eclipsed still more completely than it is in that Babe in the manger: it must be contradicted in death!

Then, when He, the God of our salvation, who took all our sins upon Himself, has descended into deepest death, when His glory seems hopelessly swallowed up of death, yea, of the death of the cross, then He will mightily break forth through the darkness into the glorious light of the resurrection, and ascend into the glory of the Father.

And then He will reveal Himself, through His Spirit and Word, as being God with us, very near with His blessed fellowship.

He will draw us unto Himself, that we may be with Him.

For evermore! □

JOY TO THE CHURCH

Joy to the church —
her Lord is born —
In Flesh, the Son of God!
The holy Child,
The Undeified,
He's born to be our King!
Let us in triumph sing
Hosanna!

Let praises to our Savior ring.

Joyfully sing!
The Lord has come
To set His people free.
The sin-enclave
By Him are saved.
Adore on bended knee —
The Lord Incarnate — He!
Sing praise;
Sing praise eternally!

— *Thelma Westra*

The Birth of the Only Begotten

The churches' observance of Christmas is due to Jesus' being the only begotten Son of God.

True celebration of the birth of Jesus consists of worshiping Him as the only begotten of the Father.

The birth of the firstborn son of Mary in the stable in Bethlehem was the birth of the only begotten Son of God.

This is the description of Jesus by the apostle John in John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; and I John 4:9. In the Greek, it is one word: "*monogenees*." The word means "only begotten." It describes Jesus' origin. His origin is the being of God. Out of the being of God He is produced as the Son. This producing as Son, or begetting, from God's being has Him sharing God's being, as Son. The one begotten of the being of God is Himself God, just as the child begotten of an earthly father thereby and therefore shares the human nature of the father.

The only begotten is God.

He is the Son of God as God the Son.

Since it is Jesus who is the only begotten, Jesus is God the Son. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son (Jesus Christ, according to the preceding verse — DJE), which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18).

The baby in the manger, indeed in Mary's womb, was God — the infinite, glorious God.

Jesus was not the Son of God only, or even mainly, by virtue of

conception by the Holy Ghost. He was the Son of God before His conception as a child. He was, and is, the Son of God by virtue of being begotten of God in eternity.

Jesus did not begin to be the Son of God when He was born. He was the Son of God before He was born. He is the Son of God eternally. His begetting is an eternal begetting. There never was a "time" in eternity when He was not, as the Son. God was never without His Son.

In the conception and birth of Jesus, God did not *make* a Son, but *gave* and *sent* His Son.

The birth of Jesus was the beginning of the Son of God as a man. Without ceasing to be God the Son, He begins to be the son of Mary, of David, of Abraham, and of Adam.

The birth of Jesus was His incarnation: The eternal Word and Son became flesh, and dwelt among us (John 1:14). But very definitely, the one now dwelling among us in the human flesh of the baby in the manger is the "only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Of this becoming flesh of the only begotten, the virgin birth was both clear sign and necessary means.

Unbelief has always ridiculed or raged against the description of Jesus as only begotten. This was true during the earthly ministry of the only begotten. Jesus claimed the distinction in John 5:17, when He referred to God as His very own Father: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." The Jews knew that Jesus

was claiming to be the Son of God. They knew that He was claiming to be the Son of God by begetting. For they understood that by His claim He was "making himself equal with God" (v. 18). He is equal with God only if He shares the divine being, and He shares the divine being only by being begotten of God. For this claim, they sought to kill Him.

The unbelief of theological modernism similarly resents and rejects the biblical teaching that Jesus is the only begotten. It too is guilty of attempted murder. It seeks to kill the truth, specifically the truth that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. It seeks to kill Jesus in His revelation in the confession of the true church. All that is meant, say the liberals (who thus show themselves denser than the unbelieving Jews, who at least understood what "only begotten" means), is that there came to be a special relationship between the man Jesus and God.

How surprising, how ominous, how inexcusable, how destructive for the Christian faith that the modern English translations of the Bible refuse to translate John's "*monogenees*" as "only begotten." In all the passages, the Revised Standard Version and the New English Bible translate "only" (Son). The New International Version (NIV) has either "only" (Son) or "one and only" (Son).

This is erroneous translation of the Greek word.

In the NT *monogenees* ... means "only begotten." ... In Jn. 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; I Jn. 4:9 *monogenees* denotes more than the uniqueness or incom-

In the conception and birth of Jesus, God did not make a Son, but gave and sent His Son.

parability of Jesus. In all these verses He is expressly called the Son, and He is regarded as such in 1:14. In Jn. *monogenees* denotes the origin of Jesus. He is *monogenees* as the only-begotten (Buchsels, "monogenees," in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 4, pp. 739, 741).

This is a puzzling, willful break with the longstanding tradition of translating *monogenees* as "only begotten."

Fact is, the translations "only" (Son) and "one and only" (Son) teach falsehood. Jesus is not the only, or the one and only, Son of God. God has many other sons and daughters. All elect believers are children of God both by adoption and by rebirth. Jesus is the only Child *by begetting*, that is, by (eternal) derivation of His being from God's own being. This is the force of *monogenees*, and this is perfectly expressed in the translation, "only begotten."

The loss of the description of Jesus as only begotten in the new English versions of Scripture is a real threat to the fundamental Christian doctrine of the Godhead of Jesus

Christ. We are today in danger of losing by Bible translation what was won for the church by grand theology, vigorous controversy, blessed martyrdom, and Spirit-guided synodical decision.

In light of John's "only begotten," Mark's "beloved Son" and Paul's "His own Son" will, and must, be understood to teach that Jesus is Son by sharing the being of God. Lose John's "only begotten," and the fundamental testimony to the generation of the Son is effectively stricken from Scripture. Lost is the clear biblical explanation as to *how* Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, namely, by begetting from the divine being.

At Nicea in A. D. 325, the issue — and the whole of the Christian faith — hinged on this: Jesus is "of one substance with the Father." But Nicea grounded this confession upon Jesus' being "the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds ... very God of very God, begotten, not made."

The Nicene confession of Jesus' Deity — the "*homoousion*" ("of one substance") — rested solidly on John's doctrine of the "*monogenees*" as the begetting of Jesus from the

substance, or being, of God. Take away the "only begotten," and the "*homoousion*" falls. With the fall of the "*homoousion*" falls Christianity.

"Only begotten" is fundamental.

"I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God!"

As the only begotten Son, the baby of Bethlehem can and will save His people from their sins. Otherwise not.

As the only begotten Son, He is the revelation to all who believe of the love of God toward us, for "God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him" (I John 4:9). Otherwise not.

As the only begotten Son, He must be honored by our believing in Him. "He that believeth on him is not condemned: He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). Otherwise not.

We have reason to rejoice in the birth of Jesus.

And to marvel.

It was the birth of the only begotten. □

— DJE

Guest Article

Rev. Jason Kortering

Good Tidings for All People*

Christmas is a time for good news. The Christian gospel is the good news about the birth of Jesus. We are thankful to God for each one of you here tonight. We want to tell you about the "good tidings of great joy."

Rev. Kortering is a Protestant Reformed minister-on-loan to Singapore.

The story of Jesus is not an interesting legend that has been handed down for many centuries. There are many such stories in our Chinese tradition. We think of Kuan Yin, or the Goddess of Mercy, the Monkey King, or the Monk Tang Cheng, and the Pig Man. The story of Jesus is different in that Jesus actually was born and lived on the earth. Almost 2,000 years ago a young virgin by the name of Mary

went to the city of Bethlehem, in the Middle East, just south of Jerusalem. She was pregnant and about to deliver her son. Her husband was not even the father of her baby. Rather, God had come down upon her and conceived within her this son. When

* This article is the transcript of a Christmas (1994) message delivered by our minister-on-loan to a people of another culture.

they came to the little village of Bethlehem there was no room in the hostel. So they stayed the night in the stall where the donkeys of the travelers were kept. It was during that very night that she gave birth to her son and called His name Jesus. Jesus actually was born and lived on the earth. He is both God and man.

Joseph and Mary were happy that God had given to them this son. They knew this son was special. The angel of God had told them that He would be the Savior of the world. This is the good news which makes us Christians so happy on Christmas.

There were shepherds taking care of their sheep just outside the little village of Bethlehem. These men were Christians and were praying for the birth of Jesus to take place. You see, God had promised to Christians for many years that this Savior, Jesus, would be born. God sent His angels to the shepherds to tell them that Jesus had finally been born.

When the shepherds first saw this angel of God, they were afraid. You must understand that an angel is not a fairy that floats around in the air. Neither is an angel a ghost with a long tongue hanging out of its mouth, roaming around the earth making trouble. Many of our older Chinese friends know about fairies and ghosts. When they think of them, they are afraid. Angels are different. They are wonderful creatures of God. God made them to be His messengers. They go back and forth between this earth and heaven, bringing messages and helping Christians even when we cannot see them. You ask, Why then were the shepherds afraid? The angel said, "Fear not." The reason is that the shepherds knew that they were sinful men and that the angels were perfect, without sin. They were afraid the angels had come to punish them for their sins.

The very opposite was true. The angels had come to tell the shepherds that Jesus was born. The shep-

herds had no reason to be afraid. We do not have to be afraid of God's angels either. As Christians we know that fairies and ghosts are not even real. True, there are evil spirits in this world, but the wonderful truth about Jesus is that He has control over all of them as well. We Christians are not afraid of any evil spirit. We thank God for this.

The good tidings mentioned by the angel is given in verse 11: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."

Jesus is our Savior.

To save someone means to deliver that person from evil. Jesus came into this world to save us from great evil. What is that evil?

First, that without Jesus we believe a lie. Does not that make you tremble? Who wants to believe things which are not true? Bowing before the gods of Buddha and the many other Chinese gods is a falsehood. Buddha is no god, and the Kitchen god, the Monkey god, and the goddess of mercy are no gods. If we burn joss sticks to them, it is empty, it is no different than if we were to bow before an empty wall. Jesus came to save us from this deception. He came to lead us to the true God, Jehovah, the God of the Bible. He is the One who created heaven and earth. He is the One who gave us Jesus, His Son, as Savior. He is the only true God. He is alive right now and watches over us. Jesus shows to us this God, and we begin to know Him and love Him as our God and our Father in heaven. That is good news.

Secondly, Jesus saves us from our pride and selfishness. Without Jesus we think so much about our success and ability to do well. We become preoccupied with what people think of us. Our family traditions mean more to us than anything else. Our family name and honor are most important to us. You say, what is wrong with that? If we allow family and tradition to be more important to us than to listen to the good news of Jesus, it is like a chain

around our necks. It binds us in our pride and unbelief. Jesus saves us from this. More important to Christians than face-saving, pride, family name is that we are part of the family of God. We are willing to give up that tradition and even suffer family conflict in order to be part of the church of Jesus Christ, the family of God. The church is much older than Chinese tradition, it goes back to the very beginning of history.

Thirdly, Jesus saves us from our love for money and material things. Without Jesus we are so concerned with auspicious days and auspicious colors. We think that they will bring "good luck." We are willing to bow before the Chinese gods and burn joss sticks to the spirits of departed family members out of the fear that if we do not we will have bad luck, and if we do, it will bring good luck. We are tempted to gamble to get more money than we have. We will work long hours and pursue more courses to get greater success. We want landed property, we like to drive expensive cars, and we want to enjoy long holidays so we can show off our wealth to others. This is evil in God's eyes. Jesus as Savior delivers us from this evil. Material things are good only in that they meet our needs to serve God's purpose for us in this world. It is more important for a Christian to take time to pray, to meditate, to enjoy Christian fellowship than to make more money.

By the good news of the gospel, God shows to us where we are wrong and points us to the way of forgiveness. Are you worshipping a false god? Are you more interested in your pride and family face than listening to God and embracing Jesus as Savior? Are money and material things more important to you than the salvation of your soul? Every Christian here has experienced the same thing. It is terrifying for us to think that what we used to do is wrong, we believed a lie, we were more interested in ourselves than in God. But there is hope. There is a

way out. Because Jesus came into this world as both God and man, Jesus was able to take upon Himself the punishment of our sins on the cross. The good news of the gospel does not stop with Jesus' birth, it continues in His entire ministry on earth, but especially with His death on a cruel cross. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). God gave Jesus to die on the cross as a payment for our sins. When we come to God in sorrow, repenting of our sins, God will forgive us of all our past sins for the sake of Jesus, His Son.

There is one more thing we must remember about Jesus. He is alive right now. He is no more on earth, but He is alive in heaven. He is in the presence of God, the angels, and the saints. From heaven He looks down on us this very night. He is the One who comes to each of us tonight and calls us to turn from our sinful way and to believe in Him and in the true God. He gives us His power, the grace of God, and the presence of His Holy Spirit to give us strength to do His will. Every Christian rejoices in that we can turn from our sins, we can forsake our past sinful life, and change. The

old Chinese saying, "Mountains can be moved, but a man's disposition cannot be changed," is wrong. The wonderful thing about being a Christian is that God is able to change our disposition. All of us Christians testify to that truth. We thank God for that.

The good tidings of Christmas, as the angel announced, "is for all people." Christianity is not a western religion. It is not a new religion which came to Singapore in recent times. Christianity is the oldest religion in the world. Besides that, God intends it to be for all people. Yes, the shepherds were Jews who went to Bethlehem to worship Jesus. The gospel is for the British, for Americans, and for Australians, but also for Chinese, Indians, and Malays. The history of the nations of the world shows that Christianity has come to all these countries many years ago. What the angel said is true, it is for all kinds of people. The wonderful thing about being a Christian is that we do not even look on race, color of skin, language, or customs. When we are Christians we are one in faith and we become a wonderful family of God, the true human race saved by the grace of God.

This good news comes to you with earnestness tonight.

We are glad you are here. Your family and friends have invited you to come with them tonight, just to share with you this good news.

In closing we ask you to consider this gospel very carefully. The Bible is God's Word. If you would like to learn more about Jesus, we can furnish you with either a Chinese or an English Bible. We can give you some tracts in the different languages. We can speak with you from our hearts as well. Jesus calls all of us tonight to turn from our own false ideas of gods, pride, and material things. He calls us to confess that these things are sins in His sight and to forsake them and follow God's way of salvation in Jesus Christ His Son and to lead a holy life of thanksgiving.

Closing prayer.

Father, we thank Thee for Jesus. Without Him we are lost in our own superstition, our pride, and our love of money. Humble each one of us so that we may come to admit our sinful condition. Help us to know our need for the forgiveness of our sins in the blood of Jesus. Give us more and more the joy of living a Christian life. May Thy Holy Spirit work this in our hearts as we seek to serve Thee. In Jesus' Name, Amen. □

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. Steven Key

God's Creative Handiwork

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

Laying hold of the truth of Scripture, we consider the question: How did this world come into being? With Hebrews 11:3 we take our stand. "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of

things which do appear." We take our position without apology to any scientist.

The Theory of Evolution rejected

Our viewpoint is affected by our faith. But we would remind every man who considers this question:

Your viewpoint also involves religious belief.

Our young people who attend or who have attended state colleges and universities almost without exception have encountered professors who insist on maintaining the *theory* of evolution. Sad to say, so have those who are taught at some so-called Christian colleges (as the editor pointed out in the September 15, 1995 issue of the *Standard Bearer*). In fact, in many instances, to call evolution a *theory* will bring vehement objection. But evolution is indeed a theory. No matter whether you call it "evolution" or "theistic evolution" or "progressive creationism," it makes no difference. It is a theory.

More than that, to take the viewpoint that this world came into being by a process of evolution is a religious belief. Make no mistake. It is a *false* religion; but it is religion. The teaching of evolution extols a god. It is not the God of the Scriptures, the only true God.

Evolution rejects the God who reveals Himself and His work in the Bible. Evolution will not have God's account of the world's beginning. For evolution has a higher

knowledge, the knowledge of man. Man and man's mind has become the god of those who would maintain evolution's account of the origin of all things.

That is the seriousness of the error of evolution. It is idolatry. It elevates man and man's science to a place above God. It rejects the God who reveals Himself and His work in Scripture.

We lay hold of God's Word by faith. That Word is infallible, authoritative, and easy enough for a child to understand.

Who Created

In the very first verse of the Bible we are brought to the very beginning of time. We are shown "that which eye hath not seen, neither hath ear heard, nor entered it into the heart of man." For God speaks. He

calls us to lift our eyes toward Him, who is the eternal I AM, the Creator of heaven and earth. God created. So says Genesis 1:1.

This is also the testimony of the whole of the Bible.

In Isaiah 45:12, Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel, says, "I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded." And in verse 18 the prophet says, "For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else."

In many of the Psalms — Psalm 33, Psalm 110, Psalm 104, and others — God reveals Himself as the Creator God. We read in Psalm 50:1: "The mighty God, even the LORD, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof."

This is *God's* world. He has determined it from eternity. He created it with the Word of His power.

Moreover, we must realize and confess that this Creator is the *Triune* God.

With God the Father in creation was the Son, who was to become Christ. So we read in John 1:1,3: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." Christ was there in creation. So we read also in Hebrews 1:2, Colossians 1:15ff., and Proverbs 8.

But also the *Spirit* was active in the creative handiwork of God. Already in Genesis 1:2 we read, "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." In Psalm 104, a beautiful Psalm reflecting on God's wonder work of creation, we read in verse 30: "Thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created."

God, the Triune God, created the universe and every creature.

But we must say more. For God Himself says more.

He does not stop with the revelation that He is the Creator. After all, almost anyone who calls himself a Christian will confess that God created. But many will go only so far as to say, "God created the initial mass, from which all things then evolved." So we must point out that the wonder work of creation is further revealed in the rest of the chapter of Genesis 1, as well as in Genesis 2.

How God Created

God not only says, "I created." But He reveals *how* He created. And He reveals that work of creation in such a way that faith understands. "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear."

God *created*. There are different terms used in Scripture to denote this wonderful act of creation. In Genesis there are especially three terms used.

First of all, Genesis 1:1 speaks of God *creating*. The term "to create" means "to divide, to give separate existence to something." From eternity, everything had its prototype in the counsel of God. Is that not amazing! God knew it all from eternity! Things did not just "fall into place." The creatures in this vast creation did not evolve haphazardly! Rather, the sovereign God gave existence to that which stood from eternity in His own divine counsel. He says, "I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Is. 46:9, 10). By creating, God called into being that which stood before His mind and in His counsel from all eternity.

Secondly, God speaks of His work of creation as a work of *making* something. God, e.g., *made* the firmament, as we read in Genesis

1:7. That speaks of the creation being a masterpiece of God's workmanship.

Thirdly, He *formed* His creatures. "The LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground" (Gen. 2:7, 8). "And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air" (Gen. 2:19). He *formed* them. That is, Jehovah God gave to each creature its own peculiar form and nature, after its kind. In the one unified creation of God, there is distinction among all creatures according to God's purpose. Each bears its own peculiar form, as shaped by the Divine Potter.

But then in Hebrews 11:3, we find a term used with respect to creation that is different from those used in the creation account of Genesis. The inspired writer to the Hebrews speaks of the worlds being *framed* by the Word of God.

There is a magnificent truth set forth in these words! The text speaks of the *worlds* being formed. Literally, rather than *worlds*, we read of the *ages*. The meaning, then, is this: Not only has God created the heavens and the earth, dividing the light from the darkness and waters from waters, calling forth the plants from the earth. Not only has He formed every creature in the cre-

ation. But He has laid out the entire course of history! And for that entire course of history, the creation is to serve as the stage!

God has *framed* it all, putting every creature in its divinely ordained place in this perfect organism of the creation, each to serve its own purpose as God realizes the history of His world.

When we understand that, we lay hold of the *gospel*! For all things point to Christ! And all things serve to unite the creation under Christ as its Head, the Savior of the world.

A Creation with a Purpose

All things are for Christ's sake. So says the Bible. God will glorify Himself through Jesus Christ, His Son, our Lord.

Oh yes, creation is for God. In heaven His church shall acknowledge that truth. "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Psa. 4:11).

For His pleasure He created all things.

"The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil" (Prov. 16:4). To say we understand doesn't mean that we comprehend the wonder of it all. But we believe. The Lord rejoices

in the works of His own hands.

But the most amazing thing is that God has sovereignly willed to glorify Himself in such a way that we His people may experience His glory. We shall do so in Christ.

The expression with which Scripture begins — "In the beginning" — speaks of a time frame to follow. Creation shall run through a course of history according to the counsel and will of God. All the creation shall be united in Christ as the Head, and that too in the way of sin and grace.

In wisdom and with purpose God created the heaven and the earth. With purpose He framed the worlds. All the various creatures in the vast creation must serve together the one purpose of functioning as the stage upon which man lives to serve the Creator. More specifically, all the creation must serve as the house in which man will dwell as God's covenant friend-servant. Man, as the crown of the creation, created in God's image, is to serve and to glorify his Creator, and to experience His fellowship and friendship through Jesus Christ.

So God shall be glorified. And we who are in Christ shall testify, "O Lord, our Lord, how wonderful are thy works and ways!" □

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Carl Haak

The Feeding of the Five Thousand

John 6:1-21

Rev. Haak is pastor of Bethel Protestant Reformed Church in Elk Grove Village, Illinois.

The time in which this great miracle of our Lord took place is important for us to note. From the other gospel narratives we gather that it happened during the third year of His ministry and at a time when many things were coming to-

gether. The twelve had just returned from their mission of preaching to the lost sheep of Israel (Mark 6:30). Herod had beheaded John the Baptist and was eager to see Jesus, believing that Christ was John risen from the dead (Luke 9:7-9). Jesus

had been so busy in His work that He had not even had the time to eat (Mark 6:31).

This led Jesus to seek a time of seclusion and rest (Mark 6:31). He and His disciples travel by boat to a secluded spot (Bethsaida) on the northern shore of the Sea of Tiberias (Galilee). However, the enthusiastic crowds follow on foot, some even outrunning the ship, so that soon after His arrival the multitudes have again flocked to Him (Mark 6:33). The Lord spends the day teaching and healing.

But a real turning point has come in His ministry. The people have followed Him for the miracles He has performed (John 6:2). When they witness this miracle they will show plainly why they have followed Him. They are laboring for the meat which perishes, not for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life (John 6:27). They envision a savior who would supply them with the good things of this life, not a Savior from their spiritual bankruptcy and corrupted state. In this miracle and the subsequent sermon, Jesus will make plain that He is not the savior they had in mind. He gives a beautiful sign of who He is as the Bread of life sent down from above, able to sustain the spiritual life of His people by His crucified body and shed blood. He will resist every effort to crown Him an earthly king. The multitudes will witness and even taste of His power, but will to a large measure stumble over Him as the true heavenly bread.

The significance of this miracle is rich for us. It is a sign that points to Jesus Himself and to what He accomplishes in the realm of grace. He, as the true bread, is sufficient for all His people. No matter how great the multitude of the redeemed may be, all find in Him an abundance of life and grace that instead of diminishing continues to multiply itself, so that the need of all the members of His body is fully satisfied. And in Him is an abundance. The fragments gathered after the

multitude had eaten filled twelve baskets.

The events following the miracle are equally significant. We see Jesus dismissing the crowd and sending the disciples across the sea in order to prevent them from making Him their earthly king. And we see Jesus before His Father in prayer as His church is threatened and helpless before the onslaughts of the world, represented in the raging sea. The Lord reveals Himself as ruler of the waves and comes to His church, bringing them to a safe haven.

What a wonderful passage! "We see Jesus" (I Pet. 1:8) as the One possessing in Himself abundance of life for us! And we see Him as being the One who is able to keep us from falling and to present us without fault before the Father in glory (Jude 24, 25).

Outline

1. The setting for this miracle (vv. 1-4) — His popularity and His retreat for a time of seclusion and rest.
2. The feeding of the five thousand (vv. 5-14).
 - a. The testing of Philip (vv. 5-7).
 - b. Andrew finds five loaves and two fishes (vv. 8, 9).
 - c. The miracle itself (vv. 10-13).
 - d. The response of the people (v. 14).
3. Jesus prevents the attempt to make Him king (vv. 15, 16).
4. Jesus walks on the water (vv. 17-21).

Questions

1. What can be said about the *context* for this miracle?
 - a. When in the Lord's ministry did this miracle take place?
 - b. Why did Jesus retire at this time to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (Sea of Tiberias)?
 - c. What had been happening in the Lord's ministry at this time? (See Matthew 14:12ff.; Mark 6:30; Luke 9:7-9.)
 - d. Is there any significance to the fact that this miracle is recorded

in all four of the gospel accounts?

e. Can we say that whereas chapter 5 showed His rejection in Judea, chapter 6 will show His rejection in Galilee?

2. Why does John give us the notice in verse 4 that the Passover was nigh?

3. Is there any reason why the Lord would choose *Philip* for the question He asks in verse 5? Is there anything suggestive of the character of *Andrew* in the fact that he finds this lad and responds much the same way as Philip to the possibility of being able to feed this multitude? (John 14:8, 9; 1:41-45; 12:21, 22.)

4. What is a pennyworth?

5. Do we find here any directives for the practice of prayer before meals (v. 11)? ... after meals? (Deut. 8:10).

6. What is the *significance* of this miracle?

a. Do you find a prefiguration of it in I Kings 17:16; II Kings 4:42; Numbers 11:15?

b. What does it show to us of Jesus and His salvation?

c. What virtues of Christ are revealed, and how is Christ pictured in His relation to His people?

d. Is there any significance in the fact that in this miracle the multitudes are not only spectators but participants? (It is not a miracle performed upon a single man, but all are involved in it, I Cor. 10:4.)

7. How did the *people respond* to this miracle?

a. What prophet are they referring to in verse 14? (Deut. 18:15-18; Acts 3:22).

b. Show that the people revealed that they wanted a Messiah who would be able to provide their physical needs and desires.

c. How does the fact that Jesus was able to give them bread lead them to conclude that He was the man who ought to be their king?

d. Would they actually have tried by force to make Him an earthly king?

e. Show that the Lord's discourse in chapter 6:22-58 is spoken exactly in response to the people's

attempt to make Him an earthly king.

f. How is this same thing done today?

g. How can we be guilty of this?

h. What kind of a king is Jesus? (John 18:36).

8. Show how the Lord's actions prevented any attempt to make Him their king.

9. What do we learn of Him and of our need for prayer when we read that the Lord went up to a mountain alone to pray?

10. Discuss the significance of the miracle of the Lord's walking on the water. How is the church pictured in this? Christ? How does this apply to us in our daily fears?

11. Is there another divine wonder recorded in verse 21? (Psalm 107:23-32.) □

Go Ye Into All the World

Rev. Jason Kortering

Mission Labors of the E.R.C.S. (2)

We focus in this article on the work that the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore are doing in India. This has become Part 2, since India has been "upstaged" by the work in Myanmar. Chronologically, the work in India precedes the more recent work in Myanmar. It is not that the churches in Singapore lack interest in the India work, it is that the opportunities for work in Myanmar seem more pressing. This is due to our contact with students from Myanmar in Singapore and the readiness for the churches there to be organized and develop as Reformed churches. Subsequent events have demonstrated the truth of this as well.

By saying this we do not intimate that opportunities in India are lacking or that the potential for meaningful work there does not exist. We trust that our review of the events and work we are presently doing will demonstrate otherwise.

Way back in October 1989 Pastor Mahtani and his family made a trip from Singapore to India to investigate the possibility of doing mission work in India. Through corre-

spondence and upon invitation of some of the church leaders in the Bangalore area to speak at a discipleship training session, the churches here seized upon the opportunity to learn the Lord's will of doing missions outside Singapore. The trip indicated keen interest in the Reformed faith, though it was an initial contact and hence the first exposure of many of the people as well as the leaders to the wonderful doctrines of grace. Only time could tell whether the Holy Spirit was truly working in the hearts of the people. The great struggle of soul of the Mahtanis was whether they were really interested for the truth's sake or for bread. Also, there was a strong charismatic emphasis among them which complicated the question of further work.

The churches of Singapore did make a commitment to continue this initial contact; but due to other pressures of work and needs within the ERCS itself, it was not developed as much as they had desired. Opportunity to develop these contacts further came when Pastor Mahtani received an invitation to speak at the Sindhi Christian Conference in Nagpur, India. This conference met in October 1992. By that time we had just arrived as minister-on-loan to the ERCS, so the churches re-

quested that I accompany Pastor Mahtani to attend this conference and also to develop further the original contacts made in 1989. Pastor Mahtani and I spent an enjoyable four weeks traveling across India, meeting with people and speaking at public and private gatherings about the Word of God, thus sowing the seeds of the gospel of the sovereignty of God. It was a learning experience for me to accompany this dear brother who so energetically carried in his heart a love for his kinsmen after the flesh.

Once again it was establishing and developing contacts, some original and others for a second time. Hence it was more along the lines of pioneer work. We could not offer these brothers and sisters any commitment. We could only say that we would continue to keep contact with them and learn what the Lord's will would be concerning future work.

The contact we kept was by way of correspondence. We formulated a letter which was sent to all the people with whom we met. We thanked them for their kindness and interest in the Reformed faith and told them that it was our desire to be used by God to assist them in their spiritual growth. We especially had in mind a correspondence course, which would give us oppor-

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tunity to offer them Reformed literature and books as well as keep in personal touch with them. From 1992 to the present, about five of the brothers continue to write and enjoy fellowship by way of letters. Some of the original contacts which held great prospect for working together have ended, since these men were looking for more intensive involvement and financial support in their ministries. We cannot fault them for this, for such is the Lord's work. They need to earn their daily bread as well as work actively in their villages and cities. If we cannot meet their needs, they must look elsewhere. Does this mean a lack of commitment to the truth? Only God knows, but we must be honest with these people. I would not dare to say that those who expressed interest have forsaken us for bread. It would be quite judgmental for all of us who have "steak" to look down on those who cry for "rice." It might be in some instances that all they were looking for was a "foreign sponsor who could write the check." In other instances, it might have been a real desire to be busy with the Lord's work, and a looking to us for necessary assistance. But such a commitment we were not able to give.

A measure of impatience is shown by those who continue to correspond with us. Last year we had held forth the prospect of making a trip to southern India, the Madurai area, and to hold teaching seminars there. We suggested this district, since most of our correspondents are in southern India, and it appeared that they would be able to take time off from their work and travel to Madurai for such a time of teaching and fellowship. In addition to that, our most enthusiastic helper, Pastor Stephen, lives there, and he is most encouraging to proceed with this work. He reads the *Standard Bearer* with joy, even translates some of the meditations and distributes them to his suffering neighbors. He has studied eschatology and read through Herman Hoeksema's *Behold He*

Cometh with great joy and benefit. We sent him a copy of John Blanchard's booklet, "Ultimate Questions," and he was so enthused about it that he requested that they publish it in Tamil and he would offer the translation. He has requested copies of much of our literature and enjoys the emphasis on God's sovereignty.

Such a visit, however, was not the Lord's will so to direct. The ERCS became so heavily involved in Myanmar that they saw it the Lord's will to meet the needs there. At this point we inquired whether the PRC would be interested to take an active role in the India work, but they too had prior commitments to other fields. So we continue on behalf of the ERCS to do our best with correspondence and sustain what interest remains.

A few developments have also taken place.

Pastor Stephen informed me just a few weeks ago that his wife died. She had a stroke about a year ago and required medical attention. Subsequently they determined that she needed heart-valve surgery, something they could not afford. The latest I had heard was that some arrangements were made to have some kind of heart surgery in Madras, and he requested prayers for them. Since we keep the churches here informed of our contacts with India, we remembered this family at our Wednesday evening prayer meeting. The next week I received a telegram with the brief words, "My wife expired." We have written them, but have not heard from him as yet. This leaves this dear brother with five children and no mother. So the Lord adds more to his burden, and what this will do to his future ministry we cannot say. Do pray for this family as well, for they are severely tried. We only pray that some arrangements can be made to provide help for the family, so that his work can continue. He did spend some of his time working as a farmer to provide for his family. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but

the Lord delivers him out of them all" (Ps. 34:19).

Another brother who is much interested in serving the Lord in India is the brother-in-law of Pastor Stephen (it was his sister who died). He is a young man who is presently studying in school, mostly in the field of computer, but wants so badly to serve the Lord as pastor. He is so enthused about the gospel of the Reformed faith that he holds "club-meetings" with fellow students and has led many of the non-Christians to the Lord. He now feels the need to support financially, not only his own parents, but also the family of his sister. He originally wanted to come to Singapore as a student, but financial burdens make this impossible for him. Now he wants to come to Singapore to work, for he finds it impossible to get a job in India. He would like to study "part time" while working here. Now I am trying to find out whether there is any possibility to have him come here on a work permit. It seems pretty dark for the moment.

These are the sorts of burdens which we carry for India. The contact is very limited, but it seems sincere and offers opportunities for the sake of the gospel. I am convinced that the only way we can really know is to make a trip to India. Correspondence has reached its limits. Perhaps the Lord will open a way that someone can make such a trip both for an on-the-scene evaluation and for quality time teaching and praying with these saints who long for guidance and help.

We trust that with this information you will be able to pray more knowledgeably for the work in India.

Book fund for needy servants

My heart was cheered when I read in the church bulletins that a collection was going to be taken at the Men's and Ladies' League meeting for the needy pastors with whom I come into contact. This was done last year and it was very helpful. I do not blow a trumpet for such fi-

nancial help. I rather keep it low-key and voluntary. For this reason we are grateful for such initiative and sensitivity.

We do come into contact with pastors and students who need financial assistance. Some of these are here in Singapore, others in India, still others in Myanmar. So far we have placed this fund under the supervision of the Joint Mission Committee of the ERCS. We do not want to handle money on our own. This avoids any temptation to use it improperly, but it also provides accountability to the churches, which is proper. It is not run so tightly that we cannot spend without prior approval. Rather, we use our discretion and then report it to the JMC and they monitor its use. This money is spent in different ways. Some is just sent in the Name of the Lord to show mercy in situations which call for help. Some is used to buy books to be sent to foreign countries. We have discovered that the men with whom we correspond in India are so poor they can hardly afford the stamps for the correspondence courses, so we purchased stamps in India and include self-addressed, stamped envelopes for them to use.

Recently we read in a copy of the *Banner of Truth* magazine an article entitled, "Susannah Spurgeon: A Ministry of Love." This is an article about the wife of Charles Spurgeon, who filled a need in her day. Her husband wrote books, and she became aware of the fact that many students in London and also

village pastors throughout England were too poor to buy her husband's books. She decided to set up a fund to raise money so that these worthwhile books could be sent to all theological students and pastors who desired them but could not afford to buy them. She carefully set up a method whereby the recipients would indicate their financial needs and promise to use the books in their study to the glory of God.

That set both my wife and me to thinking.

We need this fund badly here in Singapore. What better way to use money for mission work than to provide good materials for students and pastors who cannot afford them. Now that we are working in Myanmar and hope to travel there in January, we are learning firsthand of more worthy students and pastors who can work with English material, but are too poor to buy them. The same is true with the brothers with whom we work in India. The most enthusiastic responses we receive is when we send good Reformed books to them. I think of a dear brother in Manipur (northern India, just over the border from Myanmar) who is teaching theological students (some also from Myanmar). We sent him a copy of *Reformed Dogmatics* by H. Hoeksema, and every time he writes me he thanks me for that worthwhile book. He is so poor that when his old typewriter broke down he had to write by hand. I desired much to travel to him when in Myanmar, but there

is no travel allowed between Yangon and Manipur. So near, yet so far!

We are in the process of working out the details for the Book Fund for Needy Servants with the Joint Mission Committee of the ERCS. Again, we believe this fund should be under the supervision of the church. It will take great discretion to determine who is worthy of such books. Do not all students and pastors want free books? It will require some sort of form to be filled out and signed to show sincerity and intent. These details we are now considering.

The first check to go into this fund will be from the League Meeting.

Please don't send U.S. checks to us. Too much money is lost in the transaction. If any of you are interested in contributing to this cause, arrangements can best be made, through the synodical treasurer, to deposit it in our U.S. banking account, and we will have it transferred to Singapore.

The Lord is good in all His ways.

May this article inspire our readers to pray earnestly for the gathering of the sheep of Christ from all nations. Those already gathered need constant attention. Those who are servants of Christ, busy in the ingathering, need even more. May the Lord help us to work together that the lost sheep may hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and find safety in the fold of Christ.

Glory to His Name. □

All Around Us

■ Contemporary Worship

An interesting article concerning "contemporary worship" appears in the *Outlook*, Oct. 1995, written by Rev. Mark Beach. He evaluates "contemporary" worship services

and expresses legitimate dismay. Now I have never attended a "contemporary" worship service. I have often wondered what was involved in such a "worship" service — though I could make a reasonable guess. This article explains the "contemporary" service, though it points out as well that not all "contemporary" services are conducted in the same manner. This is what Beach

has to say about them:

What is contemporary worship versus traditional worship? As it is usually understood, contemporary worship is essentially a form of worship that makes its appeal to unchurched people who have little or no Christian background. It is worship geared for their needs, their tastes, their comfort zone and their appreciation. It is simple in

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Rev. Gise J. VanBaren

format, informal in its conduct, and does not presume to impose either "churchy" culture, or language, or music into the service, since unchurched people are unfamiliar and uncomfortable with these things. This means that praise choruses are sung instead of hymns, and hymn books are exchanged for overheads. Where the goal is to keep services within an hour, sermons are shortened to make room for personal testimonies, dramatic skits, liturgical dance or some other alternative means to teach a lesson or offer praise. Where possible, organs are replaced with electric guitars and drums, and/or orchestra and brass. Why? Because organs sound "churchy" and hinder outreach to the lost.

Contemporary worship has become quite the rage in some parts of the Christian Reformed Church. Christian Reformed Home Missions promotes it with enthusiasm, as I learned from its conference last June in Colorado Springs. Many mission-minded people marvel at the remarkable success of Rev. Bill Hybels and the Willow Creek Church of Willow Creek, Illinois (located in the suburbs of Chicago). This church draws *thousands upon thousands* of "seekers" to its services every Sunday.

Beach then quotes from a pamphlet written by Prof. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. of Calvin Seminary: "*Fashions in Folly: Sin and Character in the 90s.*" Under the subtitle: "*Domesticated Worship of the democratized God,*" he makes the following observations:

Many of us are familiar with a history of theological liberalism in which the profile of God has been cropped in various ways. Sad to say, some evangelicals have lately been following suit. Some of the new revised versions of God are appearing in domestic *evangelical* markets. In these markets, God is not our Lord but our chum — maybe even our gofer whose job it is to make us rich or happy or religiously excited or self-actualized in some other way.

Not surprisingly, worship of this domesticated God is likely to mu-

tate into a religious variety show whose main focus is on us and on what makes us tingle. Why else the nightclub format for public worship? Why else have prayer warriors come trotting out in combat fatigues? As David Wells asks in a new book, why do certain evangelical preachers punctuate their sermons with such eye-popping antics as sudden ascensions to the skylights via invisible wires? Why illustrate the prophecy of John the Baptist that the ax is now laid to the root of the tree — why illustrate this prophecy by pulling a chain saw to life, walking over to a couple of potted trees on stage, and buzzing your way through them as the congregation gasps and roars its delight?...

You start to change things in your services. The non-religious haven't much of a feel for the holiness of God, so you do away with silent prayer and expressions of our littleness. Secularists don't like to confess their sins, so you remove the service of penitence. Without confession of sin, you hardly need the grace notes of an assurance of pardon: out it goes.

In general, you assume that the non-religious like things simple and upbeat. That's where much of the popular culture is, after all, so away with lament, away with hard questions, expressions of anguish, dark ambiguities of any kind. While you're at it, away with creeds and confessions, away with explicit references to Christian doctrine, or to the history of the Christian church.

On the other hand, seekers *are* interested in improving themselves, so you maximize promises of personal growth and self-realization. Secularists do like pop music, so here it comes into the sanctuary, along with semi-celebrity music performers and audience applause for their performances. The non-religious also like sports figures, so in the bigger budget services, in comes Tommy LaSorda, longtime manager of the Los Angeles Dodgers — here comes LaSorda to tell us how "the Great Dodger in the sky" has helped him win games and lose weight....

Suppose a seeker came away from a service of the kind I've been describing — let's say a fairly heavy

duty service of that kind. Suppose he came away and said to himself, "Now I understand what the Christian faith is all about: it's not about lament, or repentance, or humbling oneself before God to receive God's favor. It's got nothing to do with a lot of boring doctrines. It's not about the hard, disciplined work of mortifying our old nature and learning to make God's purposes our own. It's not about the inevitable failures in this project, and the terrible grace of Jesus Christ that comes so that we may begin again. Not at all! I had it all wrong! The Christian faith is mainly about celebration and fun and personal growth and five ways to boost my self-esteem!"

My question is, again, a simple one: How do you prevent that conclusion? Or, to sum up for now, let's put the question very generally: How likely is it that a *popular* God is really God? How likely is it that a user-friendly God will rebuke sin? Or save people with transcendent and unexpected force? Or have to suffer to do it? Or call *us* to suffering and discipline as well as to joy and freedom? Meanwhile, how can we talk about *sin* to people, including ourselves — people who have lost an ear for some of its overtones?

We too had better remember that we gather to worship *our God* in our services — and not seek to gain "self-esteem" or be entertained. Man-centered, humanistic "worship" is all too often the order of the day — and increasingly in Reformed circles too. God's Word has a stern reminder to God's people that they are not to "remove the ancient landmark" (Prov. 22:28).

■ The Interclassical Conference of Christian Reformed Churches

A report from Darrell Todd Maurina, Press Officer for United Reformed News Service, gives an account of the actions taken at the recent meeting of a conference called by Classis California South held the week of November 5 at South Holland, Illinois. According to Maurina's report, there were an "un-

precedented 290 delegates from 110 of the Christian Reformed denomination's 985 churches." These "voted to call the Christian Reformed synod to lead the denomination in repentance. The call to repentance will respond to Synod 1995's decisions allowing women to serve as ministers, elders, and evangelists in the 294,000-member denomination and its failure to sever ecclesiastical fellowship with the CRC's mother church, the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, despite its earlier decision to admit practicing homosexuals to church membership and to ordain them to church office."

To accomplish the above, the conference also voted to form a Covenant Union of Christian Reformed Churches (CUCRC) seeking "to return the Christian Reformed denomination to its historical biblical positions regarding important denominational issues." The report continues:

The Covenant Union, to be organized as a non-profit corporation, is to hold an annual conference and may hold regional meetings as well to "encourage its members to form a united front in their participation in classical and synodical sessions." Other specific objectives for the Covenant Union will be to "assist in the preparation of overtures and communications," "promote education for office bearers," "enable its members and member churches to do ministry," and "promote the restoration of discipline in its member churches."

Strangely, the conference responded to the actions of six CRC classes which have exercised an option given them by Synod 1995 to permit the ordination of women by declaring parts of the church order "inoperative," by voting to "endorse the idea of classes based on the idea of theological affinity for churches that in conscience believe they must be part of such classes." This would mean that classes would be formed based on theological viewpoints rather than geographical boundaries.

The proposal is presented as a way to prevent "schism" while maintaining distinctives regarded as important by many in the CRC. Dr. W. Robert Godfrey, professor of Church History and president of Westminster Seminary in California, presented this proposal in the *Outlook*, Oct. 1995 as follows:

1. Form new classes based on our historic Christian Reformed doctrines and Church Order. We expect that synod will approve these new classes. We do not recognize, however, the right of synod to prevent this action. The decisions of Synod 1995 forced this action upon us when it acted tyrannically and unbiblically and so disrupted the life of our churches. Since Synod 1995 has declared some aspects of the Church Order "inoperative," we have no choice for the protection of our churches except to follow that precedent. We may have to declare some articles of the Church Order inoperative for us;

2. Organize these like-minded classes into the "Fellowship of Conservative Reformed Classes." These classes will only receive synodical deputies from other classes in the Fellowship;

3. Declare that the new classes will only send delegates to synod if no women officebearers are delegates to the synod;

4. Declare that the Fellowship will not recognize the GKN as a church in ecclesiastical fellowship;

5. Declare that the new classes accept the Church Order as it existed in 1994, but reject all supplements to it that have the effect of changing its meaning, including:

- a. the supplement to Article 3 permitting the ordination of women;

- b. the supplement to Article 7 restricting ordination under this article to very few. We are in great need of historically Reformed ministers and cannot be limited any longer to graduates of Calvin Theological Seminary who have been made candidates by the synod."

Godfrey himself admits that "this proposal is radical and will be controversial." Indeed it is. One is

reminded of the situation in Israel in the days of the judges when "there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Jud. 21:25).

The conference did place some "teeth" in their call to repentance: it adopted a resolution to "inform synod that should she not humble her heart in repentance before the Lord, this conference will reconvene next year to consider a proposal to form a new denomination."

If the threat is carried out, then the new denomination will face a jungle of thorny issues. Will it be a denomination which holds to all past decisions of the CRC — except those pertaining to women serving in the office of elder or minister, and those pertaining to maintaining fraternal relations with the GKN? Or will it go back further and renounce those decisions which earlier allowed women to serve as deacons? Or will it go further back still and reject those decisions which allowed women to vote in congregational meetings? Then would such a denomination condemn earlier synodical decisions which gave approval to worldly amusements as the dance and earlier still to movie attendance (both decisions in part based on the CRC doctrine of common grace)? Perhaps it is but wishful thinking, but could such a new denomination reconsider the whole issue of common grace and the effect that this decision has had on current difficulties that the churches face?

Our prayers must be with dedicated children of God who strive to find their way through this "jungle" in order to glorify God and to preserve a faithful church. We ought also, however, to pray that these take no "half-way" measures, but deal carefully and thoroughly with all of the issues which have affected the CRC in past years. □

All

The Reformed believer is intensely interested in the use of the word "all" in Holy Scripture. He finds the chief, doctrinal use of this word in connection with God Himself, with God's works outside of Himself, and especially with God's salvation. Because the honor and glory of God are at stake according as we interpret the word "all," the Reformed believer wants to get it right!

The all-ness that is in God refers to the infinite goodness and limitless perfections. No limits can be placed upon God's Being or virtues. It belongs to God's sovereign greatness that He is all mighty (Gen. 17:1), so that He is the source of all power, force, and movement; that He is all-knowing, having perfect understanding of Himself (I Cor. 2:10), our words and activities before they take place (Ps. 139:1-6), even all His works from the beginning of the world (Acts 15:18); that He is all (omni) present so that He is near to everyone of us (Acts 17:27) and simply cannot be eluded (Ps. 139:7-12); that He is the God of all grace (I Pet. 5:10), the God of loveliness and beauty who is to be desired above every earthly thing (Ps. 73:25); that He is the only wise God (Rom. 16:27) and therefore the all-wise God; that His mercy is abundant (I Pet. 1:3) and rich (Eph. 2:4) because He is the God of all mercy.

The all-ness that is in God Himself implies, even requires, that He reveals this all-ness in His works in time. God does not do things in a corner (Acts 27:27), nor does He employ half measures; rather, He works extensively and all-embracingly. God works, in Christ, all things after the counsel of His own will (Eph. 1:11). All things are of Him, through Him, and unto Him, to whom be glory forever (Rom. 11:36). His purpose is to gather together all things in Christ, put all things under Christ's feet, that the fullness of Christ might fill all in all (Eph. 1:10, 22, 23). Accordingly, God has concluded all in unbelief that He might have mercy on all (Rom. 11:32). God created the human race to be represented by Adam so that "by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). By Adam's offence judgment came upon all men to condemnation; by the righteous One the free gift of justification came upon all men (Rom. 5:18). Understanding the headships of both Adam and Christ we can appreciate I Corinthians 15:22, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

Who are the "all" in Christ? When we come to the "all" passages which speak of God's desire to save, and of those who are saved, there are two rules which must guide our understanding and faith. First, the word "all" does not mean "every." Second, the exact meaning and

scope of the word "all" is to be derived from the context. Unless these rules are followed, a Bible reader ends up in universalism, or in the free-will waters of Arminianism, which posits two, paradoxical, contradictory wills in God: a desire to save only the elect, and a desire to save all men in general, or at least those who hear the gospel preached. In John 3:16, "whosoever" does not hint that faith is a possibility for everyone if he applies himself a bit, but literally states "all the ones believing." In I Timothy 2:1, Christians are not exhorted to pray for every living soul (how could we ever do that?) but for all kinds of men, also those in eminent positions, for God's people are sometimes to be found among them. We are to pray also for them, because "God will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth," and Christ "gave himself a ransom for all" (I Tim. 2:4, 6). The all-ness of God Himself, the all-ness of His counsel which God works unfailingly, requires that His gracious salvation includes all kinds, categories, and types of people: male and female, bond and free, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile.

One further example of allowing the context to speak to the meaning of the word "all" is II Peter 3:9. Not only is this a favorite text of the Arminians, not only is this text badly twisted by those who claim to be Reformed, but this passage is also a favorite of the true, five-point Calvinist in that it explains the seeming delay of Christ's second coming, and comforts the believer with the truth that not a single elect shall fail to be saved. The Lord Jesus will not return in glory prematurely because he is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." If "all" refers to every individual we are left to several dismal choices: Christ will never return; there will be opportunity for some to believe after death; the will of the Lord is weak and is not accomplished; or, the text is giving us just one of the wills of the Lord. But God, who has but one will and does not reveal that will by speaking out of two sides of His mouth, comforts us in this wonderful passage by assuring us that there is great reason to trust His promise to send Christ, and there is no reason to grow faint in waiting for Him, for a premature return of Christ would result in some unborn, or unconverted, elect perishing, an intolerable thought in the light of all the Scriptures. So we comfort ourselves and one another with the truth that the second advent of Christ awaits the salvation of the last, precious elect of God. For the Lord is longsuffering to usward! God's promises in Christ are particular to usward! In that glad day the Father of Jesus Christ will have all the glory, and He will be all in all! □

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A Federal Court Declares Nation's First Physician-Assisted Suicide Law Unconstitutional

"Oregon's Assisted Suicide Act withholds from terminally ill citizens the same protections from suicide the majority enjoys. In the process, it has lowered standards and reduced protections to a degree that there is little assurance that only competent terminally ill persons will voluntarily die. The majority has not accepted this situation for themselves, and there is no rational basis for imposing it on the terminally ill."

Lee v. State of Oregon, U.S. District Court,
Aug. 3, 1995.

Oregon's Suicide Law

In November of 1994, Oregon voters narrowly approved a state-wide referendum that permitted a "terminally ill" adult to obtain from the attending physician a fatal dose of a lethal drug for the express purpose of committing suicide. The Oregon measure became the nation's first physician-assisted suicide law, and its passage was hailed a great victory by "death with dignity" and "right to die" zealots across the country.

However, prior to its effective date on January 1, 1995, opponents of the controversial law filed suit in the Oregon federal court to have the measure declared unconstitutional. The federal court immediately delayed the effective date of the Act pending the litigation, and in August of 1995 issued an opinion striking down the law as violative of the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment.

Presumed Safeguards

The law permits an attending

physician to comply with a patient's written request for a fatal drug prescription where a "competent" patient is suffering from a "terminal disease" (defined as an incurable disease producing death within six months). The law permits the suicide to occur without notification of spouse, family, or next of kin, apparently concerned only that the patient "end his or her life in a humane and dignified manner...."

The law incorporated several "safeguards," including the attending physician's determination that the terminally ill patient was "capable," that the death request was "voluntary," and that there be a 15-day waiting period "between the patient's initial oral request and the writing of the prescription."

The federal court, after conceding that a majority of Oregon citizens apparently desired such a suicide law, nevertheless ruled that "the judiciary cannot simply defer to state legislative processes when presented with a law which may not provide adequate constitutional guidance to its citizens." The court then noted that the state of Oregon has numerous laws that clearly express a state interest to *prevent* suicide (e.g., recklessly or intentionally

causing or aiding another to commit suicide is defined in Oregon as manslaughter; another Oregon law provides that a person may use physical force to thwart an attempted suicide, etc.)

The court then concluded that Oregon's historical state interest in preserving life and outlawing the suicide assistance was "arbitrarily and irrationally abrogated" by the law passed by a majority of Oregon's voters. The judge held that these older laws protect vulnerable people "who might otherwise seek suicide in response to treatable depression, mental illness or coercion," noting a majority of states have similar laws imposing criminal penalties on one who assists suicide. The state's interest underlying these statutes, the court said, include preservation of life and protection against suicide.

Reading the new voter-approved assisted-suicide law in this context of the state's interest to preserve life, the court found several fatal flaws in the new measure. First, the court ruled that the alleged "safeguards" in the measure were not sufficiently designed to differentiate between competent and incompetent persons. The court took judicial notice that one of the leading factors

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that motivates suicide is depression, and the new law does not provide for sufficient mental evaluation of the terminally ill. Secondly, the court complained that the definition of "terminal disease" is woefully imprecise, resulting in a category that is inherently unstable. Thirdly, the new law requires only that the physician assisting in the suicide act "in good faith." The court saw this to be a subjective standard, allowing physicians even to act negligently, so long as they did so in "good faith."

Equal Protection Denied

The court concluded its opinion by declaring that the new law was constitutionally deficient because it created a legal disparity between Oregon's treatment of terminally ill persons and those who are not terminally ill. The legislation withheld from terminally ill citizens, declared the court, the same protections from suicide the majority enjoys. The measure reduced protections to a degree that there was little assurance that only competent terminally ill persons will voluntarily die. Since the majority did not lower these suicide protections for themselves, there was no rational basis for imposing it on terminally ill persons.

This disparity between the protection of the majority of Oregon citizens from suicide and the consequent lack of protection for terminally ill persons was, in the court's view, a violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amend-

ment, which commands that no state shall "deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

Other Reasons?

The careful reader of the *Lee* opinion receives the impression, however, that Judge Hogan may have used the "equal protection" argument to strike down the questionable law while he actually entertained more fundamental objections to state-sanctioned suicide. After all, the equal protection objections could possibly be remedied by additional safeguards incorporated into the Act by the suicide activists.

But what about the basic concept of the legislation itself — that government sanctions physicians assisting their patients to take their own life. In a somewhat obscure footnote, Judge Hogan finally broaches the rudimentary problem with the new law (which perhaps penetrates deeper than the "equal protection" defect):

Certain of the defendants would limit the court's analysis of the constitutional issues to the context of the terminally ill class as defined by the new law and the court has so limited its analysis. Nonetheless, the candor of the defendants boldly presents the underlying issue: what are the boundary lines, if any, to state-sanctioned suicide? While a diagnosis of terminal illness with less than six months to live may be a persuasive rational

basis for some to choose suicide, there is little limit to the justifications which can be advanced for state-sanctioned suicide. Where in the constitution do we find distinctions between the terminally ill with six months to live, the terminally ill with one year to live, paraplegics, the disabled, or any category of people who have their own reasons for not wanting to continue living?



In two hundred and five years of our existence no constitutional right to aid in killing oneself has ever been asserted and upheld by a court of final jurisdiction. Unless the federal judiciary is to be a floating constitutional convention, a federal court should not invent a constitutional right unknown to the past and antithetical to the defense of human life that has been a chief responsibility of our constitutional government.

We have not heard the last of the *Lee* case, since the Judge Hogan's decision released in August of 1995 has been appealed to the U.S. Court of Appeals and may indeed end up before the U.S. Supreme Court. In any event, Reformed Christians would hope that Oregon's suicide law will not survive constitutional scrutiny. But one would also hope that the higher courts strike down the controversial law for reasons much more fundamental than the "equal protection" objections which may be circumvented by clever amendments to the challenged legislation. □

Decency and Order

Rev. Ronald Cammenga

Warding Off False Doctrines

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To ward off false doctrines and errors that multiply exceedingly through heretical writings, the ministers and elders shall use the means of teaching, of refutation, or warning, and of admonition, as well in the ministry of the Word as in Christian teaching and family-visiting.

Church Order, Article 55

Banning heretical writings

The original article is almost unrecognizable in our present Article 55. Originally the article concerned the censorship of books and the banning of heretical writings.

The fathers were aware of the power of the pen. They had witnessed the revolution caused by the invention of the printing press. They had seen the influence of the printed page in the spread of the Reformation. They had witnessed the tremendous impact that books had in the spread of new ideas. And they were concerned that this new tool for the promotion of truth not be used as an instrument in the service of the lie.

Already in 1517, the Provincial Synod of Dordt passed the following resolution:

The brothers deem it necessary that the following means ought to be taken to eradicate false doctrines and heresies, which increase more and more by the reading of heretical books: 1) The ministers shall exhort the people from the pulpit to read the Biblical writings, and they must warn against unhealthy, heretical books, mentioning even the titles of the books from time to time. 2) Those book sellers who are kindly disposed to pure doctrine shall be exhorted by the ministers neither to print nor sell such books. 3) The ministers shall pay careful attention at home visitation of the members of the congregation whether they have detrimental books in their homes so that they may exhort them to get rid of such books.

The original Article 55 as drafted by the Synod of Dordt, 1618-'19, read:

No one of the Reformed religion shall undertake to have printed or otherwise distributed any book or writing produced or translated by himself or by another concerning religion unless the same has been examined and approved by the ministers of the Word of his classis, or by the particular synod, or Professors of Theology of these prov-

inces, including also foreknowledge of his classis.

This type of censorship was not unheard of in the days following the Reformation. Well known is Rome's banning of "heretical writings" in its *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*. Included in the books banned by the "Index" were the works of the Reformers, as well as their translations of the Bible. Anyone caught possessing a book listed in the "Index" suffered severe punishment, some even death.

Following the tradition of Rome, the early Reformed synods sought to control the spread of heretical writings. Anyone interested in publishing a book dealing with religion had to gain ecclesiastical approval.

But this kind of ecclesiastical censorship, although well intentioned, was misguided. For one thing, it proved impossible to enforce. As books became more easily available, the mere fact that a book had been banned aroused sufficient interest to promote its sale. Neither did the government show any great inclination to assist the church in this sort of enterprise. From a principle point of view, such censorship was legalistic and infringed on individual Christian liberty.

For these reasons the Synod of Utrecht, 1905, re-wrote Article 55. The Christian Reformed Church adopted Utrecht's revision in its 1914 English edition of the *Church Order*. Our Protestant Reformed Churches have taken over this revision and incorporated it into our *Church Order*.

A clear calling

Ministers and elders are to "...ward off false doctrines and errors..." That is the mandate of Article 55.

There is a close connection between this article and the preceding. Articles 53 and 54 concerned the signing of the "Formula of Subscription." By signing the "Formula" officebearers vow that they themselves will uphold and defend true

doctrine. Article 55 calls the officebearers to exert themselves to preserve the congregation in purity of doctrine and holiness of life.

Heresy must be opposed! False doctrine must be refuted! Error must be condemned and warned against!

This is a strange sound in our theologically tolerant day. Room is made in the church for deviant views. It is said that those holding to two completely different positions, for example on the issue of women in office, may rightfully co-exist in the same church federation. The importance of maintaining clearly defined doctrinal positions is downplayed. The individual's right to take exception to binding doctrinal statements is defended. And let no one dare to criticize anyone or any group, or church, or organization that diverges.

Neither are our churches immune to the influence of this kind of mind-set. Among us too there are those who can be heard to complain about negative sermons, negative speeches, and negative editorials. "Isn't it enough," it is asked, "that we set forth the truth positively? Do we have to criticize others?"

Certainly the truth must be set forth positively. The gospel of grace and the holy life that adorns that gospel must be proclaimed. But the gospel must also be proclaimed anathematically. The lie must be pointed out and condemned. Those who teach false doctrine must be identified and warned against.

How can there be any doubt about this!

Read the prophets! Examine the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ! Peruse the apostolic writings! Study our confessions!

The prophets were not content only to be positive. No one could be more scathing in his criticism than our Lord. The apostles were often sharp in their condemnation. Our confessions are bold to warn against heresy.

This is the nature of the gospel. And this is clearly the calling of the

faithful officebearer. In his parting words to the elders of Ephesus, Paul points them to this calling: "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears" (Acts 20:29-31). If the calling of every believer is to "believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (I John 4:1), how much more is this not the calling of officebearers?

What is at stake

This will require boldness. It will require forthrightness. It will require good application of the Word to the needs of the congregation.

Past errors which still threaten the church today must be warned against. From a certain point of view, there is no new thing under the sun when it comes to false doctrine. Every error that the church faces today has, in one form or another, been faced by the church in the past. This is why a good understanding of church history and a thorough acquaintance with our confessions is necessary for officebearers.

At the same time, officebearers must not be content merely to warn against errors of the past. But current enemies of the truth must be exposed and their teachings condemned. Officebearers must keep themselves abreast of developments and movements in the church world of today. They must be able to point

out the departures from the truth of the Charismatics, the New-Agers, the Reconstructionists, the Pre-and Post-millennialists, the feminists, the Promise Keepers, the Christian Psychology movement, the false ecumenical movement, and many more.

The concern here is certainly the welfare of the church. For the church is built upon the truth. And the church is called by God to be "the pillar and ground of the truth" (I Tim. 3:15). Out of love for the church the faithful officebearer must warn against every attack upon and departure from the truth.

But of even more concern is the honor of God. The truth is God's truth. Every false doctrine and every heretic who promotes false teaching dishonors God. For the sake of the glory of God the faithful officebearer must take seriously his calling to defend the truth.

Opportunity for refuting false doctrine

Officebearers must take every opportunity to carry out the calling of Article 55. Refutation and warning, publicly and in private, are in order whenever and wherever officers have opportunity to confront false doctrine.

Article 55 mentions some specific opportunities: "... as well in the ministry of the Word as in Christian teaching and family-visiting."

Certainly the minister must take the lead here. The ministry of the Word is mentioned first. In the public preaching in the congregation error must be pointed out and heresy condemned. The minister must pay attention to this in his regular sermon preparation. The elders must insist on it that this be done in the

preaching. The elders ought to discuss this element of the preaching with the minister and feel free to make suggestions in this regard.

"Christian teaching" is the general work of both minister and elders as they go in and out among the members of the congregation. Individual pastoral labor is in view here. Included are the catechism classes of the congregation, led either by the minister or the elders. Especially in the older classes, which deal more with doctrine, attention must be given to identifying false doctrine and warning against error.

Mention is also made of "family-visiting." Part of the spiritual inspection of the families of the congregation is seeing to it that there is no embracing of false teaching in the home. Family visitation gives the elders a good opportunity to warn against errors and movements that are a special threat at the moment. Since Article 55 refers especially to the multiplication of false doctrines through "heretical writings," family visitation is also a good opportunity to exhort the members of the church to the reading of sound, Reformed literature, both books and magazines, that explain and defend the faith. "Are good books bought and read? Does the family subscribe to the *Standard Bearer* and *Beacon Lights*? Do the parents encourage their children and young people to read?"

The congregation served by officebearers who carry out the calling of Article 55 is going to be blessed. That congregation is not going to be "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine...." (Eph. 4:14), but is going to be a congregation "established in the present truth" (II Pet. 1:12). □

Book Reviews

Leadership Handbook of Practical Theology: Outreach and Care, James D. Berkley. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company, 1994. pp.

xvii-480. \$19.99 (cloth). [Reviewed by Prof. R. D. Decker.]

This book is a "handbook," i.e., it is intended to provide the pastors

and elders of the church a quick, brief reference to a wide variety of practical concerns in the church. This volume has seven main sections dealing in order with the following

areas: Evangelism, Missions, Social Involvement, Pastoral Care, Pastoral Counseling, Christian Education, and Chaplaincies. Part V, which deals with mental illness, is particularly helpful. The volume is enhanced by helpful, although in most instances very brief, bibliographies for further study at the end of each main section.

The contributors are too many to list. All are, as best this reviewer could determine, in the evangelical tradition.

The book will prove helpful for pastors. Because it lacks a Reformed perspective the book must be used with discretion. ■

God's Hammer: The Bible and Its Critics, by Gordon H. Clark. Hobbs, New Mexico: The Trinity Foundation, repr. 1995. 232 pp. \$10.95 (paper). [Reviewed by the editor.]

This reprint edition of the book originally published in 1982 adds a foreword by Harold Lindsell, an introduction by John W. Robbins, and two chapters by Gordon H. Clark, "What is Truth?" and "The Reformed Faith and the Westminster Confession."

The *Standard Bearer* published a review of the book by Prof. Herman Hanko on pages 21 and 22 of volume 65 (October 1, 1988). Prof. Hanko called the book "without

doubt the best book I have read on ... the doctrine of Scripture's inspiration and infallibility."

In his introduction to the reprint, John W. Robbins states that Clark defends Scripture against recent "severe and sustained attack" on "the idea of divine revelation, the adequacy of human language, the notion of literal truth, and the trustworthiness of human logic" (p. xi).

Chapter 8, "The Concept of Biblical Authority," is interesting and helpful regarding the contemporary "evangelical" apostasy from Scripture's doctrine of its inspiration, particularly the falling away of Fuller Seminary. □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Evangelism Activities

This year's catechism collections from the Lynden, WA PRC are being used to support the outreach evangelism of the Trinity PRC in Houston, TX. We thank Lynden for sending the following brief review of Trinity's outreach in Houston so that we can share it with you.

One of the specific areas of outreach for our Trinity congregation continues to be its work among the Hindu Indians, and particularly among a group of people called Sindhis, who originally came from Sind, Pakistan. Over the years a large population of Indians have migrated to this country from India and have chosen Houston as their home. For the past couple of years Rev. Mahtani, Trinity's pastor, who is himself a Sindhi, has been working with a few Sindhi Christians by having Bible studies with some of them, making visits to Indian areas of businesses, attending and speaking at other Indian Christian Conferences, etc. This has developed into a monthly

meeting at Trinity with the specific purpose of bringing the Gospel to many Hindus residing in Houston. These meetings begin with instruction from God's Word and conclude with a discussion of the message as well as a topic of interest chosen by the Sindhis.

A series on Christian marriage was recently concluded, and in October a new series on the Ten Commandments was begun. Anywhere from a dozen to about 20 people attend.

The Evangelism Committee of the Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ was able to sponsor a Reformation Lecture on October 27. Rev. Dale Kuiper, pastor of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, spoke on the subject, "The Reformed View of Angels."

We should also include here that Covenant is starting to iron out details for an upcoming Spring Conference. They have chosen the theme, "Family Values." Further information regarding speakers and the date for the conference will be included here as soon as it becomes available.

Rev. Carl Haak, pastor of the Bethel PRC in Itasca, IL, was the

guest speaker at a Reformation Day Lecture sponsored by the Pella, IA PRC. Pastor Haak spoke on the theme, "Soli Deo Gloria."

On November 10 the Reformed Witness Committee, made up of members from the Doon and Hull, IA PRCs along with the Edgerton, MN PRC, sponsored a lecture by Prof. H. Hanko, from our seminary, in the B.J. Haan Auditorium at Dordt College in Sioux Center, IA. Prof. Hanko spoke on the topic, "The Covenant Family."

Congregational Activities

The Council of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI has decided that the catechism collections for this year will be for the Free Christian School in Edgerton, MN.

The Monday night catechism classes at the South Holland, IL PRC recently had a special assignment to coincide with Reformation Day. They were to read the October 15th issue of the *Standard Bearer* on "The Reformation of 1924" and answer a sheet of questions prepared by their pastor. I wonder if you or I could pass that test.

The congregation of the Peace PRC in Lynwood, IL held a special

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

dedication service for their new church building on November 17. Thanks be to God for providing them a place in which to worship.

Young People's Activities

The Lodging committee of the South Holland, IL PRC's Young People's Society has made tentative plans to host next year's young people's convention at Wheaton College the week of July 29 to August 2.

Sunday afternoon, November 19, the Federation Board of our Young People's societies sponsored their annual Thanksgiving Mass Meeting. This year's meeting was hosted by the two societies of the Hudsonville, MI PRC. Rev. B. Gritters, pastor at Hudsonville, spoke on a theme based on I Timothy 4:3, 4, emphasizing that we can use the things listed in these verses ... if created by God, if Christ died for us, if God is a God of providence, and if these things are sanctified by God's Word and prayer.

Minister Activities

Rev. R. Harbach, emeritus minister in our churches, underwent surgery in mid-October to repair a detached retina. The surgery went well and Rev. Harbach returned to his home in Raybrook Manor in Grand Rapids, MI.

Rev. R. Dykstra, who accepted the call to our Hope PRC in Walker, MI, was scheduled, the Lord willing, to preach his farewell sermon at the Doon, IA PRC on November 19. He was to be installed as Hope's tenth pastor one week later, the 26th of November.

There was a special meeting of Classis West held in the Edgerton, MN PRC on November 9. This classis was called to conduct the classical examination of Pastor-elect Allen Brummel. There was a spe-

cial worship service held the night before, at which time Allen Brummel preached an assigned sermon as part of his exam. Mr. Brummel capably gave account of his faith and his knowledge at this special meeting, and Classis unanimously voted that Edgerton proceed with his ordination.

On November 13 the ordination service of Pastor-elect Brummel took place in Edgerton, with Rev. Dykstra, as their moderator, preaching the sermon and Rev. R. Moore

reading the form for ordination. Indeed, this is always a time of special blessing for our churches when Christ prepares a minister of the Word of God for the ministry of our churches.

Rev. S. Key received the call to serve as pastor of the Doon, IA PRC.

Food for Thought

"A proud heart and a lofty mountain are never fruitful."

— Gurnall □

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With thankfulness to God, our parents, **ED and MARY LOTTERMAN**, celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary on December 12, 1995. We, their children and grandchildren, are grateful to God for His gracious care in the past 25 years. Above all we are thankful for the godly upbringing we have had through them. It is our prayer that He will continue to bless and keep them for many years to come.

Psalm 100:5, "For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations."

- * Larry and Amy Rypstra
Alaina and Allen
- * Cornelis and Rebecca Kleyn
Rachel
- * Andrew, Heidi, Lindy, Russell,
Katie, Holly, Emily,
and Bethany Lotterman

Byron Center, Michigan

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Consistory and Congregation of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Edmonton, AB express their heartfelt sympathy to the following fellow members and their families:

Mr. and Mrs. Kors Vanden Boogaard in the loss of her sister,
MARRITJE HOGENES.

Elder and Mrs. Henry Nieuwenkamp, and Mr. and Mrs. Albert Nieuwenkamp and family in the loss of their mother and grandmother,
MARIA JONGEJAN.

Rev. and Mrs. Michael DeVries and family in the loss of their father and grandfather,
CHARLES DE JONG.

May they continue to experience the blessed truth that, "Our only comfort in life and death is that we are not our own, but belong body and soul unto our faithful Savior Jesus Christ" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 1).

Rev. Michael DeVries, President
Henry Ferguson, Clerk

NOTICE!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 10, 1996, at the Southeast Protestant Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, MI.

Jon J. Huisken, Stated Clerk